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Unified voice needed for federal response to B.C. mines

by **Ed Schoenfeld, CoastAlaska News**

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Guy Archibald of the Southeast Alaska Conservation Council, left, discusses issues with Sitka Mayor Mim McConnell, right, during Thursday's transboundary mine meeting in Juneau. (Photo by Ed Schoenfeld/CoastAlaska News)

Lt. Gov. Byron Mallott says Alaskans need a unified voice to push the federal government to question mines across the border in British Columbia.

Addressing a Thursday meeting of tribal, business and conservation leaders, he said the state will share its knowledge and ask for input on mines near rivers that flow into Alaska.

He said it's time for more than words.

“You can scream, all you want. You can go to the governor. ... But that’s not the way we should do it. We’ve had too much of that,” he said.

Critics accuse state officials of keeping them in the dark about B.C. mining projects, which they say will threaten Southeast fisheries.

They’ve also asked the state to push the federal government to bring the issue before the International Joint Commission, which addresses U.S.-Canada water disputes.

Commission expert David La Roche said that’s unlikely, because Canada has shown no interest. But he said a U.S. State Department request for a panel examination would catch their attention.

“Not because you’re going to get one. But because it would finally and officially serve notice that the U.S. federal government is really taking this issue seriously, which has yet to occur,” he said.

Mallott met this summer with U.S. and Canadian officials and said they viewed the transboundary mine issue as local, not international.

But he told those at the meeting that the state will keep trying, as well as push for more access to British Columbia’s permitting process.

“We will be fully engaged. But this administration wants to be in constant touch with the voice of Alaska’s people. And in this instance, with those [in] leadership, individuals, institutions that are in this room,” he said.

He didn’t define how that would work. But he said he looked forward to finding way to combine efforts.

At [a meeting](#) with Southeast tribal leaders the previous day, he offered direct

involvement with the state's transboundary mine task force.

Note: *We'll have more coverage of the issues raised at the meetings in future reports.*

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