

Teztan Biny (Fish Lake) is More than just a Lake- It's Part of Our Culture

"Our Elders and ancestors have passed the responsibility to protect our lands and way of life on to us. It is not possible for us to agree to the destruction of the land that sustains us."

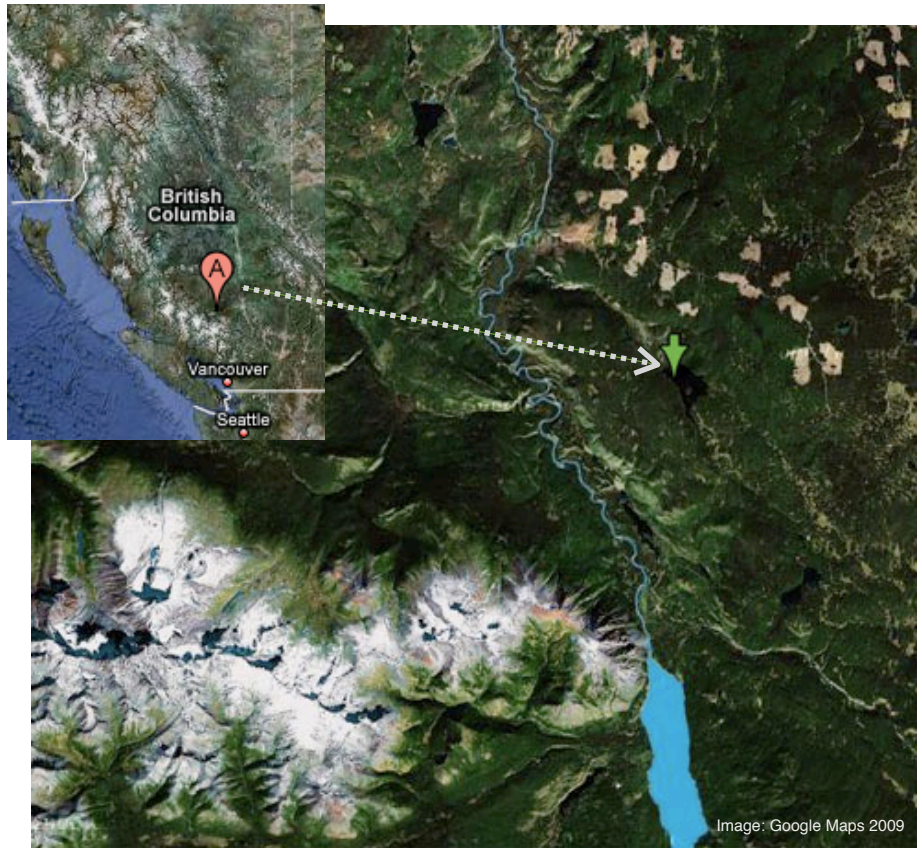
Chief Marilyn Baptiste, Xení Gwet'in First Nation, Tsilhqot'in Nation

photo: Lorna Elkins, 2008

Taseko Mines Ltd. is proposing to develop the Prosperity Mine, a massive open pit gold and copper mine, deep within the traditional territory of the Tsilhqot'in Nation. The proposed Prosperity Mine is located in south central British Columbia, approximately 125 km southwest of Williams Lake, on an alpine plateau in the Chilcotin, beneath the rugged glaciated peaks of the Coast Range. The Prosperity Mine, if developed, would be situated in a site of exceptional natural splendor, close to the Nemaiah Valley, Ts'yl-os Provincial Park, and the ?Elegesi Qayus Wild Horse Preserve.

The proposed mine's two kilometer-wide open pit, tailings pond, waste rock piles, roads, and transmission lines would destroy an entire sub-alpine ecosystem, and most importantly Teztan Biny, a lake sacred to the Tsilhqot'in Nation, and known to others as Fish Lake. Teztan Biny is a beautiful mountain lake which our ancestors have used and managed since time immemorial. Teztan Biny supports a vibrant population (some 85,000 individuals) of genetically unique Rainbow Trout that provide a critical food source for the Tsilhqot'in people and local wildlife; including blue-listed species of concern such as Grizzly Bears.

For generations the Tsilhqot'in people have gone to Teztan Biny to fish, to set fish traps and nets, hunt and trap, gather medicines, engage in spiritual practices, reconnect with the land, honor our Elders, share stories, and foster unity. It is more than a lake to us – it is an integral part of Tsilhqot'in culture, and vital to our cultural continuity and survival. Many non-Aboriginal local residents and tourists also enjoy Teztan Biny for a wide variety of recreational activities. The Tsilhqot'in Nation is neither against development nor against the responsible use of natural resources. In fact, as the traditional keepers of the land for thousands of years, we have successfully balanced the need for sustainable harvesting with long-term preservation. To the Tsilhqot'in people, the destruction of Teztan Biny is an unacceptable use of land and water, incompatible with modern principles of sustainability, and an ill-conceived and shortsighted attempt to inject an industrial project into the heart of our pristine watershed.



