



British Columbia Mine Tailings Map

Key Term Definitions

July 2022

Watershed: Minor watersheds (third-order watersheds developed for the 1:50,000 [BC Freshwater Atlas](#)) that could be at immediate risk if a tailings dam in the watershed fails.

Salmon Habitat: Occurrence of salmon in minor watersheds (third-order watersheds developed for the 1:50,000 [BC Freshwater Atlas](#)). Click on a watershed to learn the species that could be at immediate risk if a tailings dam in the watershed fails.

Drainage Regions: Principal drainages (developed for the 1:50,000 [BC Freshwater Atlas](#)) that could be at downstream risk in the event of a major tailings facility failure.

Operating: Operating metal and coal mine sites containing tailings storage facilities.

Care & Maintenance: Metal and coal mine sites containing tailings storage facilities that the Province of BC has designated as under Care & Maintenance. There is no clear definition provided by BC for what the term Care & Maintenance means, but it generally implies the site is not operational but not fully closed, either. Care & Maintenance sites have reduced site presence and may receive inadequate oversight to prevent dam failures.

Closed: Closed metal and coal mine sites containing tailings storage facilities. Closed sites have reduced site presence and may receive inadequate oversight to prevent dam failures.

Proposed: Metal and coal mine sites that have been proposed and will contain tailings storage facilities when built and operational. These sites are either under construction, greenlit for construction, or actively pursuing approval.

Dam Height: Height of the tallest tailings dam on a site. Taller tailings dams tend to have greater failure consequences and, in some circumstances, can have increased probability of failure. The failed Mount Polley dam was only 40 m.

Dam Failure Consequence: Highest consequence of dam failure assigned to any single tailings dam on site, based on [BC and Canadian Dam Association guidelines](#). Failure consequence categories are defined based on potential loss of life and potential impacts to infrastructure, economics, and environmental and cultural values.

Facility Capacity: The maximum design storage capacity of the largest (greatest volume) tailings facility on site, when built to its fully permitted size (unless marked by a "*" — see the [Research Methodology](#) document). Facilities with larger stored volumes of tailings tend to have greater failure consequences because there is more material than can be released during failure. One Olympic-sized swimming pool is equivalent to 2,500 cubic metres.

Upstream Dam Present: Whether at least one tailings dam on site has been raised by the upstream construction method. Upstream construction involves progressively raising the dam on top of the existing tailings in the facility. Upstream tailings dams have a higher rate of stability issues compared to other types of tailings dams.