

Report Finds Contamination and Monitoring Issues at Closed Babine Lake Mines

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Terrace BC

A new report released today by researchers with SkeenaWild Conservation Trust in partnership with the Lake Babine Nation outlines major deficiencies in government regulations and monitoring, and impacts to the aquatic community of Babine Lake, related to two decommissioned metal mines.

Babine Lake, situated in the Skeena River watershed, produces ~ 90% of Skeena sockeye salmon, and carries great significance to Lake Babine Nation. Bell and Granisle mines, which closed in 1992 and 1982, respectively, were both linked to negative aquatic impacts in the lake while they were operational. The report investigates monitoring related to these mines over more recent years.

The report demonstrates that current permits regulating discharges of mine-impacted water from the decommissioned mines are limited in extent and stringency. For example, permits allow high discharge concentrations of harmful contaminants, such as copper, which are known to negatively impact salmon at allowable concentrations.

“Mines like Bell and Granisle continue to produce contaminated wastewater long after mining is over,” notes Adrienne Berchtold, Ecologist and Mining Impacts Researcher with SkeenaWild Conservation Trust, and lead author of the report. “Strong discharge regulations are essential to put the onus on mining companies to clean up this polluted water before it can put the local environment at risk.”

The aquatic monitoring program of Babine Lake also contains significant gaps that severely limit the monitoring information obtained, thereby inhibiting detection and tracking of mine-related aquatic impacts.

“An adequate annual monitoring program is essential to our understanding of potential impacts of industrial-scale projects, such as these metal mines, on the surrounding aquatic community,” says Donna Macintyre, Fisheries Director, Lake Babine Nation. “Considering the vital importance of Babine Lake as nursery habitat to wild salmon and nature’s food basket for Indigenous Peoples, it is imperative that a robust monitoring program be developed and implemented without delay”.

Despite the glaring monitoring gaps, the report’s assessment found evidence of negative aquatic impacts to water, sediment, and fish in Babine Lake linked to historical and recent mining activities.

The report includes recommendations for improved regulation and monitoring of the mines that, if implemented by the provincial government and the mines' owner, would help curb the damage already done to Babine Lake.

“Contamination and monitoring issues at the Babine mines are part of a much larger problem.”
“A [new map](#) shows over a hundred contaminated mine sites across the province; many of these sites have little or no monitoring” says Greg Knox, Executive Director, SkeenaWild Conservation Trust.

“The recommendations in our report could provide some framework for improving oversight of the many closed mines in BC currently posing threats to our shared water,” says Berchtold.

Report's Key Facts & Highlights:

- Discharge permits for Bell mine allow metal concentrations up to 25x higher than provincial water quality guidelines for the protection of aquatic life; permits do not limit discharge quality from the Granisle mine at all.
- One source of Granisle's discharge to the lake had average copper concentrations 20x higher than the provincial guideline and nearly 250x higher than the threshold for negative effects to salmon reported in the scientific literature.
- Basic monitoring of Babine Lake water, sediment, and fish in the receiving area for one of Bell's discharges is only performed once every ten years, while fish and water quality are *never* monitored near some of Granisle's discharges.
- Zero monitoring of sockeye salmon is performed near the mines.
- Sediment and fish surrounding both mines are persistently elevated in copper beyond levels known to cause chronic negative effects.
- In recent years, aluminum and sulphate have increased in water, and metals like iron, lead, and copper have increased in fish tissues near the mines.

Link to the report:

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1PkB7xUWPFerufk25sDs9pZFWWh4SDn28b/view?usp=drive_web

Photos / video: <https://skeenawild.org/new-legacy-of-metal-mine-impacts-on-babine-lake/>

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