



BC Mining Pollution Increasing in the Kootenai River

*Montana, Idaho, Washington and Alaska
Have a Problem with BC Mining*

October 8, 2019

Greetings!:

[Very recent science](#) from the USGS and EPA has revealed that coal mining pollution flowing south out of Teck Resource's British Columbia coalmines into the Kootenai River is affecting more than we thought. This issue has proved to be a major focus at *Headwaters Montana* over the past year.

The USGS-EPA report shows that selenium (an essential nutrient that becomes toxic at very low concentrations) is reaching critical levels in Kootenai River whitefish *downstream* of Libby Dam.

Until recently it was thought the selenium contaminants from



Teck's BC mines was mostly contained behind Libby Dam. This new evidence points to several important and preliminary conclusion:

You Can Take Action Here!

Headwaters Montana is working with conservation partners in Montana, Idaho, Washington, and Alaska on mutual concerns with BC mining practices.

All 8 senators from those states [sent a joint letter to BC's Premier John Horgan](#) asking for direct



The *Flathead Beacon* recently (10/2/19) ran paired stories on Teck's BC coalmines and their pollution discharge. Click [here](#) to read the stories. (Photo: *Hunter D'Antuono | Flathead Beacon*)

- That the problem of selenium pollution is more wide-scale than previously documented;
- That the water quality monitoring and fish impact research should have included more than Lake Koocanusa;
- That other toxins such as nitrates should have been considered as well;
- And that Montana's government needs to stay vigilant to protect the people and state interests.

Short Backstory

dialogue to address their concerns.

Salmon Beyond Borders has sent up an action page. [Please sign the petition.](#) *Thank you!*

publicly reported. This revelation kick-started a water quality planning process for the Elk that resulted in the [Elk Valley Water Quality Plan.](#)

While Teck has invested millions in water treatment technology, that technology hasn't been effective at addressing the enormous scale of the Teck mines, and will need to be operated for hundreds of years after the mines close - a technical impossibility.

The high selenium loads also triggered concerns in Montana that Lake Koocanusa may be receiving toxic concentrations of selenium as well. In 2014, Montana and BC agreed to form [Lake Koocanusa Monitoring and Research Working Group](#) (LKMRWG - *phew!*) and drafted a memorandum of understanding (MOU) to outline the scope of work and commitments of each side. However, the MOU was never signed.

The goal of the Working Group was to recommend a selenium standard at the border. A standard is a legally enforceable number for the concentration of Selenium. Montana could have adopted the EPA standard of 1.5 micrograms/Litre (ug/L), but chose to find a Lake Koocanusa-specific standard.

Now almost 5-years later, Montana still does not have a standard at the border that protects aquatic health or Montana's interest. And it may very well turn out that the standard that *is* set (supposedly in 2020) is the same or very close to the current EPA standard.

Consequences for Montana

What has Montana gained in the interim?

Well, we're getting more selenium and nitrates, and we're going to get a lot more for a very long time (a thousand years and more.) Montana and the U.S. governments are also paying for the studies required and not the polluter, Teck. Neither, in simple terms, is a gain. Montana is losing ground.

What has Teck gained?

Over the intervening years that BC and Montana governments have been politely negotiating (with Teck's "impartial" help), Teck has gained approval from the BC government *for four new giant, mountaintop-removal coalmines.* New mines that might have been required to show they can contain their pollution prior to approval if a standard had already existed. But none did... and none yet does .

It is very clear from our perspective that BC and Teck's "game" is to, (a) delay meaningful decisions that would result in protecting Montana's down-stream interests, and (b) avoid all legal accountability for their pollution.

That is why it's so important at this point in time that Montana and the U.S. demand a scientifically valid standard at the border that protects fish and aquatic life. It's also vital that Montana's government, from the Governor on-down, support an open public process and continued

In 2013, Teck revealed that selenium concentrations in the Elk River in BC (a major tributary to the Kootenai) coming from its coalmines had exceeded provincial guidelines *years* previously - but had never been



Montana DEQ will be hosting two community stakeholder events on **November 12 and 13** in **Libby** and **Eureka**, respectively.

These events will provide the public with an opportunity to learn first hand the status of negotiations with BC over a selenium the standard, *as well as* and opportunity to comment on protecting Montana's interests.

Headwaters Montana will provide more information on these events as it becomes available.

monitoring and research. (See box above with DEQ logo for more information for how you can get involved.)

We will continue to report on this as the issue evolves.

Happy Fall, everyone!

Cheers and thanks,



Dave Hadden, Ex.

Dir.
Headwaters Montana, Inc
info@headwatersmontana.org
406-270-3184



Sub-alpine Larch on the approach to Nasukoin Mountain
in the Whitefish Range.