

## Alaskans tour Mount Polley site in wake of breach



Northern Shuswap Tribal Council mining response co-ordinator Jacinda Mack (left) and Xat'sull First Nation Chief Donna Dixon (right) welcome Byron Mallott, Lieutenant Governor of Alaska, to a luncheon at Xat'sull First Nation community Wednesday.

— *image credit: Monica Lamb-Yorski photo*

By Monica Lamb-Yorski

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After touring the Mount Polley Mine tailings impoundment breach site by land and helicopter Wednesday, Alaska's Lt.-Gov. Byron Mallot said vigilance is required in every aspect of resource development that could have catastrophic consequences.

"It was certainly eye opening to see on the ground the devastation that had occurred," Mallot said of the breach site. "It was also eye opening to see the work that the company is doing to reclaim and to recover the area, although of course it will never be the same."

Mallot was part of a delegation from Alaska that included members of Salmon Beyond Borders and the United Tribal Transboundary Mining Working Group, invited to the region by Jacinda Mack, mining response co-ordinator for the Northern Shuswap Tribal Council.

"I invited them here because they are concerned about proposed mines in northwest B.C. that could impact Alaska," Mack said as she introduced the guests during a luncheon at Xat'sull First Nation Wednesday. "I wanted them to meet our community and see our area."

Jennifer Hanlon, an environmental specialist with the Central Council of the Tlingit and Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska, said a year ago the United Tribal Transboundary Mining Work Group formed in Alaska because of concerns about the possible impacts B.C. mines could have on the Taku, Stikine and Unuk Rivers that flow into southeast Alaska.

"We have not been consulted by mining companies, the B.C. government or the federal government of Canada," Hanlon said. "We have the sovereign rights to be consulted because we are the ones who will take on the environmental risks if something happens like it did at Mount Polley."

Mallot met with provincial ministers and officials from the ministries of mines and environment in Victoria on Monday in an effort to strengthen communication, he said.

"There's an opportunity to make sure that whenever mining or mineral extraction takes place that those who are most impacted have a voice in the policies that guide such projects," Mallot said, noting it's also important that mining companies have relationships with governments so that Alaskan voices can be heard.

"I really get the sense that the governor of Alaska wants to find a way to work with B.C. and we want to find a way to work with Alaska," mines minister Bill Bennett said after the Victoria meeting. "It means that we should provide a little more access to the Alaskans, in terms of our permitting processes here in the province and I'm confident we will have the opportunity to strengthen the relationship between the two jurisdictions."

Imperial Metals vice-president of corporate affairs Steve Robertson also met with Mallot in Vancouver and conducted Wednesday's ground tour of Mount Polley with the Lt.-Gov. and his special assistant, Barbara Blake, Heather Hardcastle from Salmon Beyond Borders and Mack.

"We were able to convince them to land their helicopter and have a tour," Robertson said. "I wanted to show them the restoration work we've been able to achieve in lower Hazeltine Creek."

Robertson said he has also invited Mallott to meet with him in the future at the site of the company's new Red Chris Mine located 80 kilometres south of Dease Lake.

While in the Cariboo the Alaskans met with First Nations leaders at the Tsihlot' in National Government office, toured historical Xat'sull Village and attended a luncheon at Xat'sull First Nation, where they met Xat'sull Chief Donna Dixon and Williams Lake Indian Band councillor Willie Sellars and members of the community.

"I appreciated the opportunity to meet with First Nations leaders and government leaders and as Lieutenant Governor, I've invited them to come and visit me in southeast Alaska," Mallott said.

Bennett said the B.C. government recognizes more can be done to improve mining safety and environmental protection.

"B.C. will continue to work closely with the State of Alaska to ensure that Alaska's important environmental interests are respected," Bennett said, adding he definitely wants to take Mallott up on his offer to visit him in Alaska.