



# Community Meetings About Mining Report

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*Old mining ruins near Rampart, Alaska, photo credit: Maryann Fidel*

## INTRODUCTION

During the summer of 2018 the Yukon River Inter-Tribal Watershed Council (YRITWC) hosted four community meetings about mining in the Alaskan communities of Rampart, Tanana, Ruby and Galena. The YRITWC is a Native non-profit organization working to protect and preserve clean water on the Yukon River and tributaries. The purpose of these meetings was to build a better understanding of information needs, and the impacts and benefits of mining from community members' perspectives. Discussion at these meetings will help keep the YRITWC's newly formed Mining Program rooted in the needs of the communities we serve. YRITWC does not take a pro-or anti- stance on mining as we respect the sovereignty of each community to make their own decisions about mining. Following is a brief summary of each of those meetings.

### Rampart

**Benefits:** Community exists because of mining; Many of us living here today are descendants of miners; Miners have been a part of community in a positive way; The old owners (of a nearby mine) hired locals, not sure if the new owners will

**Impact:** Water contamination; Could do more to protect environment; Brings weirdos too (end-of-the-roaders); Abandoned buildings and equipment; Memories of a turbidity event that hurt fish

**Other:** It's odd that we don't talk much about mining, since it is such a part of our lives here



*Mining Community Meeting in Rampart, photo credit: Emily Andersen*



## Tanana

**Benefits:** Responsible mining is a good thing; Jobs, people can make a living; Many Yukon River communities are mining communities with a long history of mining; A worker in a mine said they really try to be as clean as possible

**Impacts:** Downstream of the mining district, Fish Lake has tested positive for Mercury (water contamination), we have also noticed the lake is shallower and fish are getting smaller; Concern about changes in water quality regulations under current administration not protecting human health; Memory of a tailings pond failing and experienced lots of sediment downstream and there were no fish for a long time; Seems there is no enforcement of regulation; Big mines (like Pebble) are a problem, and there is potential for big mines since our area is rich in minerals; Worry about big mines because big money ignores our voices and potential for pollution

**Other:** People don't know much about mining happening in upstream district; Was surprised when we flew over nearby area how much mining activity is going on; The new road may increase interest in mining district; Confusion about initiatives 'Stand for Alaska/Salmon' and what they mean for mining; If we don't stand up for what we care about (water, way of life) no one else will; Need to know more about the connection of mercury to mining? Is a unified Native voice about mining possible?



*Community Meeting in Tanana, photo credit: Emily Anderson*

## Ruby

**Benefits:** This is an old mining town turned into Village; Nearby mine provides some jobs for locals; Miners have never been a threat to us and water is clean; Current placer miners don't use chemicals

**Impacts:** Concern about contaminants; Water used to be worse during mining days but is getting better; We see impacts to fish like cysts; Miners left buried 55 gallon drums that are now turning up; There is old mining junk the current miners have to deal with; Miners aren't taking good care of the road; Concern about a big mine starting (potentially a uranium mine); Big holes out there; Water quality degraded; Miners don't want to pollute but money makes people do crazy stuff; A past mine workers told about chemicals being dumped and not reported

**Other:** We would like to have up-dated information on nearby mining activity; Want to pursue a grant to build partnerships and clean up old mining junk/contamination



*Community Meeting in Ruby, photo credit: Daniel Ahrens*

## Galena

**Benefits:** Provides gravel; Some jobs; Nearby exploration is providing some jobs may be more in the future

**Impacts:** Concern about mining in Canada affecting our waters; Concern about mercury – what was used in the past and currently; 55 gallon drums are a concern but that is mostly associated with the old military base; Concern about the Ambler Road opening new mines; Long time ago mining impacted the

river; Historic mining had no environmental controls; Concern about the global impacts of mining and oil and gas to climate change and effects to our way of life

**Other:** Have other 'bigger' concerns; Just learning today about these mines; Internet is slow can't get much information; Social media is more important; There is so much information out there that it is difficult to filter through it and get the trusted information you need; Would like to know more about the mining activity across the river and where they are exploring, they may be gearing up to build a big mine



*Community Meeting in Galena, photo credit: Daniel Ahrens*

**Conclusion:**

Residents spoke of mines from personal experience. Opinions about mining vary as widely as the actual mines themselves. Some mines have excellent operators that work hard to hire locals, and ensure environmental protections are in place. While other mines have caused extensive damage to the river beds and fish habitat, but the responsible party is long gone. Some people we talked with expressed concerns about the potential of a large corporate mine development, like the proposed Pebble Mine, developing in their area, fearing that their voice will be lost in protecting the water they depend on.

