

CITY AND BOROUGH OF SITKA

RESOLUTION NO. 2021-21

**A RESOLUTION OF THE CITY AND BOROUGH OF SITKA URGING THE UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT TO ADVOCATE FOR A PERMANENT BAN ON TAILINGS DAMS AND FOR A TEMPORARY HALT TO THE PERMITTING, EXPLORATION, DEVELOPMENT, AND EXPANSION OF CANADIAN MINES ALONG ALASKA-BRITISH COLUMBIA TRANSBOUNDARY SALMON RIVERS UNTIL THE UNITED STATES-CANADA BOUNDARY WATERS TREATY OF 1909 AND THE UNITED NATIONS DECLARATION ON THE RIGHTS OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES ARE UPHOLD AND AN INTERNATIONAL AGREEMENT ON WATERSHED PROTECTIONS IS IMPLEMENTED**

**WHEREAS**, the Boundary Waters Treaty of 1909 was signed to prevent and resolve disputes over the use of shared waters between the United States (U.S.) and Canada, declaring in Article IV that, "it is further agreed that the waters herein defined as boundary waters and waters flowing across the boundary shall not be polluted on either side to the injury of health or property on the other;" and

**WHEREAS**, the Alaska-British Columbia (B.C.) Memorandum of Understanding and associated Statement of Cooperation on Protection of Transboundary Waters signed by the State of Alaska and the Province of B.C. in 2015 are important, but cannot provide binding, enforceable protections for the residents, rivers, and watersheds of the Alaska-B.C. transboundary region; and

**WHEREAS**, inadequately regulated Canadian hard rock mines in Northwest B.C., most of which are large-scale and open-pit, are occurring in known acid-generating ore bodies near the transboundary Taku, Stikine, and Unuk Rivers shared with Southeast Alaska, producing massive tailings dams that have to store toxic waste forever, expansive waste rock storage facilities, the need for perpetual water treatment, roads, and other infrastructure, as well as threatening (both in the short term and on geological timescales) the productivity and ecological health of these watersheds through cumulative impacts, contamination, habitat destruction, and/or possible catastrophic failures; and

**WHEREAS**, the Taku, Stikine, and Unuk Rivers are of tremendous and unique cultural, ecological, subsistence, economic, and recreational value as Indigenous people from several Nations have stewarded the Alaska-B.C. transboundary region since time immemorial and this region is now home to nearly 80,000 people in dozens of communities; and

**WHEREAS**, the Southeast Alaska Indigenous Transboundary Commission - a consortium of fifteen federally recognized Tribes in Southeast Alaska - in 2018 submitted a petition to the Inter- American Commission on Human Rights, asserting that Canada has violated their human rights by failing to prevent foreseeable harms from hard rock mines in B.C., and on March 31, 2021 sent a request to B.C. Premier Horgan for a pause in the permitting of B.C. mining projects in Alaska- B.C. transboundary watersheds until an agreement is made regarding Alaska Tribal participation in ongoing permit decisions pursuant to the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP); and

**WHEREAS**, the clean water and intact habitat of Alaska-B.C. transboundary watersheds are historically some of the most productive wild salmon rivers on the entire west coast of North America, with the Taku, Stikine, and Unuk Rivers alone contributing nearly \$50 million in economic activity, \$34 million in direct spending, over 400 jobs and almost \$20 million in labor income towards Southeast Alaska's annual multi-billion dollar fishing and visitor industries; and

54 **WHEREAS**, the leaching of heavy metals to groundwater and sediment from mining can contaminate  
55 freshwater systems for decades, preventing recovery of fish populations many years after the  
56 cessation of mining activity and posing a risk to human health, and B.C.'s Tulsequah Chief mine in the  
57 Taku River watershed has been abandoned and leaching acid mine drainage since 1957; and

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59 **WHEREAS**, B.C.'s environmental assessment process does not set legal requirements or standards  
60 for assessing cumulative effects of existing and proposed development, and B.C.'s open-pit Red Chris  
61 mine has been operating at the headwaters of the Stikine River since 2015, the entire riparian corridor  
62 of the Iskut River, the largest tributary of the Stikine River, is staked with B.C. mineral claims, B.C.'s  
63 Kerr-Sulphurets-Mitchell project (KSM), if built as proposed in the Unuk-Nass River watersheds,  
64 would be the largest open-pit mine in Canada and one of the largest in the world, and more than half  
65 of the B.C. portion of the Unuk watershed is staked with mineral claims; and

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67 **WHEREAS**, the Taku, Stikine, and Unuk Rivers are experiencing a decline in wild salmon  
68 populations, resulting in the Alaska Department of Fish and Game listing Chinook salmon in the Unuk  
69 River as a Stock of Concern in 2017 and will soon list Chinook salmon in the Taku and Stikine Rivers  
70 as Stocks of Concern; and

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72 **WHEREAS**, on June 30, 2021, Canada's Department of Fisheries and Oceans eliminated 60% of its  
73 commercial salmon fleet in B.C. due to poor returns and declining populations - some near 90%  
74 declines - resulting in the largest set of commercial salmon fishery closures in B.C. history, while  
75 simultaneously B.C. continues to permit industrialization of the headwaters (spawning and rearing  
76 grounds) of some of its largest salmon producing systems; and

