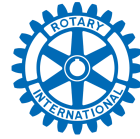




Glacier National Park  
CONSERVANCY



Parks  
Canada



## Rivers without Borders - Alaska and British Columbia Transboundary Watershed Conservation Initiative

Will Patric  
will@riverswithoutborders.org  
360-379-2811

Southeast Alaska and northwest British Columbia  
Size: Over 100,000 square miles or 26,000 hectares.



Participants in coordinating the ongoing transboundary cooperation:

Local Government:

- Alaska
- SouthEast Alaskan Native American Tribes
- Municipal Government

National NGOs:

- Sierra Club BC
- MiningWatch Canada
- Canadian Parks
- Wilderness Society
- Trout Unlimited
- Wilderness Committee

Local NGOs:

- Rivers Without Borders
- Salmon Beyond Borders
- Salmon State
- Southeast Alaska Conservation Council
- Skeena Wild

Local Small Businesses:

- Alaska commercial fishing associations

Community-based Organizations:

- Canadian and U.S. scientists

**Objectives:** The initiative is only getting started. The objective of our initiative is raising awareness of the extraordinary ecological and cultural values of the southeast Alaska (U.S.) – northwest British Columbia (Canada) transboundary watersheds and promoting ecosystem based planning and stewardship toward sustaining those values.

**Values and importance:** There are six major transboundary watersheds with headwaters in northwest British Columbia. Each of these wild and spectacular river systems courses through a range of diverse interconnected mountains-to-estuary eco-zones, crossing the international border and emptying into the Pacific Ocean along the Alaska panhandle. They are all relatively intact, in some cases virtually pristine. Not coincidentally, here are outstanding reservoirs of biodiversity and some of the most important wild salmon habitat anywhere, crucial to the region's fishing economy. Indigenous people on both sides of the border maintain strong cultural connections to these waterways.

**Aspects of transboundary cooperation:** nature conservation, ecosystem based management, watershed management, and scientific research.

**Stage in the process:** Our transboundary conservation initiative is still in its early stages. Proposed mining in Canadian headwaters has inspired downstream interest in the watersheds and their fate, driven by concerns about wild salmon. Downstream (U.S. side) state, federal, tribal, community, fishing industry, and NGO calls for International Joint Commission engagement, under auspices of the Canada – U.S. Boundary Waters treaty,

have yet to be embraced by upstream Canadian government entities.

**Official Protected Area Designation:** No designation yet.

**The Catalyst:** Protecting wild salmon runs for both economic and indigenous cultural/subsistence reasons has been a particular motivator for downstream interests calling for coordinated and cooperative international watershed governance for the transboundary region.

**History:** Large scale mining as proposed for transboundary watershed headwaters is not seen as compatible with sustaining world class salmon fisheries.

**Barriers, challenges, obstacles, or constraints:** The biggest barrier to the transboundary watershed ecosystem-based international dialog, shared planning, and stewardship we seek is differing regional visions. British Columbia's current government is promoting mining development in the transboundary watershed headwaters. As the region is very remote there are few stakeholders present other than First Nations whose views regarding development are mixed. On the downstream Alaska side there are many communities, tribes, and stakeholders present and there is unanimous and robust support for the enhanced international watershed conservation protocol we seek.

### **The Governance and Management Structures**

- **Cooperative relationship:** We do not yet have a formalized cooperative relationship. British Columbia and Alaska are drafting an MOU. Downstream interests do not believe this approach sufficient and continue pushing for International Joint Commission engagement.
- **Legal basis for cooperation:** An MOU is being drafted but is viewed as an insufficient step falling short of watershed stewardship needs and it has almost no downstream support.
- **Governance structure:** There is no international governance structure in place.
- **Cooperative management arrangement:** There is no international governance structure in place.

**Results:** Our initiative to date has raised a huge amount of watershed interest and awareness of issues. There is real momentum for conservation.

**Lessons Learned:** The key lesson is to figure out values and political dynamics within a watershed, as accentuated by an international boundary, and to take advantage of factors that are drivers for conservation based on those dynamics.

**For More Information**

Name	Title	Organization	Email	Phone
Heather Hardcastle	Director	Salmon Beyond Borders	heather@salmongal.org	907-209-8486
Tim Bristol	Director	Salmon State	timsalmonstate@gmail.com	907-321-3291
Jill Weitz	Campaigner	Trout Unlimited	jweitz@tu.org	907-586-2588