



## **Stk'emplúsemc te Secwépemc Nation (SSN)**

Represented by the Tkémlúps te Secwépemc and the Skeetchestn First Nations  
We do not have a mandate, we have a responsibility We are yecminme7

### **Stk'emplúsemc te Secwépemc Joint Council Statement: Decision and Key Considerations Regarding the Proposed Highland Valley Copper Mine Life Extension Project**

November 14, 2024 (Kamloops), Stk'emplúsemc te Secwépemc Nation does not give its free, prior, and informed consent to the development of the lands and resources at Ctseltšaltnéws (the Highland Valley Area) for the purposes of the proposed Highland Valley Copper Mine Life Extension Project proposed by Teck Resources Limited (Teck), through its subsidiary company, Teck Highland Valley Copper Partnership, including the Basal Aquifer Dewatering Amendment, the Bethlehem Extension Project, and the BC Hydro Transmission Line Upgrade Project.

Stk'emplúsemc te Secwépemc Nation (SSN) has determined that the impacts of the proposed Highland Valley Copper Mine Life Extension Project (HVC MLE Project) are neither reasonable nor sustainable. The Highland Valley Copper Mine has already caused serious harm to the lands and water in SSN's ancestral lands, and SSN believes that the proposed HVC MLE Project would lead to more significant and permanent damage.

SSN claims both Aboriginal rights and Aboriginal title to Stk'emplúsemc te Secwépemcúlecw (Stk'emplúsemc ancestral lands), including over Ctseltšaltnéws, which encompasses the proposed HVC MLE Project area. This title includes (but is not limited to) the right to carry on traditional customs and spiritual activities in the historical location, engage in a Secwépemc economy, and enjoy sustainable watersheds, airsheds, and a healthy ecosystem. We are obligated by our laws to manage water for the good of *kw'séltkten* (our relatives), to take care of one another in reciprocal accountability, and to protect, nurture, and maintain this area for future generations. These rights have been violated by the existing HVC Mine and would continue to be violated by the proposed HVC MLE Project.

This decision was made by SSN's Joint Council, in accordance with SSN's laws, traditions, customs, and land tenure systems supported by the evidence and assessments as presented in the Panel Recommendations Report, and in recognition that Ctseltšaltnéws is a keystone area with significant spiritual, cultural, historic, and continued importance to SSN. We have approached this decision from the perspective of our traditional way of governing, which reflects our values and ways of knowing. It reflects and respects our relationship to all our relations, including the land, the water, the sky, and all the creatures and plants in our territory. Our decision respects the roles and importance of families, elders, and youth in understanding our past and determining our future, and represents our values, laws, and traditional governance.



## KEY CONSIDERATIONS

SSN has prepared and submitted a comprehensive and confidential decision report to the British Columbia Environmental Assessment Office. SSN will be releasing a plain language summary of that report in the coming weeks. The following are some of the key considerations which informed SSN's decision.

### Disruption of Lands, Waterways, SSN's Rights and Authority Since 1962

Since the HVC Mine began operating in the early 1960s, it has polluted our waterways, harmed our plants and animals, and disrupted habitats and migration routes. This has made it harder for us to maintain our way of life and exercise our rights and authority on our ancestral lands.

Through SSN's Project Review Process, we have assessed the HVC MLE Project within the present context of Secwépemcúlcw. 40% of our ancestral lands has already been clearcut by logging companies, and another 30% has been affected by wildfires. Mining, urban sprawl, and other industrial activities have also impacted these lands. There is very limited land left where we can partake in spiritual and cultural practices, or go hunt or harvest traditional plants and medicines.

The proposed HVC MLE Project would disturb an additional 1,500 hectares of land, which would further alienate our title lands. The expansion of the HVC Mine is not a land use that SSN accepts as it prohibits us from using the land to continue our way of life and preserving the land for our future generations. Even if Teck reclaimed the land in accordance with its returning land use objective after closing the HVC Mine, the legacy impacts of the mine will prohibit us from fully exercising our rights and title.

While the existing HVC Mine site has harmed the Highland Valley's ecosystems, we remember that the habitats and ecosystems of Ctselstsaltnéws used to be rich and productive. Ctselstsaltnéws, which means "throughout-saline-bitter place with a trail through it" in Secwepemctsin (the Secwépemc language), is a culturally, spiritually, and economically vital landscape for SSN. For at least 10,000 years, our ancestors have occupied the higher plateaus of Secwépemcúlcw, including Ctselstsaltnéws.

