

TAIYA INLET WATERSHED COUNCIL

P.O. Box 827

Skagway, Alaska 99840

tiwc@taiya.org

www.taiya.org

03 May 2004

Drew Grant
ACWA Nomination
410 Willoughby
Juneau, AK 99801-1795

Re: ACWA Nomination for the Skagway River

Dear Drew,

Following is the supporting information regarding our nomination of the Skagway River to ACWAs' priority action list. Please don't hesitate to contact me if I can answer any further questions -- I wasn't sure exactly what sort of supporting information you would be looking for. Ben Kirkpatrick, Habitat Biologist for the Alaska Department of Fish and Game, is also quite familiar with the system.

The lower reaches of the Skagway River are cataloged anadromous fish streams that contain excellent spawning and rearing habitat for salmon and trout. Salmon and trout returning to our local streams provide important benefits to people, and wildlife including bears, eagles, seals, sea lions, and others. Fisheries in the area attract thousands of ducks, gulls, bald eagles, and marine mammals to the upper Taiya Inlet.

The Skagway River has issues affecting water quality and fish habitat including debris accumulation, fish passage obstructions, urban runoff, water quality, erosion, flood control, habitat degradation, hydro-electric power, recreation, incinerator runoff, and development. The lower reaches of the Skagway River are cataloged anadromous fish streams and contain (or used to) excellent spawning and rearing habitat for chum, pink, and Coho salmon as well as Dolly Varden char.

The Skagway River runs through the west side of the Skagway Valley and into the Taiya Inlet. The community of Skagway has developed in the floodplain of the river, one of the few spots in this area flat enough for development. Because of limited space for expansion, the community has expanded into the rivers channel and into the estuarine area. As seen in the photo below, the result of this is the gradual channelization of the river and the nearly complete elimination of the rivers tidal flats.

There are a variety of other issues affecting the health of the Skagway River:

- ♦ Skagways' garbage is incinerated, it is possible that runoff from the incinerator is running into the Skagway River.
- ♦ Pullen Creek is an ACWA priority water body primarily due to potential heavy metal contamination from a now defunct ore transfer facility. The Skagway River could easily have been contaminated from the same source.
- ♦ Fish passage has been limited and there has likely been a significant decrease in salmon populations here (historic evidence suggests there used to be significant salmon fisheries on the river).



Looking north up the river, footbridge can be seen in the background.



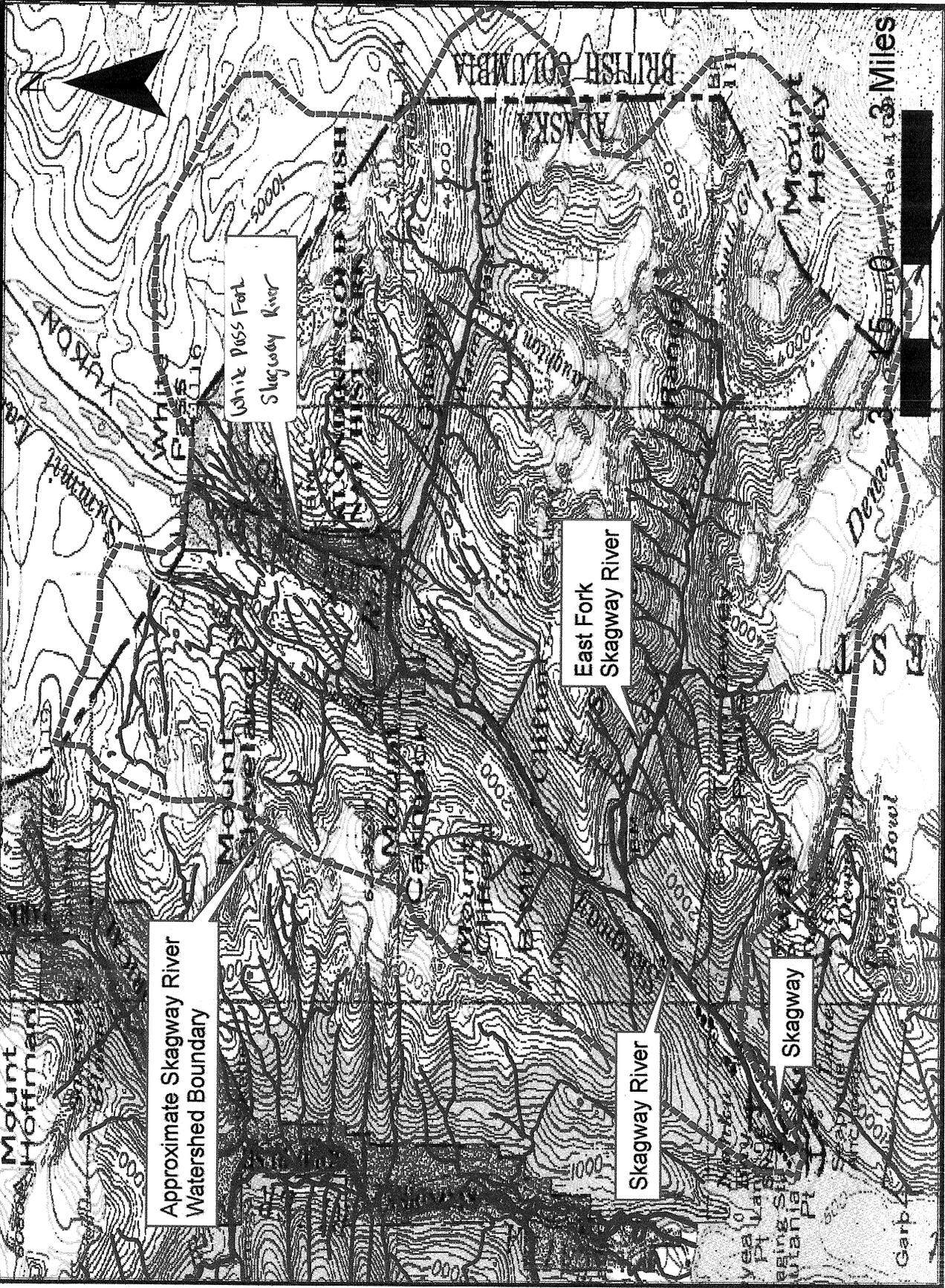
Looking south from just above the mouth of the Skagway River, photo taken from footbridge.

Please let me know if you have
any questions!

Amber Bethe
Coordinator, Taiya Inlet Watershed Council
983-2426
abethe@taiya.org

Skagway River & Watershed

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Approximate Skagway River Watershed Boundary

White Pass Fork Skagway River

East Fork Skagway River

Skagway River

Skagway

3 Miles

Heavily Impacted Lower Reach of Skagway River

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