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## **Buyer interested in Tulsequah Chief Mine**

### **Alaska's efforts to force cleanup of toxic discharge ignored**

By Kim Marquis | JUNEAU EMPIRE

A sale is pending on an old mine leaking polluted water into the Taku River watershed.

The unnamed company intends to purchase the Tulsequah Chief Mine in British Columbia, according to a memo distributed by the BC Environmental Assessment Office.

Former mine owner Redfern Corp. went bankrupt in March of 2009, after its plans to build an experimental hoverbarge to cart ore down the river met resistance from Juneau's commercial fishermen and other river users.

The Taku is a prized salmon habitat.

The buyer, identified only by code in the memo, requested the transfer of the mine's operations certificates as part of the sale.

Redfern's bankruptcy receiver did not immediately return a call Friday requesting more information about the buyer.

The company asked for the transfer to occur "as soon as possible," citing seasonal access issues and "barging of equipment to the site."

That could mean a new owner intends to start barging materials to the mine this year, Rivers Without Borders Spokesman Chris Zimmer said.

"My worry is we'll be back to the same situation we were in before," he said.

Redfern's barging plans met strong resistance in Juneau after being introduced in 2007. Meetings about the hoverbarge it was building to operate on the river were attended by hundreds. The barge was never finished.

A new company would still need to acquire a permit from the Alaska Department of Fish and Game for barge operations to the mine, which is difficult to access.

The river presents challenging navigation along the approximately 40 miles inland to the mine. The Taku River Tlingit First Nation opposes a road across its land, and a Redfern study in 2006 showed the cost to build a road would render the project unfeasible.

BC officials asked members of a project work group to comment on the new request to transfer certificates, setting an April 26 deadline. The group includes Alaskan officials from several state departments. None could be reached for comment late Friday.

The mine was originally operated in the 1950s by Cominco, now Teck Cominco Ltd., which sold it to Redcorp.

Canadian inspectors have known since 1990 that the mine is leaking sulfuric acid into the Tulsequah River, down the Taku River and into Southeast Alaska.

Sulfuric acid is a toxic chemical that forms when compounds in the rock are exposed to air and water. It happens naturally, but in much greater quantities when construction activities disturb and grind rock.

Alaskan efforts to get the BC government to force a clean-up of the site have been largely ignored.

A letter, signed in July 2009 by then-Gov. Sarah Palin, asked BC officials to force Redfern to retain water treatment equipment at the site. The letter was never answered.

The equipment and everything else of apparent value was removed, according to people who live and work on the river.

While a new owner assumes responsibilities for clean-up, renewed efforts to extract ore would likely fund the expensive process.

Redfern estimated its environmental responsibilities to cost more than \$6 million, according to court records.

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