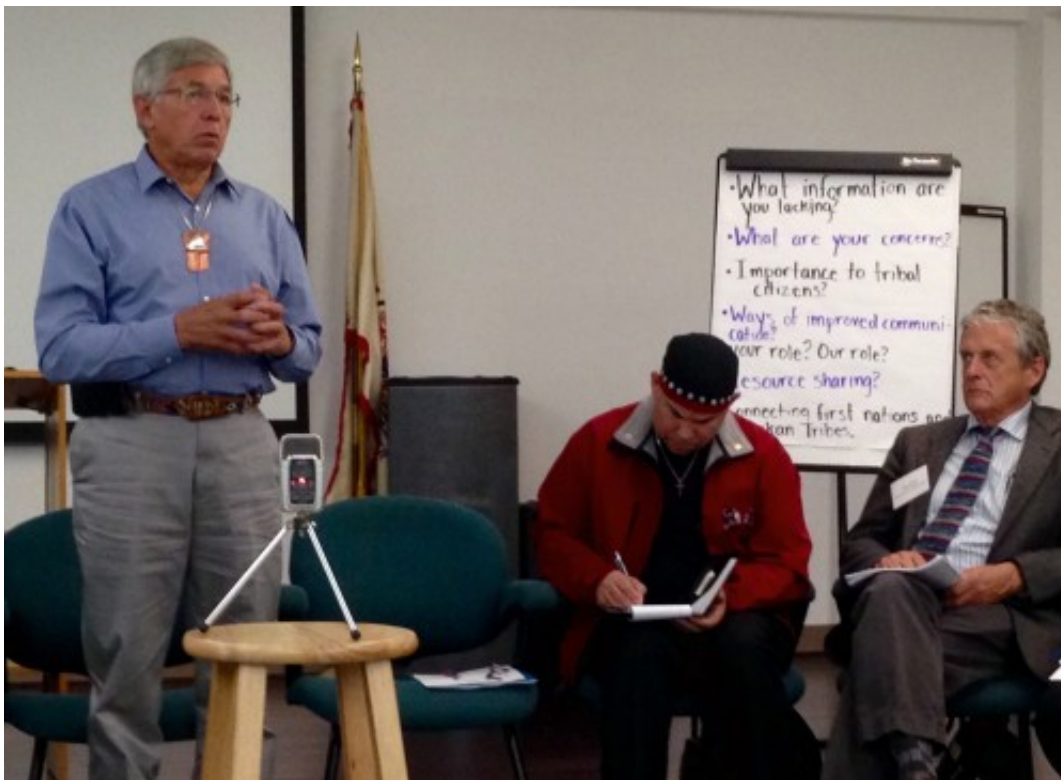


Tribes to get voice in state transboundary mine work

by Ed Schoenfeld, CoastAlaska News

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Lt. Gov. Byron Mallott speaks at a Wednesday tribal meeting in Juneau on transboundary mines. United Tribal Transboundary Mining Work Group Co-Chair Rob Sanderson Jr., center, and Fish and Game Commissioner Sam Cotten, right, listen. (Photo by Ed Schoenfeld/CoastAlaska News)

State government will formally involve tribal groups in its transboundary mining work.

Alaska Lt. Gov. Byron Mallott made that commitment Wednesday while meeting in Juneau with Southeast Native leaders.

“We agreed the transboundary state working group will have a place for a tribal voice in our work that allows them timely, transparent involvement so their voice is heard,” he says.

That will come through the [United Tribal Transboundary Mining Work Group](#), formed last year by 13 Tlingit, Haida and Tsimshian governments.

Several Native leaders asked for a tribal seat on the state’s task force. Mallott says he’s not sure that can be done, but a formal arrangement will be set.

Tribes and state officials worry new British Columbia mines on rivers flowing into Alaska will damage fisheries, wildlife and those that harvest them.

Rob Sanderson Jr., who co-chairs the tribal transboundary group, says a now-closed mine upriver of Ketchikan already wiped out the area’s run of hooligan, a high-fat fish, also called at eulachon, oolichan and candlefish.

“That small-scale mining on the Eskay Creek, which is a tributary to the Unuk River, pretty much put that to sleep,” he says.

The Unuk drainage includes the Kerr-Sulpherettes-Mitchell mining project, the largest of several under exploration.

At the meeting, state officials told tribal leaders how they track and monitor transboundary projects.

[Tlingit-Haida Central Council](#) President Richard Peterson says it’s not enough.

“We get these reports from Canada ... that are 10,000 pages. Our response can’t just be a page. I just don’t believe that it has the validity. And I challenge you to do a better job,” he says.

Peterson and others at the meeting said agencies should include traditional

knowledge from elders in their analysis. They also pointed to tribal environmental testing, which could be shared.

State and federal officials, mining interests and environmental groups will join tribal leaders Thursday for more meetings on transboundary mine impacts on Alaska.

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