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Canadian Mines Threaten Southeast Alaska Salmon, Tourism and Tribal Resources

Fishing and Tribal Organizations Call for U.S. State Department Action to Protect Alaska's Interests

JUNEAU, ALASKA -- Southeast Alaska's clean water, billion-dollar salmon and tourism industries, and tribal resources face threats from large-scale Canadian mining and other developments. Swift action by the U.S. State Department is warranted to protect U.S. interests. A group of Alaska fishermen and tribal leaders hand delivered that message today to members of Alaska's congressional delegation and the State Department.

At least five large-scale mines are planned for northwest British Columbia in watersheds that drain into salmon-bearing rivers of Southeast Alaska. One project, called Kerr-Sulphurets-Mitchell (KSM), rivals in size and scope the giant, highly controversial Pebble mine proposed for Bristol Bay in Southwest Alaska. If built, developers say KSM would be the world's largest gold and copper mine. The deposit sits in the headwaters of the salmon-rich Unuk River, which drains into Alaska's Misty Fjords National Monument, a major tourist attraction.

Carrying a letter signed by a diverse group of 40 businesses, tribes, trade organizations and individuals, the group of Alaskans visiting the nation's capital this week includes representatives from Alaska Trollers Association, Petersburg Vessel Owners Association and Central Council of Tlingit and Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska. They will meet with Sens. Mark Begich and Lisa Murkowski, Rep. Don Young, and State Department, Environmental Protection Agency and Department of Interior officials to deliver the message about what's happening in northwest British Columbia, directly across the border from Southeast Alaska.

"Alaskans rely on healthy salmon and other fish species to fuel our economy. The seafood industry is the largest private employer in Alaska. Here in the Southeast region, over 5,000 commercial-

fishing families provide jobs and revenue for the state and dozens of small towns without road access. Tourism is also an important economic driver, and sport fishing and subsistence are crucial for our sustenance and quality of life. Large-scale development in sensitive habitat is not conducive to productive ecosystems that feed fishing communities in Alaska and British Columbia," said Dale Kelley, executive director of Alaska Trollers Association.

Kelley and the other delegates, including Brian Lynch, executive director of Petersburg Vessel Owners Association, long-time Juneau seiner Bruce Wallace and Raymond Paddock III of Central Council Tlingit and Haida, are deeply concerned by the rapid pace of B.C.'s mining development in transboundary watersheds, including the Taku, Stikine and Unuk--some of Alaska's most prized salmon-producing rivers. They would like to see concrete guarantees that Alaska's water and fish will not be harmed by British Columbia's development.

"These rivers are the region's top producers of wild salmon and eulachon. We cannot afford to sit quietly as these mines are being developed on an accelerated timeline. The risk of pollution in the form of acid mine drainage is very real, while the benefit of these mines to Alaska is basically zero. We are asking the Alaska delegation to see that the State Department protects our downstream interests and works with Canada to ensure this unique international salmon-producing region is not negatively impacted by industrial development," said Lynch.

Commercial and sport fishing businesses and organizations, guides, outfitters, seafood processors, Alaska communities and Alaska Native organizations all signed the letter of concern. It follows more than 350 public comments, mostly from Southeast Alaskans, last fall expressing concern about the development of the KSM mine and how it could affect Southeast Alaska's salmon and other resources.

Central Council Tlingit and Haida, the largest federally recognized tribe in Southeast Alaska, representing some 29,000 tribal citizens, is among the organizations expressing concerns about transboundary mine development. The council, along with several other Southeast tribes, has passed resolutions of concern. The Juneau-based tribal council also signed the letter delivered to the Alaska delegation this week. One of the tribe's chief complaints is the absence of government-to-government consultation about what's happening upstream from its customary and traditional use areas.

"There has been a lack of tribal consultation with us about matters that affect our fisheries, our customary and traditional harvesting, and our way of life. Harvesting fish and wildlife constitutes the nutritional, spiritual and cultural foundation of Alaska Native tribal citizens. We must be included in any decisions about mines that could affect us," said Paddock.

Read the [letter](#), [supporting documents](#) and [economic information](#) about the value of commercial fishing to Southeast Alaska [here](#).

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