Orphaned, Abandoned and Closed Mines: BC Community Perspectives

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BC’s mining legacies
Old projects make problems for new projects

There is a sense of mistrust within communities who are facing new mining projects but still dealing with old or current mines.

Photo: http://researchforest.unbc.ca/jprf/background.htm
Human health and wildlife health are intricately connected in places where people still rely on the land for food and medicines.
New Approaches to Abandoned Mines in Takla’s Territory

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Mining’s Legacies: The Baker Mine and the Takla-Bralorne Mine

Open Adit at Baker Mine
The Baker Mine
The Baker Mine

- DuPont of Canada Exploration mined silver and gold from 1981 to 1983
- Purchased by Sable Resources in 1989
- Sable is currently mining the Shasta deposit and milling at the Baker Mine

Photo: Metal Leaching at Baker
DuPont’s Legacy

- Open adits, metal leaching and ARD
- No remediation of the site
- Buried toxic wastes at Sturdee Airstrip
- Other abandoned mines nearby – Cheni
- No known EA or cumulative impact assessment
Continued Problems

- Cleanup by Sable minimal
- ARD and metal leaching
- Tailings pond problems at Baker and Shasta
- Evidence of caribou and wolves in the tailings pond
- In July 2008, a tailings pipeline burst
- Accident not reported to the Ministry of Mines until Takla made efforts to do so
What’s being done?

- Very little

- Major remediation and monitoring efforts are needed at the Cheni Mine, the Baker Mine, the Shasta Mine and the Sturdee airstrip.

- Takla has been sampling these sites
  - Funds for abandoned mines are not eligible because Baker is an operating mine.
  - This ‘regulatory limbo’ is a problem!
Takla views the issues of contaminants from a holistic perspective. We don’t care who caused the mess, we just want it cleaned up.

Community members are the experts on the land; not government reps in Victoria/Vancouver. More people are reporting unhealthy animals.

B.C. and Canada have not taken steps to clean these sites up.

Millions of dollars are likely needed to address this area.

People eating traditional foods have the most interest to see things done right. Therefore community members should be doing the monitoring, cleanup and enforcement.
Bralorne-Takla Mercury Mine

Takla Lake Mining Map

- Takla Lake Territory
- Mineral Claims

Mines of Concern:
- Bear Mountain - Sacred Site
- Kames South - Operating Mine
- Bralorne - Contaminated
- Ogden Mountain - Abandoned Mine & Failed Dam

* Bear Mountain - Takla First Nation Background Landmarks survey 2008
History of Bralorne-Takla Mine

- Operated from 1943 to 1944
- 59,914 kg of mercury from 10,206 tonnes of milled ore
- Top 10 B.C. Crown contaminated sites
- In 2005, Crown Land Restoration Branch began EA
- Takla wishes to conduct studies and determine clean-up efforts
- This will require millions of dollars and a government-to-government joint decision-making process
- Takla’s request for epidemiological studies have been turned down
Mercury & Arsenic Contamination

- Unacceptable levels of mercury and arsenic in the soils around the mine.
- Also high levels in the spread calcines used to build roads throughout our Territory. This has yet to be studied.
- In 2008 B.C. built a fence around parts of the site.
The contamination infringes Takla’s right to drink clean water and harvest animals, fish, plants, berries, and medicines.

Takla enters a risk assessment process with very different values that need to be incorporated into the design.
The remediation of Bralorne-Takla is a good thing, but meaningful consultation and accommodation requires equal decision-making authority to decide:

- Terms for risk assessment design
- What are safe contaminant levels
- Acceptable remediation measures
- Who will be monitoring the site in the long-term
- Long-term site management plans

B.C. reps do not currently have a mandate to negotiate the issues listed above. This has to change.
Healthy Land Healthy Future

- A Health Canada funded project in partnership with UNBC
- HLHF is a joint project between Takla lake First Nation and Tsay Keh Dene
- It is implemented and directed by the community. We know the land and contaminated sites, and we are the ones affected most by the contamination
Phase I, in 2006 we tested soil and water for contamination.
Locations were chosen based on sites of concern identified by elders.
Our results indicated many sites with levels of heavy metals and contaminants far above guidelines.
Phase II, ongoing, is testing plants and animals for contamination.

Further tests of soil and water to improve confidence in results.

We seek to confirm reports that many animals have hair loss, yellowed fat and discoloured organs and link these to human health.
Phase III will test Takla’s human population – hair and/or blood samples. We hope to find funds to conduct ongoing monitoring on the land, especially near current and abandoned mines.
Government should fund remediation regardless of property titles or ongoing operations.

New mines need realistic long-term closure plans and bonds.

Stricter enforcement - companies WILL NOT spend $ voluntarily.

Regular site inspections of dams and tailings ponds

Mt. Ogden: the 2005 dam failure has yet to be remediated
…What Should be Done?

- Compensation to Takla for existing and past impacts
- Major funding to support Takla’s efforts to address the legacy of abandoned mines.
- Studies are needed to alleviate the community’s concerns about contaminants in their food
- First Nations should be the monitors and the enforcement agency
- Risk assessments should not be undertaken without the consent of First Nations.