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WILLIAMS LAKE TRIBUNE
TNG report raises Prosperity water concerns

By Erin Hitchcock - Williams Lake Tribune

Published: November 19, 2009 7:51 AM
 Updated: November 19, 2009 10:03 AM

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A study prepared for the Tsilhqot'in National Government says Taseko Mines Ltd. underestimated the potential risk of the proposed Prosperity mine to surrounding lakes and rivers.

Stratus Consulting concluded in its study that information provided to date "does not permit a reasoned evaluation of potential adverse effects to water quality, water quantity, fish and wildlife under variable conditions."

As a result, the TNG is concerned about the future of salmon runs.

"This study raises the alarm," says Xení Gwet'in Chief Marilyn Baptiste. "As the traditional caretakers of these lands and waters, we have asked the Panel reviewing this project to demand more credible and accurate information from Taseko so we can properly understand the environmental and human health risks that we are facing."



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The report says Taseko's Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the project "vastly underestimate[s] the uncertainties in site water balance."

The report says Taseko has relied on limited data to predict or prepare for extreme weather events.

"After operations, they propose leaving their mine waste in place with no active controls," the report says. "One extreme weather event at any point in the future could lead to an uncontrolled release of mine waste, which could have severe adverse consequences for the trout and salmon fishery of the Taseko River."

The TNG says Taseko River flows into the Chilcotin River, which empties into the Fraser River.

Stratus Consulting's report says that because of the known impacts of hard-rock mining, it is critical that Taseko identifies reasonable potential effects and include short-term and long-term mitigation and management measures and monitoring in its mine proposal.

"This report makes it clear that we cannot rely on Taseko's own assessment of the potential impacts of its project," Baptiste says. "Since time immemorial our people have relied on the pristine waters of the Teztan Biny watershed and the Taseko River as a source of life."

Stratus Consulting undertook the hydrology review at the request of the TNG and the Williams Lake Indian Band.

Brian Battison, vice president of corporate affairs for Taseko Mines Ltd., wouldn't comment on the report's findings, but says Taseko will review and consider the report and its contents, conclusions, and its work.

He says since March 2009, when Taseko's application for Prosperity Mine commenced, additional public comment periods, open houses, and technical workshops were held.

"In excess of 1,200 comments were received, 78 per cent of which were in general support of the project," Battison says, adding there were an additional 870 issues or comments raised during the working group phase, which were all addressed by written responses from Taseko.

"All of these comments — and they number well in excess of 1,000, almost 2,000 — we examine, we review, and we consider and we respond to, so this report is one of those comments," he says.

"We will review it and consider it.

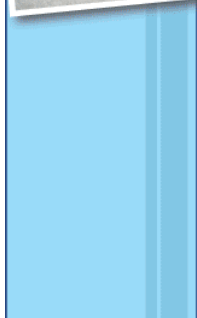
"That's what we do with these things when they come in. That's part of why this process is so thorough and why people can have such confidence in it."

While he can't know what the Panel will think of the report, he says it will undoubtedly consider its contents and come to a conclusion.

Battison notes that Taseko has "complete confidence" in the work the company has put forward and in

others, including engineering and environmental consulting firms, who have prepared work on its behalf.

Amy Crook, B.C. program manager for the Centre for Science in Public Participation, and part of the TNG working group, says the study cost roughly \$20,000, just over \$10,000 of which came from the Williams Lake Indian Band. The rest came from the \$300,000 the TNG received from the Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency to review the project.



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She says the Panel had set a deadline for comments on the hydrology information, including what was in Taseko's environmental impact statement and the supplemental information that Taseko provided in reference to the Panel's first deficiency submission request.

The Panel had set a deadline of Nov. 9 for comments, but up until the day the report was due, Taseko was still providing new information, which she says was hard to respond to at the last minute.

"Most of the information is considered in this report," she says, adding that the study, which was filed Nov. 9, wasn't able to look at all of the new information Taseko provided.

Crook, who has been working on mining proposals for 25 years, says hydrology and water balance is one of the most important topics when it comes to mine proposals.

"It's very hard to estimate these things," she says. "It's also one of the most important things to get right about a mine proposal."

When the TNG looked at the most important areas for independent review of Taseko's EIS and supplemental information, hydrology was one of the biggest areas it wanted to focus on. Acid mine drainage and neutral metal leaching was also deemed one of the most important areas, which was also independently reviewed and submitted.

"Those are the most important biophysical aspects of the mine to get right if you're going to project long-term impacts."

T'etinqox (Anaham) Chief Joe Alphonse says Stratus Consulting's findings come as no surprise.

"You look at scientific data and information, that's the telltale," Alphonse says.

He says the study shows that the information Taseko uses to draw its conclusions is insufficient and that the Panel should not use Taseko's information to make its decision on how big the imprint the mine would have.

"I think this calls for more studies, and definitely causes us to want to see more studies before making any decisions on any issues," Alphonse says.

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