



KETCHIKAN DAILY NEWS

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Our Opinion

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Encouraging stance

British Columbia's new-found willingness to take action regarding the Tulsequah Chief Mine is encouraging.

The position stated this week by B.C. Energy and Mines Minister Bill Bennett should result in ending a long-festering pollution problem at the now-defunct mine located near a tributary of the Taku River that flows into Southeast Alaska near Juneau.

Perhaps more important, the B.C. government's apparent commitment to fixing an existing transboundary river problem could signal that it's taking Alaska's concerns about future mining in British Columbia seriously.

Closed in 1957, the Tulsequah Chief copper, lead, zinc, silver and gold mine site has been leaching pollutants into the Tulsequah River ever since, while two companies that have attempted to restart the mine have gone bankrupt.

Bennett this week acknowledged that it's ultimately up to the B.C. government to stop the pollutant-bearing water from entering the river, either by setting that requirement for a new operator or shutting the site down itself.

British Columbia would be prudent to make good on this, and soon.

Letting the Tulsequah Chief site fester for six decades hasn't enhanced British Columbia's reputation for monitoring or fixing mining-related environmental issues.

Alaskans pondering the scale of proposed mining operations in British Columbia watersheds that flow into Southeast Alaska — massive operations by any measure — have viewed the Tulsequah Chief situation with horror. If B.C. can't be trusted to tend to the small Tulsequah site, what does that say about its potential oversight of something like the immense Kerr-Sulphurets-Mitchell project that could affect the Unuk and Nass rivers?

Transboundary rivers are of incalculable importance to many facets of life in Southeast Alaska. As such, misgivings about B.C. stewardship of mineral development has become widespread on this side of the border, and has resulted in important conversations between Alaska officials, tribes, fishing interests and other entities with B.C. and Canadian federal officials.

The State of Alaska and British Columbia have signed a memorandum of understanding and a statement of cooperation to begin addressing transboundary mining and water quality concerns. These are good things, but just good things on paper at present. What's also needed is actual action by British Columbia.

Fixing the Tulsequah Chief site would signal that B.C. can manage its mine-related responsibilities, and that it is interested in keeping our shared transboundary rivers clean.