While concerns and benefits varied among communities there were some commonalities. The benefits discussed centered around economic benefits, including jobs. In addition, many pointed out the mining is why their Village exists. It is part of their history. We also heard about some of the impacts from



mining. Negative impacts included observations of turbidity events, and concerns about pollution, particularly water pollution. There were concerns about how mining contaminants affect the fish that people eat and how it could impact human health and traditional ways of life. We heard first-hand about observations of mining pollution and impacts making this a very real, very important issue. Some impacted areas are the same places where people take their drinking water from. The people we talked with wanted to be able to do something to protect their waters.

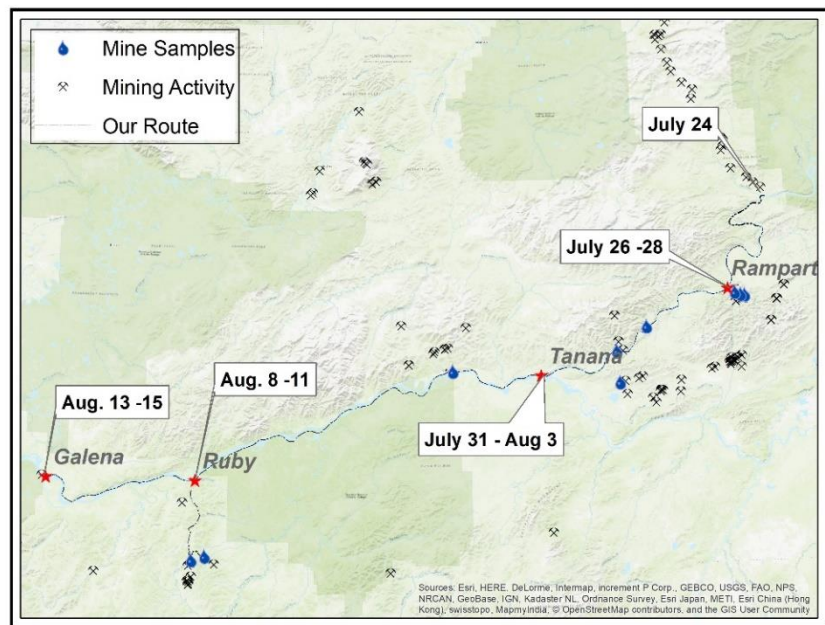
#### *A Way Forward:*

The YRITWC coordinates one of the largest Indigenous community-based water quality monitoring efforts in the world. We are working to obtain the resources and develop the protocols that would empower rural communities to test specifically for mining contaminants. This way residents could work to protect their waters, being the first responders in pollution events and collecting scientifically defensible data to hold polluters accountable.

While traveling on the Yukon River during the summer of 2018 sediment and water samples were collected to test for mining contaminants (see map). This purpose of this effort was 1.) To pilot a community-based monitoring methodology to collect scientifically defensible data, and 2.) To collect the first baseline data points, of what we hope to be a continued monitoring effort. From lessons learned during this effort, and a review of other data collection methodologies we have developed a Quality Assurance Project Plan

(QAPP) that Tribes can use as a template to begin their own monitoring program regarding mining contaminants under the EPA's IGAP program. This template QAPP can be found at [www.yritwc.org](http://www.yritwc.org), under library -> template library -> **Mining QAPP**

**Template.** Results of the water and sediment analysis can also be found on our website, under Departments -> Mining, click on the mining map. Clicking on a point will bring up more information about that sample.



The YRITWC has a 20-year history of cooperation with our First Nation neighbors in Canada. As such, we would like to do more to promote trans-boundary cooperation regarding mining issues. We hope to work with all relevant stakeholders to minimize the impacts of mining to clean water in the Yukon River and its tributaries.

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*YRITWC's Science Director Dr. Edda Mutter and mining equipment on the banks of the Yukon River*

*photo credit: Maryann Fidel*