Environmental Journeys: Government Legislation

Changing attitudes and laws on Environmental Protection

In November of 1974 the Mine stopped producing. We say it closed at that time, however closing the mine involved removing old equipment and ensuring it meant the environmental standards of the day for mine closure.

Below is the correspondence between Anaconda and the Provincial Government outlining the environmental requirements for the closure and the proposed methods to meet them.

Anaconda did implement methods to meet the requirements of the closure, so how did Britannia become a major pollution problem?

The time following Anaconda's sale of its land through to the clean-up project which began in 2001 is filled with battles between subsequent land owners and government over what to do and who should do it.

The result of the inaction, and a lack of monitoring and maintenance of the Mine, resulted first in the failure of the remediation infrastructure installed by Anaconda, and subsequently the polluting of Britannia Creek and the Britannia Beach intertidal zone.

If you wish to examine what was happening between government and the land-holders in detail, 'Environmental Journeys – The Missing Years' presents the story of how Britannia became known as a major pollution source following its closure.

Have your students research how environmental laws have changed in Canada since the late 1960s. A good place to start is the BC Environment Management Act. A list of the federal and provincial acts that effect mining and mineral exploration in our province can be found here: http://www.mining.bc.ca/our-focus/environmental-laws-regulations

Have them identify a current environmental issue associated with a mine or proposed mine and discuss whether or not government is taking enough action to address it.

A good place to begin this search is Google News with the term "mining environment".

ADDRESS ALL COMMUNICATIONS TO:
DIRECTOR, POLLUTION CONTROL BRANCH
PARLIAMENT BUILDINGS
VICTORIA, BRITISH COLUMBIA
V8V 4G5

WHEN REPLYING PLEASE STATE
OUR FILE NO. 0262100-AE-219
YOUR FILE NO. .....
TELEPHONE 387-5303

DEPARTMENT OF LANDS, FORESTS, AND WATER RESOURCES
WATER RESOURCES SERVICE
POLLUTION CONTROL BRANCH
VICTORIA, BRITISH COLUMBIA

October 25, 1974

Anaconda Canada Limited
307-140 West 15th Street
North Vancouver, British Columbia

Gentlemen:

Requirements Pursuant to the Pollution Control Act, 1967, covering discontinuance of operations at the Anaconda Britannia Mine, Britannia Beach, B. C.

You are hereby ordered to collect and direct all mine drainage water to the discharge point known as the 4,100 foot portal and to discharge this effluent via such treatment works as approved by the Director to Howe Sound through an approved permanent submerged outfall pipeline.

The point of discharge in Howe Sound shall be located at a depth of at least one hundred feet below the surface of the water at low tide.

All contaminated mine water shall be directed through the internal mine workings using diversion structures, which are permanently constructed of protected concrete or similar material, properly bonded to solid rock. All structures shall be adequate to control the water flow under all conditions but shall not result in a depth of water greater than twelve inches above "base of rail".

Plans and drawings are to be submitted to the Director for approval on or before December 1, 1974.

The works are to be constructed in accordance with approved plans and shall be put into operation in conjunction with other requirements such as monitoring, maintenance, etc., all of which shall be detailed in a subsequent order.

Yours very truly,

ANACONDA BRITANNIA MINES

DIVISION OF ANACONDA CANADA LIMITED

BRITANNIA BEACH, B.C. VON 1JO PHONE (604) 896-2221

December 9, 1974.

W. N. Venables, P. Eng.,
Director,
Pollution Control Branch,
Parliament Buildings,
Victoria, B. C.
V8V 4S5

Dear Sir:

Re: Requirements Pursuant to the Pollution Control Act, 1967, Covering Discontinuance of Operations at Anaconda Britannia Mines, Britannia Beach, B.C.

Due to lack of staff at Britannia, now that the mine is no longer producing, it has been necessary for us to engage Western Canadian Hydraulic Laboratories Limited to design the facilities required by your order of October 25, 1974.

I am pleased to say that the initial phase of the work has now been completed, but concern regarding the stability of the submerged slope which will support the pipeline has indicated the need for soil investigations. As a consequence of this unforeseen complication and the difficulty of expediting work over this period of the year, I am requesting that we be permitted to present our plans and drawings for approval at the end of January.

It is agreed that all contaminated mine water will be directed through the internal mine working to discharge at the "4100 portal". However, in order to divert water on the 2200 level from the area of #1 shaft to #3 shaft an 8-foot high dam is recommended just north of #1 shaft as the rail height at #3 shaft is 6.45 feet higher than at #1 shaft. The dam will be of concrete 12" thick and reinforced with 7/8" rebar pinned to the sill and walls and laid on 1 foot centres. The height of the drift at the dam is approximately 10 feet.

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W. N. Venables, P. Eng. December 9, 1974.

I trust that this will be satisfactory.

Yours sincerely,

J. Lovering,
Manager.

JL/jc