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78 **WHEREAS**, the risk of natural forces such as extreme precipitation events and landslides, which are  
79 becoming more common due to climate change, add further instability to the mining infrastructure and  
80 could trigger catastrophic failure of the tailings waste dams and thereby release contaminants into the  
81 Taku, Stikine, and Unuk waterbodies and are inadequately addressed in B.C. mine operations  
82 designs; and

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84 **WHEREAS**, following B.C.'s Mount Polley mine disaster in 2014 an expert panel appointed by the  
85 B.C. government found that if mining companies continue their business-as-usual operations the  
86 province could face an average of two dam failures every ten years and the same expert panel  
87 reported there are 123 active tailings dams in B.C.; and

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89 **WHEREAS**, the Auditor General of B.C., in her report issued on May 3, 2016, found that the B.C.  
90 Ministry of Energy and Mines and Ministry of the Environment's "compliance and enforcement  
91 activities of the mining sector are inadequate to protect the province from significant environmental  
92 risks", and according to a 2017 report by the United Nations Environment Programme, Canada has  
93 the world's second-worst record for mine tailings spills after China, with seven incidents reported in  
94 the previous decade; and

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96 **WHEREAS**, the June 2021 Audit of Code Requirements for Tailings Storage Facilities by B.C.'s Mine  
97 Audits and Effectiveness Unit, has found provincial mining code changes developed after the Mount  
98 Polley disaster lack the definition needed to ensure compliance, verification and enforcement--which  
99 means communities and the environment across the province lack full protection against the  
100 potentially catastrophic consequences of tailings dam failures that B.C.'s new mining code was meant  
101 to provide; and

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103 **WHEREAS**, B.C. touts itself to U.S. officials and potential investors as a world-class marketplace for  
104 responsibly-sourced metals and a mining jurisdiction with highly positive ESG (Environment, Social,  
105 Governance) outcomes and yet, B.C. is supporting widespread exploration and the permitting of open  
106 pits and tailings dams at mine sites across B.C. just upriver from four U.S. border states (AK, WA, ID,

MT) and at the headwaters of some of North America's last remaining productive wild salmon rivers, without the consultation and consent of local Tribes and communities downstream; and

**WHEREAS**, Native Tribes in Alaska, First Nations in B.C., commercial fishermen, local communities, conservation groups, thousands of concerned citizens, and local, state, provincial, and federal lawmakers (including all eight Senators from the four border states) on both sides of the U.S.- Canada border have raised concerns since 1998 about B.C. mining development potentially causing significant harm to water quality, fish and wildlife, cultural practices, and local economies in Alaska-B.C. transboundary watersheds and still do not have a meaningful say in the shared management of our shared rivers; and

**WHEREAS**, Commercial fishermen, subsistence and recreational users, local communities, elected leaders, and Tribes and First Nations on both sides of the Canadian/U.S. border have raised concerns about the pace and scope of the proposed industrial development in British Columbia and the potential for harm to water quality, fish and wildlife, and local economies; and

**WHEREAS**, A major part of Sitka's economic base is commercial and sport charter ocean fishing, in 2019 398 Sitka resident permit holders harvested 27.8 million pounds of fish with a total ex-vessel value of \$41.3 million; and

**WHEREAS**, Maintaining and protecting healthy wild salmon populations throughout these river systems must be a priority. The concerns of local communities, individuals, and user groups downstream from these projects must be integral to any transboundary watershed development and decision making; and

**WHEREAS**, the City and Borough of Sitka seeks all opportunities for collaboration to address these issues, promote methods to protect these vital rivers from harm, to facilitate and promote meaningful dialogue and engagement at the local, state, federal, provincial, and Tribal levels to assure protection of resources on both sides of the border; and

**WHEREAS**, the community of Sitka and the Assembly of the City and Borough of Sitka, seek a thriving Salmon Coast (AK-B.C. transboundary region) fed by intact ecosystems, healthy salmon populations and landscapes, robust traditional lifestyles, and sustainable economies.

**NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED** that the Assembly of the City and Borough of Sitka calls upon President Joe Biden and the United States government and Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and the Canadian government to immediately:

1. Utilize their authority under the United States-Canada Boundary Waters Treaty of 1909 to prevent and resolve disputes over the use of shared waters; and
2. Support an immediate temporary halt to permitting, exploration, development, and expansion of Canadian mines along shared Alaska-B.C. salmon rivers until a binding international agreement on watershed protections, developed by all jurisdictions in these shared transboundary watersheds and consistent with the Boundary Waters Treaty of 1909 and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, is implemented; and
3. Convene with local communities, stakeholders, and Indigenous leaders of the Taku, Stikine, and Unuk watersheds to develop the aforementioned binding international agreement on watershed protections. This agreement will identify and honor no-go zones and decisions by local residents and Indigenous people on both sides of the international border, ensure mining companies and shareholders are liable for cleaning up their waste and compensating impacted communities for all damages, and enforce requirements for mining best practices, including a permanent ban on the perpetual storage of contaminated water and wet tailings behind earthen dams along these irreplaceable Alaska-B.C. transboundary salmon rivers.

**PASSED, APPROVED, AND ADOPTED** by the Assembly of the City and Borough of Sitka, Alaska on this 14<sup>th</sup> day of September 2021.

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Thor Christianson, Deputy Mayor

ATTEST:

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Sara Peterson, MMC  
Municipal Clerk

1<sup>st</sup> and final reading 9/14/2021

Sponsors: Knox / Himschoot