[Facts & Highlights Below]

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

New Map Shows Dozens of Mine Pollution Threats in BC

January 19th, 2021 (Vancouver/Terrace) - Today, SkeenaWild and the BC Mining Law Reform network released a new map pointing to over a hundred known and potentially contaminated mine waste sites that threaten to pollute waters, fish habitat and communities across the province.

Concerns over mining have been growing since the 2014 Mount Polley disaster and 2016 Auditor General report calling for significant reforms to protect BC's waterways and communities. "The new map highlights the massive scale of the problem and provides information that has not been made available by the Ministry of Energy & Mines" stated Greg Knox, Executive Director, SkeenaWild Conservation Trust.

Mining poses risks of water contamination from acid mine drainage and heavy metal and pollutant leaching. At times this can result in the need for water treatment in perpetuity which can cost taxpayers millions, as with the Britannia Mine that has cost $40 million for clean-up to date and an additional $3 million annually to reduce acid mine drainage and heavy metals from entering Howe Sound.

"This map highlights dozens of mine sites that are polluting or putting our waters and communities at risk of contamination. We need to reform mining laws in B.C. to put safety and clean water first," said Nikki Skuce, Co-chair, BC Mining Law Reform Network.

The BC Mining Law Reform Network represents 30 local, provincial and national organizations from a wide range of sectors calling for reforms to BC's weak mining laws, and a lack of enforcement and oversight in a context of increased demand for minerals.

"The information on the map was challenging to uncover. How can we begin to investigate these potentially mine-damaged waters and monitor the extent of the pollution, when the information is not even available to the public?" asks Knox.

The Association of Mineral Exploration of BC (AMEBC) is hosting their annual conference RoundUp online that will include a session on the growing importance of Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) investing on January 21.

"There are a few key reforms BC needs to make around mine tailings safety and water protection, and ensuring that the polluter actually pays before it can promote itself as a responsible mining jurisdiction," said Skuce.

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Facts & Highlights

The Map

- The map displays 173 coal and metal mines across B.C., including all major mines as well as historic mines where a significant amount of ore was extracted (i.e., over 300,000 tonnes if production ceased before 1985, or over 10,000 tonnes if production

ceased during or after 1985). The map specifies whether mines are proposed (16), operating (17), in care and maintenance (17), closed/abandoned (84), or historic sites that are being redeveloped for further mining (39).
- Only 2 of the 173 sites on the map are demonstrated to pose no current water contamination threat.
- 116 of the sites on the map have either already contaminated the surrounding environment, or have the known potential to do so. Of these, acid mine drainage is a concern at 71 sites, many of which will still encounter water contamination issues even if acidic drainage is mitigated.
- 55 of the sites on the map have no publicly available information about their contamination risk (though many seem likely to have some contamination concern, given their location and deposit geology).
- The map does not depict the additional 130 mineral exploration sites throughout the province that may also cause water pollution in the future.

Five Examples of Ongoing Mine Water Pollution in B.C.:

1. **Tulsequah Chief Mine** (Chieftain Metals, closed)
   - Tulsequah Chief has been leaking acid mine drainage into the Taku watershed near the B.C.-Alaska border for over 60 years.
   - As well as being highly acidic, the contaminated water includes copper and zinc, among other contaminants, at levels far exceeding BC Water Quality standards.
   - The BC remediation plan was released in 2020 with three different options for controlling and addressing the water contamination issues (see Rivers Without Borders).
   - The estimated cost for remediation is close to $60 million, with annual costs of over a million. The BC government has only collected just over a $1 million reclamation bond for Tulsequah Chief.

2. **Mount Polley Mine** (Imperial Metals, care & maintenance)
   - The Mount Polley mine tailings pond collapsed on Aug. 4, 2014, spilling 24 million cubic metres of solid and liquid mine wastes into Hazeltine Creek and Quesnel Lake, a source of drinking water and major spawning ground for sockeye salmon.
   - Despite repeated claims by the company that the mine wastes pose no threats, researchers have found that resuspension of spill-related material off the bottom of the West Basin is occurring and prolongs the exposure of aquatic ecosystems to contaminants. Bacteria are also being found around the tailings waste that could be affecting fish.
   - Since the disaster, Imperial Metals has been permitted to release ongoing discharge of large volumes of liquid mine waste into Quesnel Lake, with little to no treatment, and with contaminants up to 800 times higher than the lake's natural background levels. The Concerned Citizens of Quesnel Lake captured the discharge pipes on video
   - To date, no penalties, charges or fines have been laid against Mount Polley for the disaster.

3. **Elk Valley Watershed**-Wide Selenium Pollution (Teck coal mines)
   - Selenium pollution from waste rock dumps left from Teck's mountain-top removal coal mines in the Rocky Mountains flows into the Elk River and then into the Kootenay River, hundreds of kilometers downstream through Montana, Idaho and back into BC.
   - Selenium pollution (which can be found in neutral pH drainage) can cause deformities and reproductive failure in fish and started rising in the Elk Valley watershed in the early 90s. Despite BC monitoring showing harmful levels of pollution, the province approved expansion of four of Teck's mines, permitting levels of selenium that are known to threaten fish health. Teck is currently proposing a large expansion at the headwaters of the Elk (Castle Mountain mine) which has started a federal and provincial environmental assessment process.

- From 2017 to 2019, 93% of adult westslope trout in the upper Fording River disappeared. This stretch of river is the most heavily polluted major river in the Elk Valley, with selenium levels reaching more than a hundred times higher than BC's Water Quality Guidelines.
- Late last year, Teck was issued an order to improve water quality by Environment Canada under the *Fisheries Act* because of the increasing evidence of impacts to westslope cutthroat trout and other species from their growing selenium and other water pollution.

4. **Copper Mountain Mine** (Copper Mountain and Mitsubishi - operating)
   - Seepage from the West dam is currently discharging directly into the Similkameen River at 60 litres/second.
   - Water quality on the upper Similkameen and particularly its tributaries are trending in a downward direction for sulfate, nitrate, selenium and other key pollutants, often exceeding BC Water Quality guidelines.
   - A key area of concern is high levels of arsenic near the WA border.
   - Since restarting in 2011, the mine has been out of compliance on effluent discharge issues at least 25 times.

5. **Bell and Granisle Mines** (Glencore Canada Corporation - closed)
   - These are two closed open-pit copper mines on the shores of Babine Lake, which produces 90% of the Skeena watershed's sockeye salmon.
   - Both mines have acid rock drainage potential, and discharge wastewater directly into the lake that can contain copper concentrations up to 20x greater than provincial water quality guidelines, as well as a number of other elevated contaminants.
   - Since mining operations were active, discharges from both mines have caused metal contamination to water, sediment and fish in Babine Lake.
   - This contamination continues today: mine-exposed sediments and bottom-dwelling fish are persistently elevated in copper beyond levels known to cause chronic negative impacts; concentrations of a number of metals have recently increased in water, sediment, and bottom-dwelling fish near the mines; and lake trout metal contamination throughout the lake has worsened over recent years, with the most polluted fish nearly always being found closest to the mines.
