



## Healthy Watersheds Campaign

**Webpage:** [www.conservationnw.org/our-work/wildlands/healthy-watersheds-campaign](http://www.conservationnw.org/our-work/wildlands/healthy-watersheds-campaign)

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### Campaign Summary:

**Our new Healthy Watersheds Campaign seeks mining policy reform in British Columbia to reduce threats to downstream states, communities, fish and wildlife.**

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 of Washington, Idaho, Montana and Alaska.

Many of these mines are in the headwaters of major rivers that provide critical habitat for salmon and other fish and wildlife that are culturally significant resources for tribes. These waters also provide clean water and recreation opportunities for communities living downstream. As seen during past mining disasters in B.C., irresponsible mining practices upstream will have devastating impacts on communities and ecosystems on the U.S. side of the border.

Conservation Northwest is working with leaders from Washington state in Congress and our State Legislature to use their influence over counterparts in B.C. to secure policy change in the provincial government that strengthens mining regulations and holds mining companies accountable for the ecological and financial costs of a disaster. We're also utilizing our strong relationships with Washington Tribes, First Nations and Canadian organizations to garner support for potential mining regulation legislation that is expected to be considered soon by the government of B.C.

### Project Context:

According to the B.C. provincial government, there are 33 mining exploration projects underway within a radius of about 60 miles of the province's southern border. Most of these projects are just north of the Washington border.

Most recently, a very controversial proposal for mining in the [headwaters of the Skagit River](#) has made Washington the next jurisdiction to join the chorus of concerns over B.C.'s mining. The mine, if developed, would threaten Puget Sound's healthiest remaining runs of Chinook and sockeye salmon, steelhead and bull trout—vital food for southern resident orca whales as well as cherished resources for the Upper Skagit Indian Tribe, Swinomish and Samish tribes.

#### Web and email

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The mining company submitting the exploratory application for the Skagit Headwaters, Imperial Metals, is the same company responsible for the devastating [Mount Polley mine disaster](#) in 2014, the largest mining disaster in Canadian history which decimated salmon runs in Fraser River tributaries, with clean up and restoration work still ongoing. We're [supporting efforts](#) to oppose mining and clearcutting in the Skagit Headwaters with our partners at Washington Wild, the B.C. Wildlife Federation, the Swinomish Indian Tribe, the Union of British Columbia Indian Chiefs, the Seattle Mayor and City Council, Seattle City Light, and dozens of others.

These projects represent a risk to U.S. ecosystems largely due to a failure to regulate on the part of B.C. In the absence of enforceable protections and financial assurances for downstream communities, disasters will take many years of acrimonious debate before resolution of claims, if ever they can be resolved.

Other bordering states have faced similar threats from B.C. mining. Existing and proposed mega mines threaten the headwaters of three of Alaska's most highly-productive salmon rivers, while coal mines are polluting transboundary lakes in Montana. Recently, a call from eight U.S. Senators representing Washington, Montana, Idaho and Alaska, asked that B.C. Premier John Horgan act to address downstream contamination issues.

The current B.C. government is proposing reforms to its antiquated Mines Act and has invited public comment on the proposals. In addition, B.C. has recently stated its intention to support free, prior and informed consent for Indigenous communities for any projects in traditional First Nations territories. We are taking advantage of this window of opportunity to push Washington state to demand accountability from B.C. mining companies through mining reform.

### **Campaign Priorities:**

1. Encourage the Governor and other statewide leaders of Washington to communicate to the B.C. Premier our interest in mining reform to protect our downstream resources.
2. Encourage the Washington Legislature to pass a resolution or memorial on the issue.
3. Encourage resolutions to be passed by the Associated Tribes of NW Indians (ATNI), Lummi Nation, Nooksack Indian Tribe, Swinomish Indian Tribal Community, Colville Confederated Tribes, Yakama Nation, Kalispel Tribe of Indians, Columbia Intertribal Fish Commission, the Upper Columbia United Tribes (UCUT) and other Indigenous groups.
4. Inform and activate conservation and recreation groups on the U.S side of the border to encourage leaders in the state capitols to communicate to B.C. provincial leaders in Victoria on the need for mining reform.
5. Take advantage of the B.C. government's current process of reforming its antiquated Mines Act and invitation for the public to comment on its proposals in efforts to enforce strong financial assurances and protections for downstream communities in the event of a disaster.

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