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Coalition Cheers Settlement of Mining Threat to Skagit Headwaters

B.C. Government, Imperial Metals and Skagit Environmental Endowment Commission agree to end mining threat, relinquish claims after three years

Media Gallery: [Permission with photo credit for The Wilderness Committee](#)

Skagit Headwaters Coalition: www.savetheskagit.com

VANCOUVER, B.C. - Today, the British Columbia government, Imperial Metals and the Skagit Environmental Endowment Commission (SEEC) announced a signed Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) after a nearly three-year public process and decision process focused on a proposed mining permit in the unprotected Canadian headwaters of the Skagit River. The MOA signed by the British Columbia Government, Imperial Metals and the Skagit Environmental Endowment Commission stipulates the return of all mining and related rights in the Silver Daisy area of the Canadian Skagit Headwaters held by Imperial Metals back to the Province of British Columbia.

An international [coalition coordinated by Washington Wild grew to nearly 300](#) Tribes, First Nations, elected officials, local businesses and conservation, recreation and wildlife organizations who oppose Imperial Metals' proposal to pursue a mining permit at the source of the Skagit River which flows through Washington State before reaching the Puget Sound.

"This is incredible news and represents a win/win for indigenous peoples, British Columbia visitors to the Skagit and Manning Parks, downstream communities and businesses in Washington State and Imperial Metals," said Tom Uniack, Executive Director for Washington Wild, a statewide conservation organization who is coordinating an international coalition of U.S. and Canadian stakeholders and Tribes and First Nations in opposition to the proposed mining and logging in the Skagit Headwaters. "It was clear that the coalition's efforts played a key role in stopping the logging threats and now the mining threat to the iconic Skagit River and its headwaters.

Since March of 2019, when Imperial Metals filed its request for a mining exploration permit from the B.C. Ministry of Mines, more than 50 media stories from British Columbia and Washington State have focused on this controversial proposal. To date, more than 6,000 individuals have sent letters or emails to the British Columbia government and other entities opposing the granting of the mining exploration permit. The growing opposition has manifested into an international coalition of nearly 300 conservation recreation and wildlife groups as well as local elected officials, businesses, and Tribes and First Nations who have formally opposed the proposed mining permit in the Skagit Headwaters.

The company proposing to mine in an unprotected area of the Skagit Headwaters, Imperial Metals, was responsible for the infamous Mount Polley mine disaster of 2014, which spilled more than 2.6 billion gallons of toxic sludge into the Fraser River watershed, one of the biggest environmental disasters in Canadian history. The proposed mining exploration activities in the Skagit Headwaters include creating access roads, conducting surface exploration drilling with associated water supply and catchment sumps, and mechanical trenching over a five-year period of continued disturbance.

Both Manning and Skagit Provincial Parks (which surround the unprotected donut hole area at issue) are major outdoor recreation destinations — located just a day trip from the greater Vancouver metro area — and draw more than a million visitors each year. Outdoor enthusiasts spend their money at local businesses enroute to recreation destinations, buying gas, eating at local restaurants, finding lodging, and purchasing supplies, gear and fuel for their day of hiking,

fishing, snowshoeing, skiing, paddling, camping, biking, or horseback riding in these pristine areas. This economic activity helps to support local communities.

These headwaters are unceded Indigenous lands. Stó:lō, Syilx and Nlaka'pamux people have accessed the Skagit headwaters forests, meadows and streams since time immemorial for essentials such as clean water, wild foods, old-growth wood and other cultural materials needed for medicines and spirituality. The B.C. Government engaged in formal consultation with 16 First Nations over concerns about the mining proposal. U.S. Tribes in Washington State, including the Swinomish Indian Tribal Community, Upper Skagit Indian Tribe, Sauk-Suiattle Tribe and Samish Nation, which rely on downstream values like salmon, clean water and wildlife for their tribal treaty rights and/or lifeways also weighed in opposing the mining threat.

“Today the Swinomish Tribal Community celebrates the permanent protection of the Skagit River Headwaters from mining,” said Swinomish Tribal Community Chairman Steve Edwards. “This is an extraordinary conservation success that will benefit current and future generations of Coast Salish People, and we express our gratitude to all our conservation partners who advocated with us to protect our salmon and ecosystem forever.”

The Skagit Watershed is a transboundary issue. Concern is widespread over the future of recreational and economic benefits on the Canadian side of the border as well as fisheries and water quality benefits as the Skagit River flows through Washington State, winding through the scenic North Cascades National Park, the Mt. Baker Snoqualmie National Forest and through the renowned Skagit River Valley before reaching the Puget Sound. The Skagit River provides one third of the freshwater inputs to the Puget Sound and supports the largest populations of threatened steelhead and chinook salmon in the Puget Sound and the largest run of chum salmon in the conterminous U.S.

In the spring of 2021, the City of Seattle sent an updated letter opposing the mining. Additionally, [15 local Skagit County governments, Tribes and local land use authorities](#) sent resolutions or letters opposing the mining in the Skagit Headwaters to the British Columbia government, including the cities of Mount Vernon, Anacortes and Concrete as well as the Skagit Public Utility District and the Skagit County Commission.

