



Energy, Mines and Low Carbon Innovation



Mineral tenures surrendered in ecologically sensitive Skagit River Donut Hole

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An agreement has been reached regarding historic mineral tenures in an area within the Silverdaisy watershed known as the Skagit River Donut Hole, surrounded by both Skagit Valley Park and E.C. Manning Park, and between Hope and Princeton.

Consultation on the future use and protection of land within the Silverdaisy watershed will follow.

The agreement will ensure the preservation and protection of the natural and cultural resources, as well as recreational opportunities within the headwaters of the Skagit River. Since time immemorial, Indigenous Peoples, including the Stó:ló, Syilx and Nlaka'pamux First Nations, as well as the Swinomish Indian Tribal Community, Upper Skagit Tribe and Sauk Suiattle Tribe, have depended upon the pristine ecosystem and diversity of wild salmon running in the Skagit River watershed.

"Today's agreement is another step in the right direction to protect the rich natural heritage of the Silverdaisy watershed and surrounding areas for generations to come," said Premier John Horgan. "This milestone also reflects on the important relationship we have with our neighbours in Washington state. I know we will continue to act in this same spirit of co-operation as we look toward recovery from last year's flood event on the Nooksack River, and reducing future damage and hardship caused by flooding on both sides of the border."

The Province has entered into a Memorandum of Agreement with Imperial Metals Corporation (Imperial Metals) and the Skagit Environmental Endowment Commission that will see Imperial Metals return to the Province all its mining and related rights within the nearly 5,800-hectare Skagit River Donut Hole.

"Protecting the Skagit River by extinguishing these mining tenures is a historic step forward in the stewardship of the Upper Skagit watershed. Protecting this sensitive and diverse ecosystem with its significant fish and wildlife populations starts at the headwaters to the Skagit River within the Upper Skagit," said Thomas Curley, Canada co-chair, Skagit Environmental Endowment Commission.

"Our collective stewardship of the Upper Skagit transcends geographical boundaries as this watershed provides a critical corridor for salmon, steelhead, and bull trout, which have protected status on both sides of the border," said Leo Bodensteiner, USA co-chair for the Skagit Environmental Endowment Commission.

The potential for industrial activity in the region has historically been strongly opposed by both Indigenous communities, and local and international environmental groups. In 2019, the Province responded to calls to stop forestry operations in the Silverdaisy area by halting all timber sale licences in the same area of land.

"The Province and our neighbours in Washington state share similar values when it comes to protecting the environment and supporting local communities," said Bruce Ralston, Minister of Energy Mines and Low Carbon Innovation. "This agreement represents our next step in addressing issues within our shared transboundary watershed."

Washington Gov. Jay Inslee said: "This agreement will help protect our natural environment for generations to come. The Skagit River is one of the most diverse salmon habitats in Washington state, including for Chinook, which are essential to the survival of the revered southern resident orca. This agreement is a shining example of the importance of cross-border collaboration when confronted with challenges that know no borders."

This is a significant first step in securing some form of long-term protection for the area. The Province will consult with affected First Nations on the future use and protection within the Silverdaisy watershed in a process led by BC Parks and the Ministry of the Environment and Climate Change Strategy.

Quotes:

George Heyman, Minister of Environment and Climate Change Strategy -

"This agreement recognizes the importance of the old-growth forests and diverse species in the Silverdaisy watershed and surrounding ecosystem. Through future discussions with Indigenous Nations and others, we now have the opportunity to explore how best to manage this important area and its uniquely valuable connection to the surrounding conservation areas."

Brian Kynoch, president, Imperial Metals Corporation -

"Our objective as a mining company would have been to proceed with exploration of our claims. But as a company that is responsive to the aspirations of Indigenous communities, government and neighbours, we support this agreement."

Bruce Harrell, mayor, City of Seattle -

"Ensuring a healthy environment now and for future generations is core to our responsibility as a city and regional leader - on behalf of the City of Seattle and former Mayor Durkan, I want to thank Premier Horgan for honouring our shared commitment made in the High Ross Treaty to jointly protect the environmental integrity of the headwaters of the Skagit River. We commend the Skagit Environmental Endowment Commission, a model for transboundary collaboration

Environmental Enforcement Commission, a model for transboundary collaboration for the past 35 years, for their vision and persistence in retiring these mineral tenures so that the Province can permanently protect the Silverdaisy area. We also appreciate the leadership of Gov. Inslee in securing the support needed to make this happen.”

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