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Mount Polley Mine disaster threatens BC's tourism industry, needs regulation

For Immediate Release

(Campbell River, BC; Aug 6, 2014) The destruction caused by the Mount Polley Mine disaster has raised serious concerns with BC's tourism industry. "The breach of the mine tailings pond and the millions of cubic metres of toxic slurry that was released into the salmon-bearing Quesnel and Cariboo river systems will prove to be very detrimental to the local tourism businesses and have serious negative impacts on our current economic contribution to the province," says Evan Loveless, Executive Director for the Wilderness Tourism Association of BC.

"Full impacts have yet to be tallied, but we know that drinking water, human health, salmon, and local jobs are at risk," said Loveless. "Fish spawning and rearing grounds in Hazeltine Creek, Quesnel Lake and surrounding habitats will be affected for years to come; a local state of emergency has been declared; and BC residents across the province will be wondering what this disaster will do to the sockeye salmon making their journey up the Fraser to spawn."

"The tourism industry is raising questions about just how well our mines are being regulated," said Loveless. "There are several issues and concerns raised by the tourism industry regarding the impact of mining development on their operations including (but not limited to): mine safety, threats to wildlife/salmon and their habitats, degradation of landscapes by the huge footprints, lack of transparent processes, and the often short term company gains with no long term economic benefits to communities. With Mount Polley, concerns have been raised over the years about the mine's waste management - tailings were allowed to increase to more than 23,000 tonnes per day by 2014, stressing an already-strained structure."

"We are calling on the B.C. Government to implement a much more rigorous review and approval process for all current and proposed mines throughout BC," said Loveless. "The province needs to inspect all tailings ponds with assessed high-risk structures, and ensure that mines are using the best available technologies for development and tailings management."

Tourism is a key contributor to British Columbia's GDP and a significant private sector employer for BC. Direct tourist expenditures on nature based tourism products in BC is approximately \$1.5 billion dollars and provides the equivalent of over 26,000 full time jobs. Nature based tourism is also a major driver of BC's \$13 billion plus tourism industry.

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