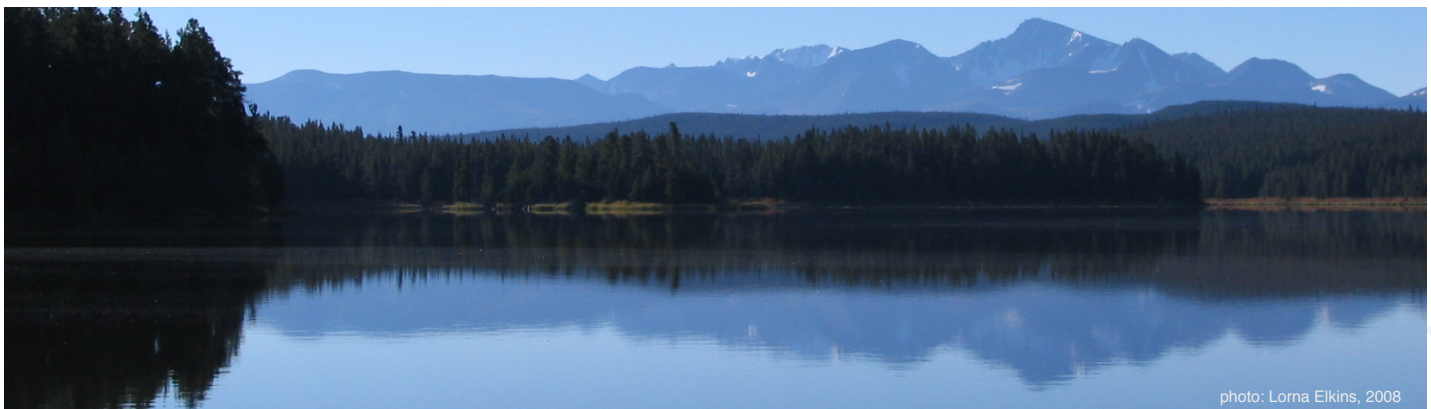
Location of Teztan Biny (Fish Lake) and the proximity of the proposed mine site to the Taseko River

Teztan Biny, and the streams and wetlands surrounding it, nourish Fish Creek and the Taseko River, critical habitat areas for Chinook and Sockeye salmon. It is here that wild salmon begin their long journey to the Pacific Ocean via the Chilko, the Chilcotin and ultimately, the Fraser River. Teztan Biny is a vital part of the watershed that supports one of the largest and most productive salmon fisheries in North America. We have deep concerns that any toxic effluents that seep from the mine tailings and waste rock facilities at the proposed mine could negatively impact BC's already threatened Fraser salmon fishery.

The governments of Canada and British Columbia have a legacy of betraying the trust of the Tsilhqot'in Nation. In 1864, the Tsilhqot'in Nation successfully stopped the construction of a road into our traditional lands which would have fostered the gold rush and forever changed our way of life. Our warriors fought the colonial militia to a standstill, until our War Chiefs were tricked into attending negotiations with the Crown and subsequently hung, a betrayal that still lingers in the memory of our people to this day.

Sadly, the Crown continues to disregard the rights of the Tsilhqot'in people by contemplating the approval of a mine that will destroy an ancestral lake in the heart of our traditional lands and devastate the traditional way of life we have fought for generations to preserve. Chief Marilyn Baptiste, following in the long tradition of strong Tsilhqot'in leaders, has again taken our claims to court by filing another case seeking a specific declaration of an Aboriginal right to fish in Teztan Biny. She is acting on behalf of our Elders, our leaders and future generations. Currently, the Tsilhqot'in Nation Government (TNG) is participating in the environmental assessment process conducted by the Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency (CEAA) to ensure that our voice is heard. The financial, social and time pressures placed on our government and our people by this process are immense. An independent review panel has been named, and public hearings will take place this summer. The review panel is scheduled to make a recommendation by the fall of 2009. Taseko Mines Ltd. is strongly advocating for an expedited process to ensure construction begins in winter 2010.

We oppose the destruction of Teztan Biny and the Fish Creek watershed and wish to ensure that our children, grandchildren, and future Tsilhqot'in generations can benefit from Teztan Biny's natural abundance and splendor. As the caretakers of Teztan Biny we demand that the Crown acknowledge our proven rights, and abolish its current approach to mining in traditional territories.



For further information please contact:

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or visit www.landkeepers.ca