

Empire Editorial: Deja vu over mining mess

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“The Tulsequah Chief mine missed a Canadian deadline to clean up its toxic metal pollution on Thursday.”

That was the first line of a Juneau Empire article published July 1, 2005. More than a decade later, acidic water continues to run from the mine into the Taku River.

Many Southeast Alaskans are wondering how many more years, or decades, it will take before this mining mess is cleaned up and given priority status.

We can't blame them.

When British Columbia Minister of Energy and Mines Bill Bennett toured Southeast Alaska in August, he stopped at the site of the Tulsequah Chief mine. There was a hopeful optimism when he said the acidic runoff would at last be addressed. That optimism is waning in light of the news Tulsequah developer Chieftain Metals has defaulted on its loan.

If Chieftain can't pay the bills, there's little hope it can pay to clean up the toxic drainage, which has been seeping since the 1950s.

“The owner will have a responsibility to address this long-standing Fisheries Act violation and achieve compliance,” wrote a spokeswoman for Environment Canada in 2005.

Fast-forward 10 years: “(The drainage) is still something that needs to be rectified,” said Bennett during his 2015 visit.

We believe Bennett was speaking in earnest when he said the Tulsequah's toxic drainage was troubling. We believe him when he said Alaskans' perception of the B.C. government is harmful. Results are more comforting than intentions, however.

We've heard about lots of good intentions from across the border. Results, not so much. Canada hasn't been polite when it comes to this mine.

We understand there's no simple or quick solution, but after more than a decade of promises and pandering, it's become increasingly difficult to believe B.C. officials.

We're beginning to wonder if we should treat them with the skepticism we reserve for oil company spokesmen.

The company that was supposed to address acid runoff from the Tulsequah Chief mine, Redcorp Ventures, went bankrupt in 2005. In 2010, Chieftain Metals purchased the mine. One would think that six years would have resulted in more progress.

At the very least, Southeast Alaskans deserve to know the B.C. government's next step. We must know its plan in case Chieftain Metals cannot, or will not, address the issue. At least then we'd know Bennett and others are still looking for creative solutions to a longstanding problem that has caused unnecessary discord between our two nations.

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