### Historic and Present Day Significance

Ctselstsaltnéws was and is a cultural landscape of spiritual work and power that was a unique and important meeting ground for *tkwílč*, Indigenous doctors from Secwépemc communities and neighbouring First Nations who trained to become experts in healing practices and were called upon by families whose members had fallen sick. *TKwílč* were known to practice together at *Ctkwílčmeńten* (Quiltanton Lake), which means the "place where Indian doctors practice", and includes the entire area around Quiltanton Lake, Little Divide Lake and its outflow to Witches Brook, and extending to Bose Lake. Our Elders tell us that the area between these sites was a unique and important medicine practicing place for the *tkwílč*. The *tkwílč* who were active in this area continue to be remembered by name, and their descendants live in the Skeetchestn and Tkemlúps te Secwépemc communities.

Ctselstsaltnéws was a key hunting ground for mule deer and elk living on the nearby grasslands. Hunting blinds were usually set up near water sources, migration routes, movement corridors, or



game trails. SSN members have identified at least eight hunting blind features near the proposed site of the Bethlehem expansion pit, with two more located west and northeast of the Highland Tailings Storage Facility pond. It is likely that additional hunting blinds existed which have been lost due to the HVC Mine.

The creeks and rivers flowing from Ctseltáaltnéws' higher peaks were rich in plant life, providing a regular supply of a variety of traditional plants which we used, managed, and relied on for food, medicine, tools, shelter, and for spiritual and ceremonial purposes.

### **Adverse Impacts on Water Quality and Quantity**

SSN did not consent to the depletion of the following 4 lakes: Ctkwíłcmenten, Xyemémshell, Little Divide Lake, and Ctsalétkwe, also known as Twenty-Four Mile Lake, since the HVC Mine began operating. Within our ancestral lands, SSN has the right to safe, clean, and reliable drinking water for our members, the right to carry out our way of life, which relies in part on water resources and activities, and the right to sustain our culture.

The proposed HVC MLE Project would use significantly more water than the existing HVC Mine, with an increase in the annual average water use from 77 to 113.5 million cubic metres (m<sup>3</sup>). For comparison, the City of Kamloops currently uses 19 million m<sup>3</sup> of water annually. Without the HVC MLE Project, water flows are predicted to return to pre-mine levels in approximately 2073. With the HVC MLE Project, however, that recovery would be delayed until 2154, over 80 years later. This increase in water use would further deplete our aquifers, which impacts the streams that an aquifer supports.

Many contaminants, including sulphate, already migrate from the existing HVC Mine site into nearby watercourses. This contamination builds up in fish and other aquatic life, affects the wildlife that drink the water, and settles into our traditional plants and medicines, all of which disrupts our seasonal round. The HVC MLE Project would worsen these issues by adding significantly more tailings which increase the seepage of contact water containing sulphate from the HVC Mine into nearby watercourses, including Pukaist Creek and ultimately the Thompson River system. This is not the future we wish to leave our grandchildren and their grandchildren.

### **Building a Water Treatment Plant 120 Years after Closure**

At the existing HVC Mine site, Teck extracts ore from the Valley Pit. While water flows into this pit that would usually flow to the Thompson River watershed and then to the Fraser River, Teck pumps and collects this water. When the HVC Mine stops operating, water will naturally flow back into the Valley Pit creating a lake. Teck plans to let this pit fill until it reaches a specific elevation, expected around 2154, after which they will pump out, treat, and discharge the water into Witches Brook.

While the pit lake is filling, Teck predicts that the water will contain cadmium, molybdenum, and selenium (which it would treat), and arsenic, copper, and nitrate (which it would not treat despite levels being above BC's Water Quality Guidelines). Allowing the receiving water to remain above BC's guidelines does not align with the Secwépemc law of *yúcwmentswécw* - to take care and look out for one another. We are responsible for protecting the lands and waters, and ensuring that animals and other resources can thrive. This is a proactive and precautionary duty.



Teck's plan to build a water treatment plant 120 years after the HVC Mine closes is unsustainable, unprecedented internationally, and goes against accepted mining practices. Delaying this construction for so long after the mine stops making money poses significant regulatory and financial risk. During the Panel Hearing, SSN's expert, Dr. Patrick Littlejohn, stated that he was unaware of any precedent in BC for managing such a liability over 100 years after a project has stopped generating revenue.

