

# Wilderness Tourism Association



BRITISH COLUMBIA | CANADA

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## **Mount Polley Mine Re-opens After Catastrophic Tailings Spill**

**(Campbell River, BC; July 13, 2015)** Last week’s decision by the BC Ministry of Energy & Mines to allow the Imperial Metals-owned Mount Polley Mine to reopen and begin operations, including resuming freshwater tailings storage, has put tourism stakeholders on edge.

“Hundreds of nature-based tour operators depend on the intact wilderness areas of British Columbia and associated downstream watersheds for their livelihoods”, says Evan Loveless, Executive Director of the Wilderness Tourism Association of BC.

Wilderness areas are fragmented and contaminated by mining projects, especially when catastrophic accidents occur. The Mount Polley Mine disaster of August 2014 is one such accident and is considered to be among the worst environmental disasters in Canadian history. When Mount Polley’s tailings storage facility breached due to a collapse of the dam foundation, it contaminated neighboring Quesnel Lake and subsequently the Quesnel River, which joins downstream with the Fraser River. This disaster released millions of cubic meters of water, toxic slurry and debris into the watershed’s pristine, salmon-rich lakes and rivers and will likely require spill containment management for decades.

An Independent Review Panel tasked by the BC government to assess the Mount Polley disaster advised that newer, safer mine waste storage technologies, namely dry-stack tailings storage, be adopted by all future mining operations. However, despite the recommendations of the Panel and the severe environmental damage caused by the Mount Polley failure, Mines Minister Bill Bennett has allowed the reopening of Mount Polley Mine without requirement for dry-stack tailings storage. The ministry has also permitted another Imperial Metals-owned open-pit mine, the Red Chris Mine located in the heart of the Sacred Headwaters region, to begin filling Black Lake with tailings using a design strikingly similar to the Mount Polley dam.

“With so many communities and tourism operations relying on the unspoiled rivers, lakes, forests and wetlands of our wilderness areas, the WTABC cannot accept such laxity around mine permitting and management”, says Loveless. “In addition to modernizing mineral tenure policy, alternative mine waste storage technologies, such as dry-stack tailings, should be adopted by all mining operations in the province, as the expert panel has advised, in order to safeguard against another Mount Polley disaster in our globally significant British Columbian wilderness.”

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To read the Wilderness Tourism Association’s full position paper on British Columbia’s mineral tenuring and mine operation standards follow this [link](#).

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### **About the Wilderness Tourism Association of BC**

The Wilderness Tourism Association of BC (WTA) represents approximately 900 stakeholder businesses and associations operating in BC. Direct tourist expenditures on wilderness tourism products in BC is approximately \$1.5 billion dollars and provides the equivalent of over 26,000 full time jobs. Wilderness tourism is also a major driver of BC’s \$13 billion plus tourism industry.