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Written Testimony submitted by Jonathan Wood, Juneau resident

Over two years ago, in August 2014, I watched in horror as the Mount Polley mine environmental disaster unfolded. A poorly engineered tailing pond used to hold mine waste had suffered a catastrophic breach in its wall and was spilling toxic materials into pristine salmon habitat. If you haven't seen this footage for yourself, I would strongly encourage it.

At the time, I wondered how an event like this would affect Southeast Alaska were it to occur in a transboundary watershed. The more I learned about the lack of regulations and oversight with respect to these mines and how they deal with their waste, the more disheartened I became. After learning that these tailings ponds have to be treated in perpetuity—that means FOREVER—I was convinced that another Mount Polley-like disaster occurring in a transboundary was not a matter of IF, but WHEN.

The owner of Mount Polley mine is Imperial Metals who is also the owner of the Red Chris mine which is located on a major tributary of the Stikine River—one of the great salmon rivers of North America. Imperial Metals has been negligent once, what's to stop them from being negligent again? Especially when British Columbia has nothing to lose from another catastrophic event like Mount Polley...

The very idea that these transboundary mines like Red Chris and KSM are being fast-tracked with extremely limited or no regulatory oversight is alarming. Add to that the fact that Alaska has no role in the permitting process—or any other step along the way—and the situation seems dire.

Alaska has NOTHING to gain and EVERYTHING to lose from a failure of one of these mines to operate responsibly. What's more, they have virtually NO incentive or disincentive to operate responsibly.

At a minimum, Alaska and its affected user groups need to be given a seat at the table and included in the process of permitting these mines. I think the most effective means of achieving this goal is the invocation of the Boundary Waters Treaty.

In short, never is it ok to sacrifice a renewable resource for a non-renewable one.