

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

April 18, 2016

The Honorable John Kerry  
Secretary  
U.S. Department of State  
2201 C Street NW  
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Kerry:

We write to draw your attention to the proposed and ongoing large-scale mining activities in transboundary watersheds originating in British Columbia and crossing into the United States. We are deeply concerned about the potential impacts of transboundary mines on American commercial, recreational, and tribal fisheries in Washington and Alaska as well as the robust tourism and recreation economy supported by these rivers.


The health of the Washington state economy is closely linked to sustainable seafood businesses throughout the West Coast and Alaska. In addition to fisheries in Washington state, over 5,000 Washington state residents were employed as skippers or crewmen on fishing vessels harvesting in Alaska in 2014 and almost 200 fishing vessel permits were held by Washington residents for Southeast Alaska salmon fisheries. All told, the Alaska seafood industry supported 23,900 jobs and generated \$1.34 billion in labor income in the Puget Sound region in 2013. Continued employment could be threatened, however, if large-scale mining in the headwaters of transboundary rivers continues at its current pace and scale, and all planned operations go into operation. Exploratory activities, proposed mines, and mines in development or operation, could result in catastrophic impacts to the Taku, Stikine, and Unuk watersheds, all of which originate in Canada but cross the border into Alaska. While the headwaters and mouth of the Fraser River are in Canada, the watershed extends into Washington state and is therefore of interest to us as well. The health of these watersheds is essential to the culture and economy of Alaska, Washington, and the United States as a whole.

Given the importance of these rivers to both countries, we ask you to work with your counterparts in Canada to address transboundary mine impacts on the U.S. salmon industry through the International Joint Commission, established by the Boundary Waters Treaty of 1909. We believe review by the International Joint Commission is the most effective way to ensure the health and sustainability of salmon fisheries are not jeopardized.

The potential for a mine tailings dam failure, such as occurred at the Mount Polley mine in British Columbia in August 2014, demonstrates the need for coordinated international action on transboundary mines. Referring this issue to the International Joint Commission would be an important step in protecting salmon fisheries for future generations.

We appreciate your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,

  
Patty Murray  
United States Senator

  
Maria Cantwell  
United States Senator