

880100

DRAFT → Tulsefuck

April 16, 1997

Dave Barr → TGS

101

Our Threatened Heritage in Northwestern British Columbia

In less than a decade our government has yielded to well-organized, well-funded, largely foreign-controlled groups of environmental activists and their well meaning, but overly-trusting membership which has unfortunately been consistently misled by persuasive propaganda. Their mission is already partly completed - to 'protect' the resource-rich northwestern part of B.C. from further access and industrial development.

In 1903 our western boundary was determined through negotiations between the U.S., and our Canadian and British predecessors in the Alaska Boundary Dispute. Our claims to tidewater access were sold out to the U.S. by the vote of Lord Alverstone, the British commission member. The region ceded became the Alaska Panhandle, removing 50% of our coastline from the Yukon boundary at the 60th parallel southerly to the region of the Nass River near Prince Rupert. Today, we are in danger of having our rights to access within the entire drainage areas of these major rivers threatened by a sector which relies on its livelihood for the products of our natural resources, but is unwilling to share the resource base with others.

Three principal trans-boundary river-systems were created which drain the coastal portion of northwestern B.C. - The Alsek-Tatshenshini, Taku and Stikine-Iskut. The region conforms closely with the boundaries of the Cassiar Timber Supply Area (TSA), the largest of any of the 37 TSAs in the province covering 13.4 million hectares and about one-sixth of the province's land base. However, its current allowable annual cut (AAC) at 200,000 cubic metres is the smallest and compares with 140,000 cubic metres in its previous AAC. People from the First Nations are the dominant population and are currently participating in treaty negotiations with the province and federal governments, having expressed a desire to have greater participation in local resource economies. The area's mining heritage is significant and the mining industry is the principal employer accounting for about 30 percent of jobs in the TSA.

The Alsek-Tatshenshini river system which contains the much maligned world-class Windy Craggy copper- gold deposit and its largely unexplored world-class mineral belt is now enshrined in Tatshenshini- Alsek Wilderness Park. The park allows a restricted number of wealthier and largely foreign- dominated rafters to enjoy a four-month rafting season which generates about \$1.5 million in revenues to the Canadian economy and a similar amount to the U.S. This activity

occupies about 1-2% of the park's 954,000 hectares - the second largest park in B.C. and one of the least visited because of restricted access.

Most tragically for most British Columbians the relatively inaccessible park represents almost one-sixth of the additional 6% of the land-base destined to be protected to reach the 12% protected area strategy objective for B.C. Largely covered by rock, ice and scree it mostly duplicates portions of a similar and contiguous biosphere protected in adjacent parts of Yukon and Alaska which now total almost 10 million hectares with Tatshenshini-Alsek park included.

The government's ill-conceived, costly and pre-Protected Area Strategy decision to create the park in June, 1993 was challenged by the B.C. Mining Industry in the only forum available - the Ombudsman's office. Although the government appears to have failed to follow due process in its decision, the Ombudsman's office is now in its fourth year of review. Among the more obvious criteria which appear to have been ignored were objections from its own ministry of Energy, Mines and Petroleum Resources and members of its Parks Ministry. It also ignored land claims initiated by the Champagne-Aishihik First Nation.

Had its production application been approved, the Windy Craggy mine could have yielded an estimated \$2.4 billion in tax revenues alone to the economy based on its latest reserves and provided much needed employment in this part of the province. Madam Ombudsman - are you there? We are still anxiously awaiting your decision.

The equally remote and inaccessible Taku river has recently been targeted by the voracious 'greens' in much the same manner as the Tats. The Outdoor Recreational Council (ORC) persists with its devious and unsubstantiated claims against perceived threats from the mining and logging industries. Included are erroneous claims about threatened fish stocks by "an abandoned mine that continues to leach deadly sulfuric acid drainage into the Taku watershed" and a "dramatic increase in the region's allowable annual cut". Although the former mine operation produced acid rock drainage, no elevated levels of acidity are currently detectable 800 metres downstream from the former mine owing to the enormous diluting effect of the Tulsequah River. Nor is there any evidence to support negative impacts on the salmon stocks. Such comments concerning the so-called threats are both vexatious and irresponsible and seriously question the credibility of ORC river rankings. Moreover, the new development proposed by Redfern Resources Ltd. offers to clean-up this existing, but non-threatening situation.

Redfern Resources plans a \$142 million development to reactivate the Tulsequah Chief base metal mine, discovered in 1923 and operated by Cominco between 1951 - 1957. The mine lies on the Tulsequah River, 14 kilometres upstream from its junction with Taku River. The former mine barged its concentrates about 40 kilometres to tidewater. Because of commercial and engineering constraints for a barging scenario, Redfern must construct a 160-kilometre restricted-access road from Atlin to the project, with concentrates to be trucked to tidewater at Skagway. The road route selected from the Tulsequah Mine to Atlin never approaches the Taku River. Furthermore, it lies within an area already designated for integrated resource use which includes mining.