Allowing Teck to postpone this required treatment plant means that environmental costs are not included in the mine's total cost estimates, creating an inaccurate assessment of the HVC MLE Project's true expenses. If the HVC MLE Project goes ahead (despite our lack of consent), a water treatment facility should be built at the start of the project and not addressed later. It is unfair for Teck to make billions of dollars in profit from extracting so much ore while leaving the cleanup for future generations to manage.

### **Wildlife and Habitat Loss**

Nature is full of relatives who sustain our way of life. We must respect these sacred relationships, which provide the foundation for Secwépemc ways of knowing. The HVC MLE Project would result in the loss or alteration of approximately 1,500 hectares of habitat, which goes against our beliefs in properly managing and caring for wildlife and its habitat, and ensuring wildlife populations are sustained for future generations.

### **Impacts of Dust on Traditional Plants and Air Quality**

Operations at the existing HVC Mine site already produce significant emissions and dust from using and maintaining dirt or gravel roads, as well as uncovered piles of sediment, ore, and tailings from the mine, which impact the air quality throughout Ctselt'saltnéws and Secwépemc territory. The HVC MLE Project would generate additional emissions and dust and increase the amount of time this dust is produced.

Wildlife also consume plants and water that have been covered in dust, raising concerns about the health of our non-human relatives and those who hunt and consume them. As specific animals are not tagged or tracked, we do not know which ones are eating these plants or drinking this water, creating health risks for our members who hunt and trap.

### **Cumulative Effects in Ctselt'saltnéws**

Teck concluded that as the HVC MLE Project is an extension of the existing HVC Mine, the project's cumulative effects would be limited. This ignores the fact that the area has already been heavily impacted by the HVC Mine, and by forestry and other activities, including mines, in the territory. Teck's assessment of cumulative effects also failed to consider the impacts of several large-scale activities, including agriculture, mineral exploration and tenures, transportation, utilities, and municipalities, on the basis that these activities would either remain the same or decrease from present levels. This rationale ignores all of the harm these activities have caused to date. SSN finds that these cumulative effects are not sustainable.



## Teck Demonstrated Non-Compliance Regarding Permits and Authorizations at Other BC Mines

In 2021, Teck Coal, then a subsidiary of Teck, was fined \$60 million for depositing deleterious substances into the Upper Fording River in relation to the Elk Valley coal mine in BC. Teck's operations at this mine reveal that cleanup costs can be much higher than estimated. A 2024 report completed by Burgess Environmental estimated that it would cost \$6.4 billion just to remove the selenium from the water affected by the coal mines: this is \$4.5 billion more than the total reclamation security of \$1.91 billion required of Teck by the Province at that mine.

## SSN Recovering from Imposed Loss of Land and Agency over Ancestral Lands

Since settlers began bringing cattle into our ancestral lands coinciding with the Cariboo Gold Rush in the late 1850s, we have experienced a loss of land and a loss of agency and control over our ancestral lands. When the existing HVC Mine began operating in Ctsełtsaltnéws in the early 1960s without our consent, this furthered our loss of control.

Streams have been rerouted, waters have been contaminated, wildlife habitat has been lost or altered, and plants have been coated in a layer of dust. The seasonal round of resource harvesting performed by our ancestors has been hampered by the loss of land resulting from the HVC Mine site as well as the downstream impacts of the mine's activities. The loss of land leads to a loss of culture, intergenerational knowledge, and our way of life.

## Looking After Needs of SSN's Future Generations

Should the Province unilaterally approve the proposed HVC MLE Project without our consent, SSN also prepared 105 conditions which should accompany any such approval of the HVC MLE Project and are detailed in the Recommendations Report prepared by the Panel and endorsed and approved by SSN's Joint Council.

We assert the right to determine the future land use for Ctsełtsaltnéws, including the HVC MLE Project area. We further assert the right to self-govern and to determine land use objectives for Ctsełtsaltnéws and the surrounding area using our traditional governance models. We will be here long after the HVC Mine closes, however, it is not clear what condition our land will be in at that time.

Teck is not living in *kecmetsút* (reciprocal relations). Teck has interfered with our laws and way of life and it has not proven itself to be worthy as a guest on our territory.

-30-

Media Inquiries: [media@stkemlupsemc.ca](mailto:media@stkemlupsemc.ca)

Find out more about the assessment process online.



<https://stkemlups.ca/hvc-mle-review-process/>

