

Study: Southeast rivers are economic gold mine

By [Margaret Bauman](#) - November 23, 2016

An economic study commissioned by Salmon Beyond Borders concludes that transboundary watersheds facing potential adverse impact from British Columbia mines are valued at just under \$1 million, when considering a 30-year horizon.

The study by the McDowell Group, a Juneau research and consulting firm, measures the economic impact of the Taku, Stikine and Unuk river watersheds on the Southeast Alaska economy.

The study found that, combined, these watersheds account for \$48 million in direct spending, 400 jobs for the Southeast region and nearly \$20 million in labor income.

The study, released in late November, also estimated the exvessel value and first wholesale value of Mass and Skeena River sockeye salmon caught commercially as \$620,000 and over \$1.3 million respectively.

Salmon Beyond Borders is a campaign driven by sport and commercial fish harvesters, community leaders, tourism and recreation business owners and concerned citizens, in collaboration with tribes and First Nations on both sides of the international border.

The study comes on the heels of an Alaska House Fisheries Committee meeting held in October on transboundary mining issues, where many Alaskans asked how the state will address issues unaddressed by the non-binding statement of cooperation on protection of transboundary waters signed recently by British Columbia and the state of Alaska.

Following the hearing Rep. Louise Stutes, R-Kodiak and chair of the House Fisheries Committee, sent a letter to Secretary of State John Kerry requesting international agreements on this issue between United States and Canada's federal governments.

A similar request to the State Department was made by congressional delegations for Alaska and Washington State.

Efforts of both states and various citizen groups to get the State Department involved were prompted by plans of mining interests in British Columbia to greatly expand mining ventures along these salmon rich watersheds, which flow into Southeast Alaska. There is concern about potential for mine wastes to get into

the watersheds, which would be very detrimental to fish, which are critical to the economy and culture of Southeast Alaska.

The Taku, Stikine and Unuk watersheds all originate in British Columbia and flow into Southeast Alaska.

The Taku River watershed encompasses some 5,000 square miles. The 100-mile long river terminates in Taku Inlet, with the lower 25 miles of the river within Alaska.

The Stikine River drains a 20,000 square-mile area, flowing through the Stikine-LeConte Wilderness and ending in a river delta north of Wrangell. The lower 27 miles of the nearly 40-mile river are inside Alaska.

The Unuk River drains about 1,500 square miles, flowing 80 miles to its terminus in Burroughs Bay, some 50 miles northeast of Ketchikan. The lower 24 miles of the river, which flow through Misty Fjords National Monument are also in Alaska.

In terms of economic impact, the Taku River watershed related economic activity includes \$23.2 million in annual direct spending and \$32.9 million in total spending in Southeast Alaska. An average \$12.8 million in annual labor income and the equivalent of 260 year-round jobs in the region are generated by activity associated with the watershed, the study said.

Commercial and recreational activity associated with the Stikine River watershed generates an estimated \$12.7 million in annual spending in Southeast Alaska, including \$9.3 million in direct spending. The watershed accounts for \$5.7 million in annual labor income for the region and creates 117 full and part-time jobs.

The Unuk River watershed amounts for an annual average \$2.5 million in total spending in Southeast Alaska, including \$1.8 million in direct spending in the region.

Annual average labor income attributable to the watershed totals \$1.2 million , and the watershed accounts for an estimated 24 full and part time jobs, the study said.

These numbers are huge and very significant, especially when we consider they are so conservative,” said Brenda Schwartz-Yeager, owner-operator of Alaska Charters and Adventures, which operates jet boats for visitors on the Stikine River.

“The analysis looks primarily at fishing and visitor industry potential impacts and isn’t capable of quantifying the full subsistence and lifestyle values of these iconic river systems,” Schwartz-Yeager said in a statement released by Salmon Beyond Borders. “If we can prevent any negative impacts by B.C. mining,