

Baucus Wants Investigation Into Canada Mine Plan

Senator Asks Secretary of State Rice to Convene International Panel

WASHINGTON, March 13 /PRNewswire-USNewswire/ -- U.S. Sen. Max Baucus (D-Mont.) today called on Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice to initiate an investigation into the environmental consequences of a proposed coal mine in British Columbia, near Glacier National Park.

Baucus has been the leading opponent of the Cline Mining Company's proposal to mine coal on the headwaters of the North Fork Flathead River, which runs into Montana's Flathead Lake. He says there could be devastating consequences to Montana's fish, wildlife, and the recreation industry in his state's Flathead Valley.

"Glacier National Park, the Flathead River system and the clean, clear waters of Flathead Lake serve as the backbone of the economy of northwestern Montana," Baucus wrote in a letter to Rice today. "This [mine] represents a renewed threat of degradation and destruction of social, environmental, and economic assets that are important to Montana.

"In the face of this threat," Baucus continued, "I strongly encourage you to request a hearing by the International Joint Commission on the current mining proposal. It is of the utmost importance to Montana's outdoor heritage, and our nation's environmental legacy, to stop this mine and protect the Flathead River basin."

The International Joint Commission is a panel of both American and Canadian experts charged with preventing and resolving international disputes between the U.S. and Canada. The panel was instrumental, at Baucus' urging, in defeating a similar mining proposal in the same area in 1988.

For the International Joint Commission to issue a finding on this case against the proposed coal mine, a hearing must be requested by the U.S. State Department, Baucus said.

"Montana has always regarded the Boundary Waters Treaty of 1909, which formed the IJC, as an important tool," Baucus wrote. "The investigation I am requesting would be an effective way of bringing that tool to bear in defense of Montanans' right to a healthy environment."

In a letter late last week, the U.S. State Department said that if the Canadian mining proposal moves forward, "significant adverse environmental effects" may occur in the United States. Baucus said the letter is a "huge step forward in our efforts to stop the mine," but noted an IJC investigation is needed.

Baucus is Montana's senior U.S. Senator and chairman of the Senate Finance Committee, which has jurisdiction over international trade policy.

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