

# Proposed mine sparks native concerns

**B.C. | Environmentalists also alarmed by application to build coal project in northern wilderness area**

BY LARRY PYNNE  
VANCOUVER SUN

British Columbians are being urged to comment on an Ontario mining company's proposal to build an open-pit coal mine in an area of northwest B.C. that contains the headwaters of three major rivers system — the Stikine, Nass and Skeena.

Fortune Minerals Ltd.'s Mount Klappan coal site is about 160 kilometres northeast of Stewart on the western edge of Spatsizi Plateau Wilderness Park. The mine plan is prompting concerns about potential environmental impacts and traditional native history.

"This is a vital issue," said Rhoda Quock, a representative of the elders' group Klabona (a native term for sacred headwaters) Keepers. "Once these rivers are polluted it will affect the fish, and that's our lifestyle, our way. What are we, after all, if all of that is gone?"

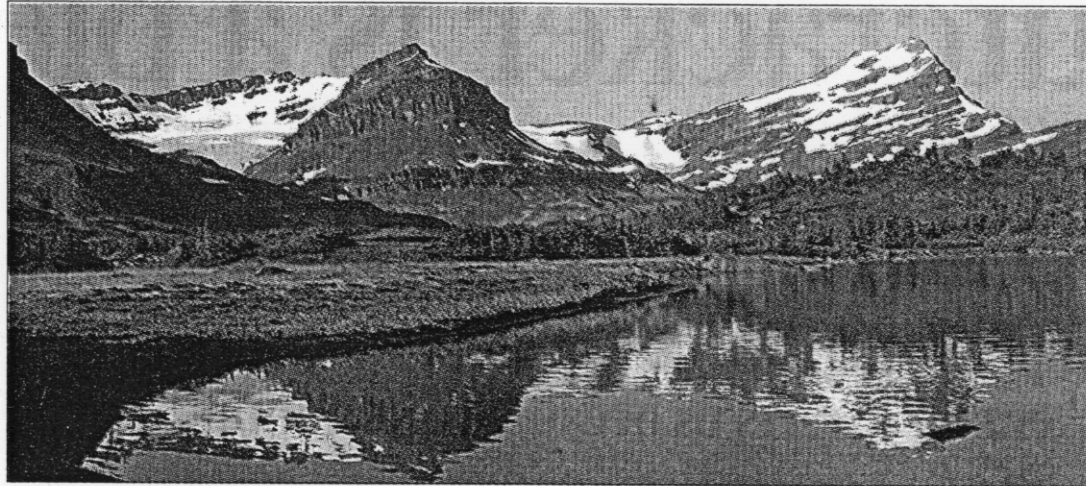
She said in an interview Tuesday the Tahltan community of Iskut favours preservation of the Mount Klappan area, with the

aboriginal right to hunt and fish maintained. Fortune Minerals is among five resource companies in the area, including coalbed methane and mineral exploration firms, she said.

Thirteen aboriginal elders and children were arrested in 2005 in a blockade of the current road access to the Klappan site — part of the railbed of B.C. Rail's abandoned Dease Lake extension. And last August natives from throughout the northwest gathered to offer solidarity for the headwaters they say are sacred.

In the latest development, the coal mine's draft terms of reference have been placed on the website of the province's Environmental Assessment Office. Public comments will be accepted until Monday.

Fortune Minerals is consulting with four native groups — Tahltan, Nisga'a, Gitksan and Skim Lax Ha — and considers the protesters to represent a vocal minority that is not representative of the greater numbers of aboriginals who would benefit from economic development from the mine.



**A proposed B.C. mine is drawing fire from some because the region is the source of three rivers.**

Company president Robin Goad said from his London, Ont., office that the Klappan mine is located "in an area generally at the headwaters where these rivers are not significant."

He added the company can mine the area without damaging the environment, but noted environmental studies are continuing.

The company is proposing to invest about \$250 million developing a mine capable of producing 1.5 million tonnes of "world-class" anthracite coal annually

over 20 years.

The investment would include construction of a new 100-kilometre resource road on provincial Crown land that would provide a more direct route to the port of Stewart.

Although not currently part of its environmental assessment process, the company is also investigating construction of a coal-fired generating plant to create more electricity for the northwest and make it easier for other mine projects to proceed.

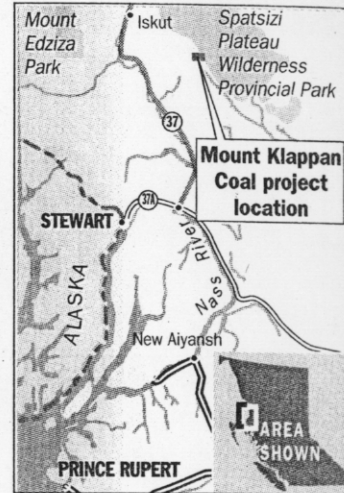
The Sierra Legal Defence Fund

released Tuesday the results of a poll showing that 69 per cent of British Columbians believe the province should not be pursuing coal-fired power. Eighty-two per cent also believe the province should enact climate change legislation with mandatory targets for reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

Monty Bassett is a Smithers resident and former executive-director of the Spatsizi Association for Biological Research, which has done radio-collar work on caribou in the area.

## Proposed mine site

Open pit coal mine north of Stewart could include coal-fired electricity.



Source: B.C. Environmental Assessment

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He said he fears the impact of a coal-fired power plant on the edge of Spatsizi, home to one of the last healthy herds of caribou in the province. He said that pollutants from the coal plant could damage the lichen upon which the caribou depend for survival.

Goad said it's too early to comment on the power proposal because the company has not even studied the concept to the point of telling the public what type of technology it would use.

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