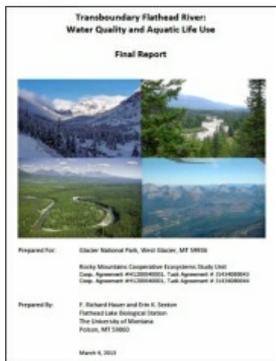


PROTECTING THE WATER, WILDLIFE AND OUTDOOR HERITAGE OF THE CROWN OF THE CONTINENT.



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Elk River Coal Mines Poisoning the Kootenai River Mine Waste Leaching Toxic Selenium; Moratorium Called

March 22, 2013

Dear Friend:

Headwaters Montana has been at the forefront of the effort to protect the Transboundary Flathead and to maintain and protect the wildlife and fish connectivity between Banff and Whitefish.

Now, a new study clearly indicates that the Elk River in southwest B.C. is being poisoned by toxic levels of [selenium](#) leaching from open-pit coal mining waste rock. These findings imply that water quality and fish in the Transboundary Kootenai River are being adversely effected. Here's the rest of the story...

New Study, New Findings
A new [study](#) by the University of Montana Flathead Biological Station indicates that the heavy metal selenium has reached toxic levels in the Elk River of B.C., a major tributary of the Transboundary Kootenai River.

Appendix B - Table 1: Values of Metals Concentrations (see Tables 1, 2 and 3 in full report for site descriptions and locations).

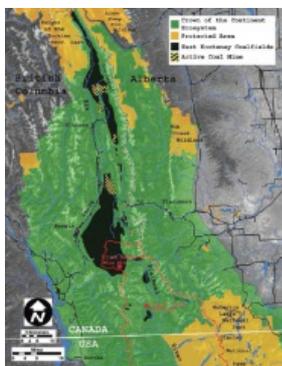
Sample ID	Sample Name	Sample Type	Sample Date	Sample Location	Sample Depth	Sample Volume	Sample Status	Sample Notes	Sample Results
...

Not a Pretty Picture
Click on the data table above and see for yourself. Go to page 71 of the full data [appendix](#) to see where selenium jumps 'off the charts' below the Elk River coal mining complex. For further interpretation and keys to the above table go to Tables 1 and 2 (pages 19 and 21) of the full study (first illustration above).

Fernie, B.C., March 21, 2013. Dr. Ric Hauer of the Flathead Lake Biological Station of the University of Montana issued a March 2, 2013 [study](#) comparing water quality in the Elk and neighbouring Flathead River Basins. Commissioned by Glacier National Park, the study found nitrogen levels at 1,000 times the background rate, sulphate levels at 40-50 times the background rate and selenium levels at 7-10 times background rate. The researchers tested above and below mines and used the pristine water quality of the nearby Flathead River to determine background levels and ascertain what aquatic life would normally be present in the Elk River were it not so pollute

- Read the [study](#).
- Look at the [data](#).
- Listen to a CBC [interview](#).

"The science is clear: selenium from the mines has polluted the river to levels known to be dangerous to fish," said [Wildsight](#) Executive Director [John Bergenske](#). "The selenium bio-accumulates and could lead to fish population collapse because it affects reproductive organs in fish. Eating them could also affect human health."



Comparing Two Watersheds
The study compared the water quality and chemistry of the Elk River (disturbed by coal mining) and the Flathead River (undisturbed). The Elk River flows into the Transboundary Kootenai River near Eureka, Montana, and Roosevelt, B.C. (Click on [map](#) for bigger image.)

There are currently five coal mines in the Elk River Valley, adjacent to B.C.'s globally-significant Flathead River Valley. In addition to the existing mines that are causing toxic pollution, there are four coal mine expansion proposals in the project review stage, one new coal mine proposal and three exploration projects underway.

"There should be a moratorium on new coal mining in the Elk



[Listen to CBC Story](#)

John Bergenske, the executive director of our conservation partner **Wildsight** is [interviewed](#) by the Canadian Broadcast Corporation.



[Bull Trout Threatened](#)

The Elk River still has bull trout and west slope cutthroat in good numbers. Current selenium poisoning and plans to expand coal mining in the Elk Valley could lead to a collapse of this fishery. Time for action is now. (Photo: Joel Sartore/NGS_Stock with Wade Fredenberg).



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~ Thank You! ~

until the far-reaching impacts of existing mines are addressed," said Sarah Cox, Interim Executive Director for [Sierra Club BC](#). "Projects like the Line Creek coal mine expansion and proposed Bingay coal mine would only increase toxic pollution in the Elk. We need to take a big step back and look at how this area is managed as a whole."

Fish are not the only species affected. The pollution from the mines is killing off smaller organisms like caddis flies, a vital part of the food chain. The Hauer study states that "all coal mining sites had increased nitrogen loading, increased sulfate loading, increased selenium loading, higher algal production as a result of increased nitrogen loading, and a decrease in macroinvertebrate diversity and abundance particularly of species sensitive to pollution".

"We need a comprehensive long-term plan that reconciles the region's world-class wildlife and wilderness values with its coal resources," added Wendy Francis, Program Director for Yellowstone to [Yukon Conservation Initiative](#). "The plan should ensure protection of human health, wilderness recreation, international fisheries, water quality and core habitat values, as well as wildlife connectivity from the Flathead River Valley to Banff National Park."

"These levels of selenium are toxic and known to cause deformities in fish and other species," said Peter Wood, [CPAWS-BC](#) Terrestrial Campaigns Director. "Clearly we are far from striking the right balance between resource development and the need to maintain the health of these ecosystems."

Wildsight, Sierra Club BC, CPAWS-BC and the Yellowstone to Yukon Conservation Initiative are urging the B.C. government to agree to a [National Park in the southeastern one-third of the Flathead](#), to fill in the missing piece of the adjacent Waterton-Glacier International Peace Park, a World Heritage Site and two UNESCO Biosphere Reserves. The groups are also calling for a [Wildlife Management Area](#) in the rest of the Flathead and adjoining habitat, which includes part of the Elk.

Read the [study](#).
Look at the [data](#).
Listen to a CBC [interview](#).

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