



TO: Co-Chairs and Members of the Alaska House Labor and Commerce Committee
FR: Chris Zimmer, Alaska Director, Rivers Without Borders
DT: February 23, 2022
RE: SJR 15

Senate Joint Resolution 15 *Recognizing and honoring the relationship between Canada and the state; and recognizing the importance of the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement* notes positive aspects of Alaska's relationship with Canada. However, the Resolution fails to recognize the concerns about the effects on downstream habitat and salmon from British Columbia's extensive mining activities in the BC/AK transboundary region that have been raised for at least two decades by thousands of Alaskan citizens, leaders, businesses and Native Tribes. The Taku, Stikine and Unuk rivers are vital to the economy, culture, recreation, and, we think it is safe to say, the very existence of Southeast Alaska communities.

According to the Resolution, "both Canada and the state are blessed with extraordinary natural environments, valuable natural resources, and indigenous knowledge that stretches back millennia." This is absolutely true. However, it would be useful to also note that the Taku, Stikine and Unuk are shared, international watersheds and according to the Boundary Waters Treaty, neither party can pollute these shared waters and that indigenous peoples should have meaningful participation in land and resource management decisions in the transboundary region.

While it is certainly reasonable for Alaska to recognize the positive aspects of Alaska's relationship with Canada, it is only fair and honest to also recognize issues of concern. One only needs to look at the situation at the abandoned and polluting Tulsequah Chief mine in the Taku watershed to see how lax enforcement of mining regulations can cause threats to salmon and water quality and also how difficult and expensive it is to address acid mine drainage pollution from mining activities.

An open, honest and productive relationship between Alaska and Canada is essential to the economy, environment and citizens of both the State and Province. However, BC has not been transparent about its transboundary mining developments nor has the Province seriously recognized the concerns of downstream Alaskans. In May 2021, members of the Alaska Legislature sent a letter to BC Premier John Horgan, conveying "the deep concerns of our constituents regarding the potential impacts to our transboundary rivers from abandoned, operating, and future large-scale mining projects in British Columbia." Premier Horgan has not responded.

TRANSBOUNDARY WATERSHED CONSERVATION

"Protecting Alaska – British Columbia transboundary watersheds since 1999, with staff and associates in Alaska, British Columbia and Washington."

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Despite ongoing salmon declines in the Taku, Stikine and Unuk rivers, which seem to be driven in large part by ocean conditions, thus making the protection of freshwater habitat even more vital, BC is continuing full speed ahead with mining exploration, permitting, development, and operation in the transboundary region without meaningful input from downstream communities and Native Tribes. Approximately 20% of the Taku, Stikine, and Unuk watersheds are staked with mineral claims, and many operating and proposed mines in this region include one or more tailings dams that will require the storage and treatment of toxic mine waste in perpetuity.

We humbly request that you amend SJR 15 to include language recognizing:

- the legitimate concerns of thousands of Alaskans regarding the potential harm to downstream fisheries and communities from BC's mining activities in the transboundary region;
- the need for improved governance of international watersheds;
- the need to honor the sovereignty of indigenous peoples and respect indigenous traditions in resource management decisions;
- the Taku, Stikine and Unuk are shared, international watersheds and according to the Boundary Waters Treaty, neither party can pollute these shared waters; and
- The best opportunity to build trust, increase transparency, and develop methods for shared decision-making in transboundary watersheds is the current effort to clean up the Tulsequah Chief mine.