

# The LOGBOOK of CSP<sup>2</sup>

The CENTER for SCIENCE in PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

*"Technical Support for Grassroots Public Interest Groups"*

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*Tulsequah Chief Mine, recently approved for reopening. A new road, the first in the Taku River watershed, is one of the most controversial aspects of the mine approval.*

## CSP<sup>2</sup> IN BRITISH COLUMBIA

It's a good time to be selling gold pans in British Columbia. The mining industry in BC is booming due to record-breaking mineral prices and a multi-faceted BC Provincial government incentive program, including a 139% tax credit. Metals prices are reaching all time highs, and mine exploration and development activities are following closely. While the industry historically has been quite volatile, the current predictions are that minerals prices will remain high.

CSP<sup>2</sup>'s staff person in BC, Amy Crook, has been working closely with communities to assist with evaluating development projects proposed in their area, to protect areas that are culturally sacred to them, and to build capacity through workshops and direct technical support. Members of the Tahl-tan and Iskut First Nations have taken a number of steps to assert their right to choose only responsible projects developed at a sustainable pace and in a manner that conserves cultural and ecological values along with economic opportunities for future generations. CSP<sup>2</sup> is assisting with many aspects of their effort.

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Amy is also working collaboratively with a group of NGOs to address the cumulative impacts of development on wildlands and wildlife, to protect watershed integrity, salmon habitat, and to ensure other existing local recreation based businesses are not harmed. CSP<sup>2</sup> is providing technical capacity for effective community engagement in the environmental assessment process for several projects and evaluation of ongoing impacts from legacy mining impacts.

Most BC mining projects are located in wild, remote areas. Adding access infrastructure to undeveloped areas opens these areas to other development pressures, resulting in pressures on wilderness quantity and quality. With British Columbia's desire to promote exploration and mining, unprotected wilderness areas will be lost. Add to this the mining/employee population moving to the area, and the impacts from a mine are multiplied.

First Nations have claimed traditional rights and title to much of Northern and Western BC, overlapping the most active mining areas. A volatile conflict over who has the ultimate right to determine land usage is playing out now through political posturing and civil disobedience. Most of the land claims from BC First Nations have not been settled through treaties or other legal processes. First Nations are caught between protecting their traditional occupation, culture and wildlife vs. economic development that employment in the mining industry can bring.

Many First Nation communities are facing unprecedented development pressure from resource extraction, with villages of a few hundred residents having over 70 exploration and development proposals occurring concurrently. The cumulative impacts from these projects and the associated roads, power lines, railways and air support will alter the landscape and Native cultures forever. Local residents will simply be overwhelmed by out-of-towners and the social changes this brings.

The Ministry of Small Business and Economic Development Economic Analysis Branch concluded that the cumulative impacts of mining in northwestern BC will bring a short-term economic boom and some benefits, but could significantly overwhelm the region's employment requirements and social services, leaving First Nation communities with increased social problems (lack of health care, drug and alcohol abuse, lack of education, violence, cultural dilution, etc). Mine impacts to spiritual or other non-economic Tribal uses/interests are difficult to capture or value, and no effort has been made to do this to date.

In a January 18, 2006 press release, the British Columbia Ministry of Energy, Mines, and Petroleum Resources announced that investment in mineral exploration reached \$220 million in 2005, signaling the best year for BC's mining industry in over a decade. This amount was surpassed only a few times previously. British Columbia openly promotes mine exploration and activities in the Province and has an aggressive comprehensive mining plan that provides financial incentives, fast and easy on-line staking and extensive geologic survey information to potential investors.

In 2005 the Province implemented Mineral Titles Online (MTO), an internet-based mineral tenure system. Prospectors can search for, stake, and maintain mineral titles by selecting an area on a GIS map and paying a minimal fee electronically. This is akin to virtual exploration and virtual mineral investment. Since the on-line staking program was implemented, mineral tenure acquisitions have increased more than four times.

The Province identifies mineral resources for potential development. The BC Geologic Survey identifies the province's mineral, coal, and aggregate reserves and resources. To increase investor

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confidence, BC has established a two-zone system of mineral exploration is allowed or not. The plan was approved by the Legislature and allows exploration and mineral activities anywhere but in a park, ecological reserve, protected heritage property or an area where mining has been prohibited by an order under the Environment and Land Use Act.

Given abundant mineral resources, a Provincial government that is willing to subsidize mineral development, metal prices that make any viable mineral prospect economically attractive, and the lack of technical expertise available to communities faced with mineral development, **CSP<sup>2</sup>** will be hard pressed to meet even a portion of the demand for its services in BC for the foreseeable future.

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**FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR**

Our featured article for this edition of The Logbook is on **CSP<sup>2</sup>**'s work in British Columbia. In the last issue of The Logbook I talked about how mining was "booming across North America." This is also true in British Columbia, where a May 17 article from a Vancouver Sun says this is a "Phenomenal Year for Mining" The article, written by a Sun reporter, goes on to say that "... 2005 was best year since 1967, and if prices remain steady, 2006 is going to blow 2005 away (in British Columbia)."



Dave Chambers is the Executive Director of **CSP<sup>2</sup>**

We all are probably aware that gold recently hit a 26 year high of over \$700 an ounce, copper has reached an all time high, and platinum has been over \$1000 an ounce for better than a year. To a great extent the booming economies in Asia are driving the high demand/prices for these metals. But there is also concern that energy supply instability and investor speculation is pushing these prices beyond justifiable market demand.



Reclamation at the Brewery Creek heap leach gold mine near Dawson City, Yukon

(continued from previous column)

In British Columbia the "boom" has meant that from 2003 to 2005 gross revenue from mining doubled, profits increase more than six fold, and mining exploration expenditures were up by a factor of ten.

Stu Levit of **CSP<sup>2</sup>** produced a report on exploration in western BC for the Moore Foundation, and Stu will probably do a follow-on study based to further investigate issues raised in this report.

Amy Crook, who lives in Victoria, is our primary staff person for British Columbia. Amy's focus over the past 18 months has been on technical support to First Nations, both to tribal governments and to first nation public interest groups working on new mine proposals in their traditional territories. The issues include waste disposal in lakes, roads and powerlines into unroaded areas, multiple mine and mine-exploration proposals to be evaluated by First Nation governments that have little or no expertise to evaluate these proposals.

We are looking to expand our work in British Columbia (funding-dependent) to meet the needs for technical assistance and support generated by the "boom" in BC mining.

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