

March 25, 2015 | 9:49 am



Juneau Empire.com

Sullivan meets with Canadian ambassador on mine issue

Says a U.S.-Canada working group could be in future

Posted: March 25, 2015 - 12:09am

JUNEAU EMPIRE

With the Mount Polley mine disaster still on the minds of many Southeast Alaskans, Sen. Dan Sullivan, R-Alaska, met with the Canadian ambassador to the United States on Tuesday to talk transboundary mine issues.

In early August 2014, a breach of the Canadian copper and gold mine's tailings pond caused huge amounts of mining waste to flow into adjacent salmon-supporting river systems, spurring concerns about increased mining efforts on watersheds shared with Alaska. Commercial fishermen, Native groups, governments and Alaskans are concerned their hands may be tied when it comes to mine permitting and safety across the border and fear of an impact on the state's fisheries.

Sullivan said Tuesday from Washington, D.C., that he had a "very constructive meeting" with Ambassador Gary Doer about "our concerns about the transboundary issue in Southeast" and "what happened with the Polley dam," among other topics.

"He acknowledged it and certainly expressed support for getting the appropriate people together on both sides of the border" to work on finding a solution, Sullivan said.

A conclusion wasn't reached as to whether a new group should be formed or if an existing one should take up the topic, he said. Sullivan plans to meet with the ambassador again and "even talked about the possibility of going to Ottawa myself."

As assistant secretary of state under President George W. Bush, Sullivan "spent a fair amount of time in Canada on these issues," he said. He worked on a U.S.-Canada energy group with the assistant secretary of energy and Canadian officials.

"I think the kind of meeting we had today is the kind of thing to address these (transboundary) concerns" and to get Alaska and Canada on the same page on mining regulations, Sullivan said.

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