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## ENVIRONMENTAL GROUPS, FIRST NATIONS OPPOSE DUMPING OF TOXIC MINE TAILINGS INTO SALMON WATERS

VICTORIA – Sierra Club of Canada, BC Chapter, Dogwood Initiative and the Cheslatta Carrier Nation strongly oppose the October 2005 permit amendment application by Huckleberry Mine to discharge effluent from the mine's tailings pond directly into Tahtsa Lake west of Prince George.

“Huckleberry should be held to the standards contained in the current permit, which prohibits direct discharge into the environment,” said Jill Thompson, Sierra Club of Canada, BC Chapter's Grassroots Coordinator who has received calls from concerned local residents. “Relaxing the environmental standards in the last two years of the mine's operation would set a very worrying precedent,” she said.

According to the application, the effluent would contain copper, mercury, zinc, nitrogen oxide and suspended solids in concentrations that raise serious concerns about bio-accumulation of toxic compounds, especially mercury, in fish tissue, and ultimately in humans who eat the fish. The proposed rate of discharge – 5 million cubic metres annually – would equal 114 railcars per day discharged directly into the Nechako watershed system. Consumption of fish containing high levels of mercury has been linked to brain damage in babies and young children.

“This Huckleberry decision will highlight whether Premier Campbell will prioritize his much touted new relationship with First Nations over the desires of Liberal party donors like Huckleberry and Imperial Metals,” said Will Horter, Executive Director of Dogwood Initiative. “Campbell's government needs to reject this application to show that the wishes of First Nations and communities are more important than \$16,000 donors to his party.”

The Cheslatta Carrier Nation, on whose traditional territory the mine is located, is also very strongly opposed to the amendment.

“What they are proposing to do would be taking us back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This is not acceptable in this day and age, especially when there are perfectly viable alternatives,” said Mike Robertson, Senior Policy Advisor with the Cheslatta Carrier Nation.

Tahtsa Lake is one of a series of large lakes that comprise the Nechako Reservoir which was created by Alcan's Kemano I project. The reservoir is the headwaters of the Nechako River, the largest tributary of the Fraser River. Tahtsa Lake also discharges directly into the Kemano River via Alcan's 10 mile long hydroelectric tunnels drilled in the 1950's.

“This is not just a local concern,” says Chief Corrina Leween. “This ‘Huckleberry Soup’ will taint several of the largest, most productive rivers in British Columbia. All citizens should fight the poisoning of their water.”

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Backgrounder attached.

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