Yes, the environmentalists have recently discovered yet another rafting river which is as eloquently and deceitfully portrayed as the Tats and Stikine-Iskut in respect to threats from other potential resource users.

The Stikine River is a different kettle of fish - yes it is a salmonid river with an equivalent run to that of the Taku, but there the similarity ends. A lengthy battle has been in progress since the late 1980s between the environmental sector wishing to protect the entire river and much of its watershed and the mining sector seeking to maintain the right to multiple resource use mostly on the lower reaches of the river and its tributary - the Iskut River.

The 49 million hectare drainage basin essentially coincides with the limits of the current Cassiar-Iskut/Stikine Land Resource Management Plan (LRMP). It is already 22.3% protected from resource development by Mount Edziza Park, Spatsizi Wilderness Park and the Stikine River Recreational area, upstream from Telegraph Creek at the head of navigation on the Stikine. However the Stikine is also protected in perpetuity for commercial navigation by the Washington Treaty of May 1871, with its companions the Yukon and Porcupine rivers in Yukon and the St. Lawrence seaway.

Our very distant forefathers recognized the potential importance of the Stikine as an international travelway as had the coastal Tlingit, and interior Kaska Dena and Tahltan First Nations for thousands of years before them.

The Stikine River has a rich heritage of mining-related transportation. For 107 years, from 1862 to 1969, over 80 different riverboats plied the Stikine. The first, the Flying Dutchman, loaded a barge and the steamer with some assorted cargo and 125 passengers. It reached the head of navigation near Telegraph Creek without incident. In 1898 about 10,000 'Stampeders' are

reported to have wintered at Glenora near Telegraph Creek on their way to the Klondike gold fields in the Yukon.

The residential population of the Cassiar-Stikine/Iskut region currently numbers less than 2,000 people with Dease Lake the largest community at about 700, Telegraph Creek 300 - mostly Tahltan First Nations people and Iskut about 200. The Eskay Creek gold-silver mine with about 150 current employees and contractors resident on a 50% annual basis includes 57 Tahltans. The region also contains the Snip gold mine on the Iskut River with 180 employees; three other mines in the permit process, plus major potential gold-copper producers and other significant mineral prospects.

The government has recently decreed that the lower Stikine is not destined to be roadless. Its 'vision' in its response to the B.C. Heritage River Board's nomination of the Stikine is "A river which, in its upper reach will convey to visitors the sense of ruggedness, power, beauty and adventure characteristic of the northern regions of the province while maintaining in its lower reach, its role as a major support for sustainable regional development and economic activity". Fortunately for visitors, there is a road linking Dease Lake with Telegraph Creek which provides views of the spectacular Grand Canyon of the Stikine River within the Stikine River Recreational Area.

In addition, Highway 37 which was constructed in the 1960s as the 'Cassiar-Stewart highway' for mining purposes to provide access to tidewater at Stewart for the Cassiar asbestos mine, passes through Dease Lake. Later the road was completed to Highway 17 to provide a link between the Alaska Highway and Central B.C. and is a critical and essential access route through the region for both the resource sector and tourism.

Proposals to government on the ultimate near-term destiny of this region are currently in the hands of the Cassiar-Iskut/Stikine LRMP with a decision not expected for about two years. The Cassiar TSA, because of its size, will also include the Cassiar-Dease/Liard and Cassiar-Atlin LRMPs, which cover about 8.3 million hectares. With adjacent Tatshenshini-Atlin park included, this northwestern part of B.C. is already over 15 percent protected.

The mining industry's message to the government and the public is clear. Historically mining has only disturbed about 0.1 percent of the land base in Canada and British Columbia. Current legislation in B.C. requires that disturbed areas be reclaimed and a bonding requirement is necessary to provide for future funding purposes. Mining is by far the most valuable use of

resource lands. Recent gross annual economic impacts per unit of land disturbed in B.C. are in the range of \$133,000/hectare for mining, \$5,700/hectare for forestry and \$1,400/hectare for agriculture. Protected areas will total 12.0 percent of the land base when the Protected Area Strategy is completed. The mining industry will oppose even an additional 0.1% loss of the land base to exploration for obvious reasons. Our society is resource driven and depends on the products of the resource sector for its very existence. "If it can't be grown, then it has to be mined."

Most importantly, and generally ignored by the environment sector, is the well-established nature of mineral discoveries - the fundamental start of all mining activity. They just don't happen accidentally anymore. They have historically been made by prospectors and exploration geologists who have spent much of their lives in wilderness areas. Environmentalists by choice, most explorationists recognize and respect the needs of other resource-users.

Like early settlers and First Nation people before them, most of their footsteps are obliterated with time. Many of nature's outstanding features were recognized by early explorationists and recommended by them for protection as parks. With today's growing emphasis on environmental protection, the mining industry not only acts pro-actively in mitigating visual impacts associated with mine development, production and reclamation, it is required to meet minimum standards and frequently exceeds them innovatively. Environmental awards received are evidence of this growing commitment.

D.A. Barr