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WILLIAMS LAKE TRIBUNE

## National Council of Canadians members visit Fish Lake

By Erin Hitchcock - Williams Lake Tribune

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1 Comment

Members of the National Council of Canadians stopped in at Williams Lake and Fish Lake recently, where they met with the Xenigwet'in First Nation and talked about the impact of the proposed Prosperity Mine.

Meera Karunanathan, the national water campaigner at the Council of Canadians, and Harjap Grewal, the regional organizer for B.C. and the Yukon, attended a gathering hosted by the Xenigwet'in First Nation at Onion Lake, near Fish Lake.

Karunanathan says that according to Taseko Mines Ltd.'s Environmental Impact Statement, Onion Lake will be affected within a 66-year span due to groundwater leakage if the mine goes ahead.

She also has concerns about Fish Lake being drained.

"They're talking about draining a lake, which shouldn't be allowed," she says. "This is a fish-bearing lake."

She says Fish Lake is one of 16 lakes on an Environment Canada list slated to be drained or used as a tailings impoundment area for a mine, and if communities, including Williams Lake, allow that to happen then the last will grow since it would set a precedent.

"It's an important message that Williams Lake will send to the rest of the country if they turn down this proposal to destroy Fish Lake" she says.

Brian Battison, Taseko's vice president of corporate affairs, says Taseko expects there to be good water quality in the tailings facility that would be built upstream from Fish Lake.

"There is nothing in our water modeling that suggests we have a detrimental affect on groundwater," he says. "We are required to prove all of this to regulators and to the public as part of the EA (Environmental Assessment) process, and we're doing that now."

He adds that groundwater moves slowly and can be easily monitored through wells. Taseko would monitor its movement and test its quality. If it doesn't meet the standards, the water would be kept at the facility, although Taseko expects the water would be of high quality and suitable for rainbow trout habitat like the facility at Gibraltar Mine.

He says the lake and the deposit are side by side, with the lake being immediately upstream from the pit. Harvesting the minerals, he says, requires the lake to be drained.

"We're not using Fish Lake to store tailings," he says.

As far as residents setting a precedent for showing support or lack of support is "too simplistic of a view to take," he says.

"There happens to be a deposit there that's valuable, that's worth money. It's worth economic development opportunity for many people," he says, adding that the judgement people need to make is if the proposal is in the public interest and if it is a good use of "this public asset."

Karunanathan says Prosperity Mine wouldn't deal with the unemployment in the community.

"And they're destroying the natural resources in the community," she says, adding that it's not clear in Taseko's plan that the company would hire people from the community.

"Speaking to people from the community, they're not confident that these are the jobs that will suit the needs of the community," she says, adding that she spoke with the local Council of Canadians, the Labour Council, and members of the Xenigwet'in Nation.

"People fish in that lake. People hunt the game in that area," she says. "There are animals there that depend on the lake. The mining company claims to be willing to train people for jobs for the next 20 years, but in doing so, they're destroying a way of life that has existed for a very long time prior to their

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arrival."

Battison says hiring practices would be consistent with delivering and maximizing economic value and social benefit, locally, regionally, and provincially.

Since there may not be many metallurgists in Williams Lake, Battison says they will likely come from somewhere else.

But there would many other jobs available locally, he says, such as equipment operation, equipment machinery, materials handling, accounting, office support, mechanics, electrician jobs, plumbing, and janitorial, as well as cooking, house keeping, and laundry services jobs that would be required for the 500-man mining camp.

He says there would also be jobs in the area of providing fuel, materials delivery, couriers, and bus drivers to take the employees to work.

He says there would also be secondary jobs created that would come from servicing employees and their homes, such as providing new and used cars, washing machines, and dryers, for example, that would create economic spin-offs as a result of Taseko spending \$800 million to construct the mine and another \$200 million every year to operate the mine.

He notes that providing jobs to local people is a priority, but that the responsibility rests on those who want to work.

Those wanting a career in mining or servicing the mining business may need to take the necessary steps to make that possible, he says and refers to the Mining Your Future program.

"Like any employer, we try to hire the best people we can, and we want the best people to come from the local region."

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