

Healthy Watersheds: Key talking points for U.S. elected leaders on British Columbia mining reform

Leaders representing states including Washington, Alaska, Idaho and Montana affected by toxic pollution flowing downstream from Canadian mines have a window of opportunity to weigh-in with the British Columbia provincial government using key messages:

- The transboundary region of the United States and British Columbia (B.C.) has become a dangerous hotspot for pollution and chemical spills from the mining industry due to legacy, existing and proposed mines in areas upstream of the four bordering states.
- According to the B.C. provincial government, there are 33 mining exploration projects under way within a radius of about 60 miles of the province's southern border. Most of these projects are just north of the Washington state border. **Washington and other U.S. states abutting Canada are vulnerable to the lax regulatory, financial liability and enforcement mechanisms for industrial mining in B.C.**
- There are constructive reforms that B.C. could undertake that would go a long way toward protecting downstream U.S. communities. A [bipartisan response](#) on this issue has begun, including a call from all eight U.S. Senators representing Washington, Montana, Idaho and Alaska to Premier John Horgan to address downstream contamination issues.
- As first steps, the provincial government can make needed reforms to its regulation of the mining industry. B.C. has already announced it will be reviewing its financial assurances policy. We urge the province to pass a strong financial assurances regime that ensure environmental harms are eliminated and that communities on the both sides of the border are not left liable for mining pollution or spills. B.C. will also soon be making changes to its antiquated Mines Act and will be inviting public comment on the proposals.
- The recent passage of legislation giving free and prior informed consent to Canadian First Nations is laudable and we support a robust implementation of this standard with respect to the Mineral Tenure Act. We urge British Columbia to consider the role of Indigenous voices—both U.S. and Canadian—in the broader transboundary region.
- With the December 4, 2019 [announcement](#) by the B.C. government to stop logging in the so-called 'donut hole' in the headwaters of the transboundary Skagit River, the province must finish the job and deny the exploratory mining application from Imperial Metals. The threat of industrial mining still hangs over this international watershed and the orcas, salmon, tribes and local communities that depend on its clear water. [Media coverage](#).

U.S. decision-makers and states bordering Canada have an urgent interest in understanding how industrial mining exploration, development, operations and response in B.C. impact international watersheds. We support mechanisms that will ensure access to information, understanding of risk, and binding assurances to protect U.S. lands, waters, wildlife and people.

We urge the Washington delegation and other representatives of Northwestern states to send a distinct and public message in the form of a sign-on letter to the British Columbia government outlining these concerns in the near term.