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CHILKAT RIVER

THREAT: Mining, development

STATES: Alaska

SUMMARY

The Chilkat River is the lifeblood of Alaska Native communities and supports an abundance of salmon, bears, and other wildlife, including the largest congregation of bald eagles in the world. But the river is threatened by a large copper and zinc mine that jeopardizes clean water, habitat, and the local way of life. The state of Alaska must reject future hard-rock mining permits to safeguard the irreplaceable natural wealth of the Chilkat.

COLIN ARISMAN

THE RIVER

The Chilkat River (Jilkáat Héeni) flows approximately 52 miles from the Chilkat Glacier in British Columbia, across the border into Alaska, past the Chilkat Indian Village (Klukwan), to the Chilkat Inlet near Haines, Alaska. With its major tributary, the Klehini River, it supports one of the most vibrant, biodiverse, and productive ecosystems in North America. The river is crucial to the Alaska Chilkat Bald Eagle Preserve and is critical habitat for the largest congregation of bald eagles in the world, five species of wild salmon, and a large brown bear population.

The Chilkat River is vital to the Village of Klukwan (Tlákwan Aan) — which means “Eternal Village” in Lingít, and is one of the oldest continuously occupied communities in North America — as well as to the town of Haines, known in Lingít as Deishu (“end of the trail”). The Chilkat Indian Village (Klukwan), a U.S. federally recognized Tribe, are the stewards of the watershed, and have been since time immemorial.

THE THREAT

A Canadian mining company is proposing a large-scale copper and zinc mine, known as the Palmer Project, above the Klehini River. The project includes drilling into thousands of acres of acid-generating rock in an area with extremely high levels of rainfall, snowfall, and seismic activity. Acid mine drainage — acidic, metal-laden wastewater produced by drilling and other mining activities — along with hydrocarbons and other pollutants, may reach the Klehini River and other tributaries. This pollution threatens the entire Chilkat River Watershed, local ecosystems, food security, and traditional ways of life.

Vizsla Copper Corp., a Canadian company, is exploring and developing land in the Chilkat watershed for a mine. That land is currently controlled by the state of Alaska

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Continued

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TAKE ACTION:

[AMERICANRIVERS.ORG/
CHILKATRIVER2026](https://AMERICANRIVERS.ORG/CHILKATRIVER2026)

and the U.S. government, but it is unceded traditional territory of the Chilkat Indian Village (Klukwan).

The Chilkat Indian Village actively opposes large-scale, hard-rock mining in the Chilkat Valley, as it risks sustainable wild salmon runs, pristine water, hunting and fishing practices, food security, sustainable economies, and traditional ways of life. In Klukwan, Chilkat Indian Village Tribal members view these lands and waters as vital and sacred. Protecting the Chilkat River Watershed for future generations is an inherent duty.

ADOBE/ LINDAPHOTOGRAPHY

WHAT MUST BE DONE

Alaska Gov. Mike Dunleavy has pledged state support for the mine, and Vizsla Copper Corp. continues exploration and development in the watershed. We need increased public involvement to demonstrate to the governor and the corresponding state and federal agencies that this damaging project does not have widespread support. State leaders must reject all future permits and state funding for hard-rock mining infrastructure in the Chilkat Valley Watershed.