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▼ COMMENTARY

Best interests not served by Tulsequah grouser

By Ken Sumanik

THE ENVIRONMENTAL Mining Council and Alaska Gov. Tony Knowles say the B.C. government's approval of the Tulsequah Chief Mine was rushed. And the suggestion has been made that together, they are "powerful enough to jettison the deal" (Our View, March 26).

I wouldn't doubt their power, for it is not the first time that an environmental group and a government administration have joined hands to deny British Columbians a mining opportunity in our own country.

The governor knows full well the valuable contribution mining can make to his state. Not long ago, the government of Alaska took the unprecedented action of extending personal invitations to leading Canadian mining and exploration companies to come to Alaska to find and develop mines. We were flattered, still are; here was a legislator who not only clearly recognized the economic and social values that mining brings to

an area, but he wanted Canadian expertise to do the work — presumably because of our expertise and ability to ensure proper care and attention to the environment, to workers and to their communities.

I can't blame the governor for not wanting to see B.C. approve a mining project too quickly; it might mean unwelcome investment competition for mineral investment from south of his border. After all, if B.C. takes steps to re-establish itself as a good place to invest mining dollars, fewer dollars will flow north to Alaska.

As for Alan Young of the Environmental Mining Council, his motivation is far less complicated. His *raison d'être* is simply to slow mine development as much as possible, stop it altogether if he can.

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Redfern Resources Ltd. has met the stiffest environmental requirements for Canada and British Columbia, and could readily meet any and all of the "tests" Alaska might subject it to had it been in Alaska.

development been within their borders. The British Columbia government approved the Tulsequah Chief project only after an exhaustive assessment which took over 3 1/2 years.

Gov. Knowles is concerned for "the possibility of significant negative impact on the Taku River and its salmon resources — important to Southeast Alaska's subsistence, sport and commercial fisheries," but so are Canadians, especially British Columbians. Because

believe it or not, these are Canadian fish! The governor can rest assured the fish are fine. They were not affected by the Cominco mine when it operated in the '50s; not affected after it shut down, and they won't be affected when Redfern commences operations.

If the governor were genuinely concerned for the fish, he would endorse a trans-boundary salmon treaty which would ensure equitable sharing, management and protection of Taku River fish populations and those in all of the other trans-boundary rivers.

It is not the development of the mine that bothers the likes of Young. It is the roads that go with them. People like Young are opposed to providing access for people to see and enjoy the wilderness. That's the real issue for them.

In this case, it is the 160-kilometre road to the mine site. This road, which is not going to be built in the Taku River valley itself but instead built around it, is required to ensure safe transportation of

people, equipment, supplies and concentrates. The road leading to the mine is an asset, not a liability.

If roads seriously had the kind of impact on wilderness and wildlife resources as Young and the project opponents claimed, wildlife would have disappeared from this province decades ago. Fortunately, this isn't the case. Roads are not used solely by hunters, but are enjoyed by all of us who like to hike, mountaineer, backpack, cross-country ski and haul our canoes and kayaks to the more remote lakes and waterways.

Provincial resources, and that includes the wilderness, are assets owned by all British Columbians, and British Columbians have just as much right to enjoy, benefit and access their resources no less than the good folks at Greenpeace, the Sierra Club and the Environmental Mining Council.

Ken Sumanik is director of Environment and Land Use for the Mining Association of B.C.