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# CHILKAT AND KLEHINI RIVERS

**THREAT:** Mining

**STATE:** Alaska

**AT RISK:** Bald eagle, fish, and wildlife habitat, Tribal culture and sustenance

## SUMMARY

Every year, hundreds of thousands of salmon swim from the Pacific Ocean into the Jilkáat Aani K̄a Héeni (Chilkat River watershed) to spawn. Alaska Natives and other communities depend upon the river and its abundance for their culture and livelihood. But the Palmer Project, a proposed copper and zinc mine, is about to move to the next stage of development that could result in the release of hundreds of thousands of gallons per day of toxic wastewater, contaminating nearby creeks that feed directly into the Chilkat and Klehini rivers and crippling the entire ecosystem of the Chilkat Valley. This is in addition to the already concerning impacts of climate change, such as rapid glacier melting and a historic increase of rainfall. Congress and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) must act now to ensure the fundamental protections guaranteed by the federal Clean Water Act are not abandoned and a grave environmental injustice is not allowed. EPA must intercede immediately and direct the mining consortium to apply for a standard surface water discharge permit that will require meeting all applicable State and federal Water Quality Standards.

## THE RIVER

The Klehini River is a main tributary to the Chilkat River. Together, the two rivers flow through the Alaska Chilkat Bald Eagle Preserve, critical habitat for the largest congregation of eagles in the world. The watershed also supports five species of wild salmon and a large brown bear population. Additionally, the ancient Tlingit Village of Klukwan, ancestral and current home of the Chilkat Tlingits, and the town of Haines, just downstream from the project, are totally dependent on these healthy and productive waters for their food, economy, and culture. The land being developed by the mining consortium is currently controlled by the State of Alaska and the U.S. government, but it has been Tlingit land for thousands of years and was never ceded to the State or federal government.

## THE THREAT

The ongoing development of the Palmer Project is being pursued by a Canadian and Japanese consortium: American Pacific Mining and Dowa Mining and Metals. The next stage of development for the project is slated for the summer of 2023. The developers want to dig a mile-long “exploratory” tunnel under the Saksaiia Glacier, directly above the Klehini River. The excavation will create huge waste storage piles and contaminated wastewater discharges in an area with extremely high levels of sulfide deposits, rainfall, snowfall, and seismic activity. The acidic wastewater, contaminated with heavy metals, hydrocarbons from vehicles and drilling muds, and explosive residues, will flow into the nearby creeks and the Chilkat and Klehini rivers. This development is extremely dangerous to the fragile ecosystem of the Chilkat Valley.

Mining industry supporters claim the demand for more electric cars is justification for mining copper wherever it can be found, ignoring the potential for reclaiming copper through recycling, as well as acknowledging the recklessness of mining new deposits

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## TAKE ACTION:

[AMERICANRIVERS.ORG/  
CHILKATRIVER2023](https://www.americanrivers.org/chilkatrivers2023)



ANDY HEDDEN

located in critical salmon habitat, especially habitat with the worldwide ecological significance of the nearby Alaska Chilkat Bald Eagle Preserve.

Congress and the EPA have the ability to ensure that the Clean Water Act is enforced. Public support could also play a significant role in convincing the federal government to allow co-management of the area by the Tribal Council of the Village of Klukwan, whose people have been living in, and protecting this ecosystem for thousands of years.

## WHAT MUST BE DONE

Congress and the EPA must act now to ensure the fundamental

protections guaranteed by the federal Clean Water Act are not abandoned and a grave environmental injustice is not allowed. EPA must intercede immediately and direct the mining consortium to apply for a standard surface water discharge permit that will require meeting all applicable State and federal Water Quality Standards.