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## Protect Tahtsa Lake from mine pollution

Dear Sierra Club of BC Supporter,

I am writing to you in urgency. Huckleberry Mine is planning to dump mercury-rich waste water into prime trout habitat on Tahtsa Lake near Prince George – and we only have two weeks to act.

### Click here to take action using our online Action Centre

If Huckleberry Mine gets the permit they are angling for, all the excess effluent from their nearly-full tailings pond will be discharged directly into the lake, at the rate equalling 114 railcars per day.

This "Huckleberry soup" contains copper, mercury, zinc, and other harmful chemicals in concentrations that raise serious concerns about accumulation in fish tissue. Ultimately, this will affect the health of humans who eat the fish. Consumption of fish containing high levels of mercury has been linked to brain damage in babies and young children.

This is not just a local concern. Through a network of lakes and hydroelectric tunnels, Tahtsa Lake is connected to both Fraser River and Kemanu River.

Many communities have been faced with a similar dilemma. Often, the choice seemed to be between their jobs and a clean, healthy environment.

This is not what is at stake here.

Huckleberry Mine is due to close in 2007. Two years, and the jobs will be gone. The community will get to keep the pollution and its associated costs and hazards. The benefits of short-term employment do not outweigh the health and environmental impacts.

For ten years, Huckleberry has operated under a permit that forbids any direct discharge into the environment. They must be held accountable to those same standards until the end.

Poisons don't belong in our water or the fish we eat. A clean environment is just a cost of doing business. Polluters, not the community, should pick up the tab.

You can help. Write, fax or email to the Ministry of the Environment to express your views. The public consultation process on the permit



application is open until February 15, so be sure to write before then.  
Contact information is supplied below.

Sincerely,



Kathryn Molloy  
Executive Director

[Click here for more information](#)

Contact info:

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Victoria BC V8W 9E2

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## Media Release

### Environmental groups, First Nations oppose dumping of toxic mine tailings into salmon waters

Jan 31, 2006

VICTORIA – Sierra Club of Canada, BC Chapter, Dogwood Initiative and the Cheslatta Nation strongly oppose the October 2005 permit amendment application by Huckleberry to discharge effluent from the mine's tailings pond directly into Tahtsa Lake near Prince George.

"Huckleberry should be held to the standards contained in the current permit, which prohibit discharge into the environment," said Jill Thompson, Sierra Club of Canada, BC Chapter Grassroots Coordinator who has received calls from concerned local residents. "Relaxing environmental standards in the last two years of the mine's operation would set a very bad precedent," she said.

According to the application, the effluent would contain copper, mercury, zinc, nitrogen and suspended solids in concentrations that raise serious concerns about bio-accumulation of compounds, especially mercury, in fish tissue, and ultimately in humans who eat the fish. The proposed rate of discharge – 5 million cubic meters annually - would equal 114 railcars discharged directly into the Nechako watershed system. Consumption of fish containing mercury has been linked to brain damage in babies and young children.

"This Huckleberry decision will highlight whether Premier Campbell will prioritize his new relationship with First Nations over the desires of Liberal party donors like Huckleberry Imperial Metals," said Will Horter, Executive Director of Dogwood Initiative. "Campbell's needs to reject this application to show that the wishes of First Nations and communities are more important than a \$16,000 donation to his party."

The Cheslatta Carrier Nation, on whose traditional territory the mine is located, is also vehemently opposed to the amendment.

"What they are proposing to do would be taking us back to the 19th century. This is not acceptable in this day and age, especially when there are perfectly viable alternatives," said Mike Friesen, Senior Policy Advisor with the Cheslatta Carrier Nation.

Tahtsa Lake is one of a series of large lakes that comprise the Nechako Reservoir which was created by Alcan's Kemano I project. The reservoir is the headwaters of the Nechako River, the largest tributary of the Fraser River. Tahtsa Lake also discharges directly into the Kema River. Alcan's 10 mile long hydroelectric tunnels drilled in the 1950's.

"This is not just a local concern," says Chief Leween. "This 'Huckleberry Soup' will taint the largest, most productive rivers in British Columbia. All citizens should fight the poisoned water."

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**Contact info:**

Jill Thompson, Sierra Club of Canada, BC Chapter Grassroots Coordinator: 250-386-52  
Will Horter, Dogwood Initiative Executive Director, 250-370-9930, ext. 23  
Mike Robertson, Senior Policy Advisor to the Cheslatta Nation, 250-694-3334  
Chief Leween, 250-694-3334

**BACKGROUND:**

Huckleberry Mine is situated near Houston, 300 km West of Prince George and south of Tahtsa Lake is part of the Nechako Reservoir which is the headwaters of the Upper Nechako, the largest tributary of the Fraser River. The mine is located in the traditional territory of Cheslatta Carrier Nation.

The Huckleberry copper mine is owned by Imperial Metals and a Japanese consortium.

Imperial Metals has donated \$ 16,040 to the Liberal party since 2000. The Huckleberry operation donated \$ 1050.

As per Huckleberry's permit application, the provincial government would allow the following quantities to be discharged into Tahtsa Lake every year:

Copper: 250 kg  
Iron: 5000 kg  
Mercury: 25 kg  
Zinc: 1000 kg  
NO2 (nitrogen dioxide): 3500 kg  
Total suspended solids: 250,000 kg

The current permit prohibits discharge of waste water from the tailings impoundment into waters or into the ground. The mine is scheduled to close in 2007 and the current tailings pond is nearly full.

The application to amend the permit to allow discharge into Tahtsa Lake was unanimously approved by the Regional District of Bulkley-Nechako at their Jan 12 meeting. According to a Lakelse News poll among local residents, one hundred percent of the interviewees were against the application.

**Toxicity of mercury:** Once it enters an aquatic environment mercury is converted to organic methylmercury and is taken up into the food chain and ultimately into fish. Methylmercury is a neurotoxin and when consumed by pregnant women it readily crosses the placenta and enters the developing fetal brain. Methylmercury can also be passed on to an infant through breast milk. In infants, methylmercury damage typically manifests as delayed walking, talking, speaking and subtle learning, memory and behavioral effects. Prenatal methylmercury exposure can lead to the death of developing brain cells and cause brain cells to migrate to the wrong position.

Mercury is so efficiently accumulated in the aquatic food web that fish at the top of the food chain may have levels of mercury in their muscle tissue that are one million times higher than the concentration in the water. Because of this extreme bioaccumulation, it takes very little mercury to contaminate a lake and its fish.

Mercury never disappears in the environment, ensuring that contamination today will remain a problem long into the future.