

## PROMPT ACTION NEEDED TO PROTECT ALASKA RIVERS, JOBS, AND WAY OF LIFE

**The Issue:** The Taku, Stikine and Unuk are world-class transboundary rivers that originate in Northwest British Columbia (B.C.) and flow into Southeast Alaska. These iconic salmon rivers and their watersheds (roughly the size of Maine) have been centers of culture, commerce and biodiversity for thousands of years. These rivers account for \$48 million in economic activity annually, including multiplier effects, and are integral to the overall \$1 billion annual commercial fishing industry and \$1 billion annual tourism industry in Southeast Alaska. Virtually all the U.S. portions of these watersheds have the highest level of U.S. federal protection, but B.C. pursues large-scale, hard rock mining development near the Canadian headwaters of these rivers. At least ten large-scale open-pit and underground metal mines are in various stages of proposal, permitting or operation. Most of these B.C. mines sit on acid-generating deposits, have large tailings dams, and require water treatment in perpetuity. The Tulsequah Chief mine has been polluting the Taku watershed with acid mine drainage since 1957, and despite offerings of sympathy, B.C. has yet to act to stem this ongoing pollution. Further, the B.C. government authorized the Red Chris mine to open in the Stikine watershed only months after a massive the tailings disaster in the Fraser River watershed at its sister mine, Mount Polley. In addition, the proposed KSM mine—one of the world’s largest—would be just 19 miles from the U.S.-Canada border in the Unuk River watershed.

**The Problem:** Alaskans fear that the sheer scale and number of these B.C. mining projects will result in irreparable harm to our way of life, clean water, fisheries, culture, and jobs in these highly productive transboundary watersheds. Moreover, we find recent reports gravely concerning: the [B.C. Auditor General’s 2016 scathing review](#) of mining compliance and enforcement in the province, the [expert findings that tailings dam failures are increasing](#) in frequency and magnitude, and the [conclusions of financial analysts](#) that B.C. has encouraged environmentally risky mines and created a \$1.5 billion taxpayer liability in the province. This matter simply cannot be fully addressed through the existing non-binding Alaska-B.C. Statement of Cooperation on Protection of Transboundary Waters, finalized on October 6, 2016. This international situation warrants international agreements, consistent with the U.S.-Canada Boundary Waters Treaty of 1909 (BWT), with enforceable protections for rivers, jobs and ways of life for thousands of Alaskans.

**Action Under the Boundary Waters Treaty:** Tens of thousands of Americans, including the [Alaska congressional delegation](#), the [Washington State U.S. Senate delegation](#), and over 100 national and local Tribal organizations, municipalities, and fishing organizations are now calling on the U.S. federal government to work with the Canadian federal government to arrive at an international solution to this international problem. The BWT is an effective and historically tested means of proactively dealing with this kind of transboundary issue—an issue that has the potential for wiping out American resources and jobs, and will have devastating consequences for the U.S.-Canada relationship if not addressed promptly. In this context, Alaskans and British Columbians have the following mutual concerns that need to be addressed:

- (a) 3-5 years of baseline water quality and fish/wildlife data needs to be independently conducted prior to mines receiving permits to operate in transboundary watersheds
- (b) an independent assessment of the potential cumulative impacts of proposed and operating mines on the water quality/quantity of shared rivers needs to be funded and conducted immediately
- (c) indigenous communities must be meaningfully involved in all phases of mine development
- (d) a robust financial assurances regime to cover the costs of all mining impacts in transboundary watersheds, and an arbitration process for filing and settling claims, needs to be created
- (e) monitoring in perpetuity needs to be funded and independently conducted in shared watersheds

Tens of thousands of Americans and Canadians ultimately request a binding international framework, consistent with the BWT, that ensures to the satisfaction of both the United States and Canada that shared waters are not harmed.