

Stikine River | Shtax'héen

Bitter River

OVERVIEW

The Stikine River, Shtax'héen in Tlingit, or Bitter River, is known for its tremendous size and complex braided waters. It is the fastest free-flowing navigable river in North America. The Stikine | Shtax'héen drainage system is recognized as an important wilderness area with local, regional, and global ecological significance. It is a critical producer for local communities and Tribes, including nearby Wrangell and Petersburg, that rely on the river for cultural practices and food sovereignty. Yet, several developing mining and energy projects in British Columbia threaten the health of the Stikine | Shtax'héen, putting the future of the salmon who spawn there, and all who rely on them, at risk.

VITAL STATS

River Length

400
miles

Average Flow

42,550
cubic feet
per second

Watershed Area

19,630
square miles
(larger than
Switzerland)

The Stikine | Shtax'héen flows from British Columbia, Canada to Alaska. The watershed is in the territory of the Tahltan First Nation. The Upper Watershed forms part of the Sacred Headwaters, where four great rivers originate – Stikine, Skeena, Finlay, and Nass. It is central to the cultural, spiritual, and subsistence practices of the Tahltan First Nation. The Lower Watershed is in Tlingit, Haida, and Tshimshian territories and is partially protected by the Stikine-LaConte Wilderness Area.

**First
Nation**

1

**Alaska
Native
Peoples**

3

Countries

2

WATERSHED COMMUNITIES

KEY SPECIES

10+

**Fish
Species**

6+

**Mammal
Species**

4+

**Bird
Species**

The Stikine | Shtax'héen and its tributaries provide critical spawning habitat for all five species of Pacific salmon as well as Dolly Varden, rainbow trout, mountain whitefish, and bull trout. The Spatsizi Plateau in the Upper Watershed hosts a wide variety of wildlife populations including stone sheep, woodland caribou, goats, bears, moose, and wolves. The Lower Watershed contains critical spawning habitat for salmon and steelhead. The estuary where the Stikine | Shtax'héen meets the Inside Passage is spectacular migratory bird habitat for half a million geese, swans, ducks, eagles, and other birds. Moose, mountain goats, wolves, and bear also call the wetlands and surrounding areas home.

Enters the
Pacific Ocean near
Wrangell, Alaska

CANADA

US



INDUSTRIES



The Stikine | Shtax'héen is a fishing river and significantly contributes to the overall income for Southeast Alaska. It provides an important source of food sovereignty and livelihood for subsistence, commercial, and sport fishing groups. The River also provides vital cultural, economic, recreational, and tourist opportunities in and around Wrangell and Petersburg.

THREATS

Johnny
Mtn and
Snip

Exploration

Schaft
Creek
Mine

Proposed

Galore
Creek
Mine

Proposed
and permitted

Red
Chris
Mine

Operational



Photo by Kendall Rock

The Red Chris Mine, located near the headwaters of the Iskut River, a tributary of the Stikine, is leaking selenium contamination after only one year of operation. The proposed Schaft Creek Mine, located between two tributaries of the Stikine | Shtax'héen, would generate 100 million tons of waste rock which would likely impact ground and surface waters. The Proposed Galore Creek Mine would be among the largest open-pit mines in the world. It is on Galore Creek, which flows into the Stikine, about 37 miles from the border. It contains potential acid-generating rock and the company does not plan to treat any water, putting aquatic life and all who depend on the river, at risk.

TAKE ACTION

Learn More

- [Southeast Alaska Indigenous Transboundary Commission](http://www.seitc.org): www.seitc.org
- [Southeast Alaska Conservation Council](http://www.seacc.org/stikine): www.seacc.org/stikine
- [American Rivers](https://endangeredrivers.americanrivers.org/stikine-river/): <https://endangeredrivers.americanrivers.org/stikine-river/>
- [Rivers Without Borders](http://www.riverswithoutborders.org/about-the-region/iskutstikine): www.riverswithoutborders.org/about-the-region/iskutstikine

Get Involved

- Write to your leaders to request action on transboundary mines
- Participate in your local Fish and Game Advisory Committee
- Host an event to raise awareness
- Write a letter to the editor for your local paper

Spread the word!