“Here in Skagit County, this is great news. The magic Skagit River is central to how we live, work and play,” said Richard Brocksmith, City Councilmember for the City of Mount Vernon, WA. “A proposed mine in the Skagit Headwaters would have threatened our community’s investments in salmon recovery, the supply of clean water for drinking and farming, and the health of Puget Sound while contributing zero financial or social benefits to our community.”

Today’s announcement is a positive resolution to concerns that had been raised on both sides of the border about potential impacts to the Skagit watershed, Manning and Skagit Provincial parks, and downstream values like salmon habitat, clean water and tribal treaty rights and lifeways in Washington State. There is strong interest in moving forward with a process consulting with affected First Nations on the future use and protection within the Silverdaisy watershed in a process lead by BC Parks and the Ministry of the Environment and Climate Change Strategy.

BACKGROUND

In 1984, a treaty was signed between the City of Seattle (U.S.) and the British Columbia (Canada) governments to resolve disputes over Ross Dam and to maintain the environmental integrity of the Skagit Watershed. In addition, it created the Skagit Environmental Endowment Commission (SEEC) to administer this collaborative partnership. Both governments established SEEC’s primary mission: (1) To conserve and protect wilderness and wildlife habitat, (2) To enhance recreational opportunities in the Skagit, and (3) To acquire mineral or timber rights consistent with conservation and recreational objectives. The letter argues that the proposed logging and mining in the “donut hole” is inconsistent with the spirit and intent of the 1984 treaty. It will have significant impact on the wilderness, wildlife habitat, and fishery resources of the Upper Skagit River.

Prior to the pending mining threat, the Donut Hole area of the Skagit Headwaters was threatened by clearcut logging. In December 2019, Doug Donaldson, British Columbia Minister of Forests, Lands Natural Resource Operations and Rural

Development announced a ban on future logging in the Skagit Headwaters as a direct response to the opposition by this international coalition.

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Timeline of Growing Opposition to Logging and Mining in the Skagit Headwaters

June 2018	Clearcut logging by BC Timber Sales which is run by the government of BC starts up in the Skagit Headwaters which is located between Manning and Skagit provincial parks.
August 2018	The Seattle Mayor Jenny Durkan sends a letter to BC Premier John Horgan expressing concerns about the clearcut logging in the Skagit Headwaters and inconsistencies with the 1984 High Ross Treaty
March 2019	Imperial Metals files an application for a mining exploration permit in the Skagit Headwaters with the government of British Columbia.
April 2019	Seattle Mayor Jenny Durkan sends a letter to BC Premier John Horgan expressing concerns about Imperial Metals' application for a mining exploration permit in the Skagit Headwaters and inconsistencies with the 1984 High Ross Treaty
May 2019	The Seattle Times published an opinion editorial "Tribes and First Nations say no to gold mining in Skagit River headwaters" which expresses alarm from the leaders of Washington Treaty Tribes and British Columbia First Nations over the proposed gold mining exploration of the Skagit River headwaters.
May 2019	BC's formal comment period on the proposed mining exploration permit ended after having received written comments from about a hundred stakeholders from Canada and the United States as well as Tribes and First Nations. Even though the official comment period has ended comments continue to be accepted by the BC Mines ministry's Statutory Decision Maker right up until the present time.
June 2019	In June, members of the Skagit Headwaters coalition launched a paid media print and digital campaign in the Vancouver Sun and Province newspapers calling on Premier Horgan and the BC Government to deny the proposed mining exploration permit To date, more than 6,000 individuals have sent letters or emails to the British Columbia government and other entities opposing the mining exploration permit.
Dec 2019	The British Columbia government announces a ban on future logging in the Skagit Headwaters.
Feb 2020	The British Columbia government released a statement to Crosscut magazine in Washington State that with respect to the pending mining exploration permit they were continuing work, "to complete a thorough and comprehensive review, and to consider all relevant information and perspectives, including feedback received from First Nations, environmental organizations and the public." No decision or update has been made on the pending permit.
Sept 2020	The British Columbia provincial election results in new Ministers within British Columbia Government
Feb 2021	Seattle Mayor Jenny Durkan sends a letter to newly re-elected BC Premier Horgan requesting to work together to identify ways to motivate Imperial Metals to work with the SEEC to retire their tenures.
May 2021	Fifteen Skagit County local governments, land use authorities and local Tribes send individual resolutions or letters to the British Columbia government or letters opposing mining in the Skagit Headwaters.
July 2021	39 British Columbia local businesses and stakeholders send letter to the BC government opposing mining in the Skagit, raising the number of stakeholders in the international Skagit Headwaters Coalition to nearly 300.
Jan 2022	The British Columbia Government, Imperial Metals and the Skagit Environmental Endowment Coalition announce a Memorandum of Agreement resulting in the sale and retirement of mining claims in the Skagit Headwaters, ending the mining threat.