RIVERS WITHOUT BORDERS

TRANSBOUNDARY WATERSHED CONSERVATION BRIEFING

Six Reasons Rivers Without Borders Opposes the Tulsequah Chief Mine Proposal

2012

Mining Would Fundamentally Redefine the Taku

The Taku is the largest totally intact watershed on the Pacific coast of North America. The virtually pristine Taku is also biologically rich and diverse and, not coincidentally, one of the continent's premier wild salmon producers. Tulsequah mining would initiate gradual industrialization of the watershed and an associated decline in the watershed's salmon and biodiversity values.

Mining, and a World Class Wild Salmon River, Are Not Compatible

The Tulsequah Chief Mine would be sited immediately above some of the best salmon habitat in the Taku watershed. The maze of channels, marshes, and backwaters straddling the international border is vital for salmon spawning and rearing. Some two million salmon annually pass through waters in the vicinity of the Taku's juncture with the Tulsequah River. Mining in the proximity of salmon habitat like this is a bad idea under the best of circumstances. In the case of the Tulsequah Chief, development would be in a geologic setting ripe for generating acid. This means a probability of acid and heavy metals toxic to fish flowing downstream from the inevitable runoff, leaks, and spills of the mine operation. Add the remoteness of the seismically active site, plus extreme weather, avalanches, and jökulhlaup events, and bigger problems are not unlikely. A tailings impoundment blowout, for example, could be catastrophic to fisheries. Alaska commercial fishermen are concerned about mining on the lower Taku.

Mining Means a Road Opening up Taku River Tlingit Territory

A 130 km haul road connecting the Tulsequah Valley to an existing road near Atlin would be constructed to support Tulsequah mining. This road will open up remote Tlingit territory to outsiders. The road will cross salmon streams, bringing sedimentation, and wildlife conflicts will be inevitable. Accidents and toxic spills are likely. A new road will bring new mineral exploration and development pressures.

Decommissioning of the Road is Unlikely

To ease numerous concerns about environmental and cultural impacts, proposals to permanently close the road and fully restore its route upon completion of mining, which is currently anticipated to last nine years, have been put forward. It is unlikely this will happen. With an industrial haul road in place, there will be numerous incentives to keep it open. If the mine operator goes bankrupt or has financial challenges, reclaiming the road will not be a priority. *"Environment Canada is unaware of any examples where substantial industrial access roads entering new territory were decommissioned and revegetated as a mitigation measure flowing from the EA."* (Environment Canada 2004)

Mining Means Barging on the Lower Taku Damaging Salmon Habitat

The lower Taku is shallow, ever changing, and notoriously difficult to navigate. Barging to support Tulsequah mine operations, with or without a road, will damage salmon habitat. Groundings and spills are likely.

Tulsequah Mining Operations Will be Difficult to Reclaim

A half century of acid mine drainage from the abandoned Tulsequah Chief and Big Bull mines is a reminder of the environmental challenges inherent in mining acid generating ore bodies. Current reclamation ideas for a Tulsequah mine are complex, expensive, and untested. There is good reason to question if they can be successfully carried out. The recent Redcorp bankruptcy and financial issues involving Chieftain raise doubts about reclamation commitments being met.