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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Plan of Operations Phase II approved for controversial mining project

Constantine-Palmer VMS Project poses threats to Chilkat Watershed, communities

Haines, Alaska, July 31, 2019: Alaska Mental Health Trust Lands Office has approved Constantine Metal Resources' Phase II Plan of Operations for the controversial Palmer VMS Project, allowing the Canadian mining company to move forward with underground mine exploration in the Chilkat Valley. The proposed mine site sits 18 miles upstream of Klukwan and 35 miles upstream of Haines, Alaska, on tributaries of the Chilkat River.

The mine exploration project raises concerns among local residents, fishermen, and conservationists about acid mine waste and heavy metals leaching into the headwaters of the Chilkat River, a top producer of coho and sockeye salmon in Southeast Alaska that fuels the region's commercial fishing and tourism economies. According to the Alaska Department of Fish and Game's harvest data, over 90% of Chilkat Valley residents rely on salmon for subsistence.

Plan approval allows Constantine to begin excavating an underground ramp approximately 2,000 meters long for drilling and mine exploration, and 30,000 meters of underground drilling. According to the plan, excavated waste rock will be placed on the surface, where it will be exposed to the elements. Exposed rock may produce acid mine drainage, the result of a chemical reaction that occurs when excavated sulfide minerals come in contact with air and water, consistent with existing sulfide mines.

The flow of toxic wastewater from sulfide mines can be impossible to stop, and will require active treatment for centuries after mine closure, or in perpetuity. Non-potentially acid-generating rock may leach heavy metals into surface and groundwater once exposed. Trace amounts of metals like copper can pose serious threats to salmon and human health.

The State of Alaska issued a waste management permit for the project July 17, allowing the Canadian company to discharge wastewater that exceeds state water quality standards into the ground in close proximity to tributaries of the Chilkat River, despite inadequate data that fails to establish a baseline for natural conditions. Constantine has failed to demonstrate that surface water and groundwater are not connected at the site of underground discharge. The Phase II Plan of Operations and ADEC waste management permit allow Constantine to begin construction of the mine wastewater discharge system.

Shannon Donahue, Chilkat Watershed Organizer for Southeast Alaska Conservation Council (SEACC) said, "Tunnel excavation is an irreversible moment. All sulfide mines present a real threat of acid mine

drainage. Once that begins, there is no turning back. Acid mine waste requires treatment essentially forever.”

The Mental Health Trust Land Office’s approval poses liability to the trust, in the form of perpetual maintenance and cleanup costs once the mine has closed. The trust’s Asset Management Policy requires the trust to remove and prevent liability risks. Constantine’s Phase II Plan of Operations is fraught with risk to water quality and human health. Mental Health Trust was created in 1956 to fund mental health services statewide.

Sarah Davidson, SEACC’s Inside Passage Waters Program manager said, “It’s mind-boggling that an agency established with the sole purpose of protecting and benefiting the mental health of Alaskans not only made a decision that will jeopardize the public safety, health, and well-being of all residents in the Chilkat Valley, including their mental health, but did so in a vacuum without public process involving the communities the agency supposedly serves.”

In 2016, Chilkat Indian Village of Klukwan petitioned the State of Alaska to designate the Chilkat River and its tributaries as a Tier III Outstanding National Resource Water under the Clean Water Act for its exceptional ecological and cultural value. The State of Alaska has refused to evaluate the nomination. National conservation organization, American Rivers listed the Chilkat River sixth in its 10 Most Endangered Rivers list for 2019, citing the threat of the proposed Constantine-Palmer Mine.

Southeast Alaska Conservation Council (SEACC) is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization based in Juneau, serving Southeast Alaska.

For more information or to speak with a staff member, contact Guy Archibald or Sarah Davidson at 907 586-6942, or Shannon Donahue in Haines at 907 303-2327.

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