

Nick Hall

EPA'S BRISTOL BAY WATERSHED ASSESSMENT A GREAT FIRST STEP TOWARDS PROTECTION OF BRISTOL BAY.

This February, EPA announced the initiation of a scientific assessment of the Bristol Bay watershed to better understand how future large-scale development projects may affect water quality and Bristol Bay's salmon fishery, an extraordinary salmon resource for the United States. EPA initiated this assessment in response to concerns from nine local federally-recognized Tribes, the Bristol Bay Native Association, Bristol Bay Native Corporation, AK Independent Fisherman's Marketing Association, Bristol Bay Regional Seafood Development Association, United Fishermen of Alaska, and others who petitioned the agency in 2010 to assess any potential risks to the watershed, and initiate a 404c process to protect the fishery.

"Gathering data and getting public input now, before development occurs, just makes sense. Doing this we can be assured that our future decisions are grounded in the best science and information and in touch with the needs of these communities. We look forward to working with Alaskans to protect and preserve this valuable resource." – Dennis McLerran.

This assessment will provide the independent scientific information on the value of the fishery and the potential risks to inform EPA on future decisions surrounding protection for Bristol Bay.

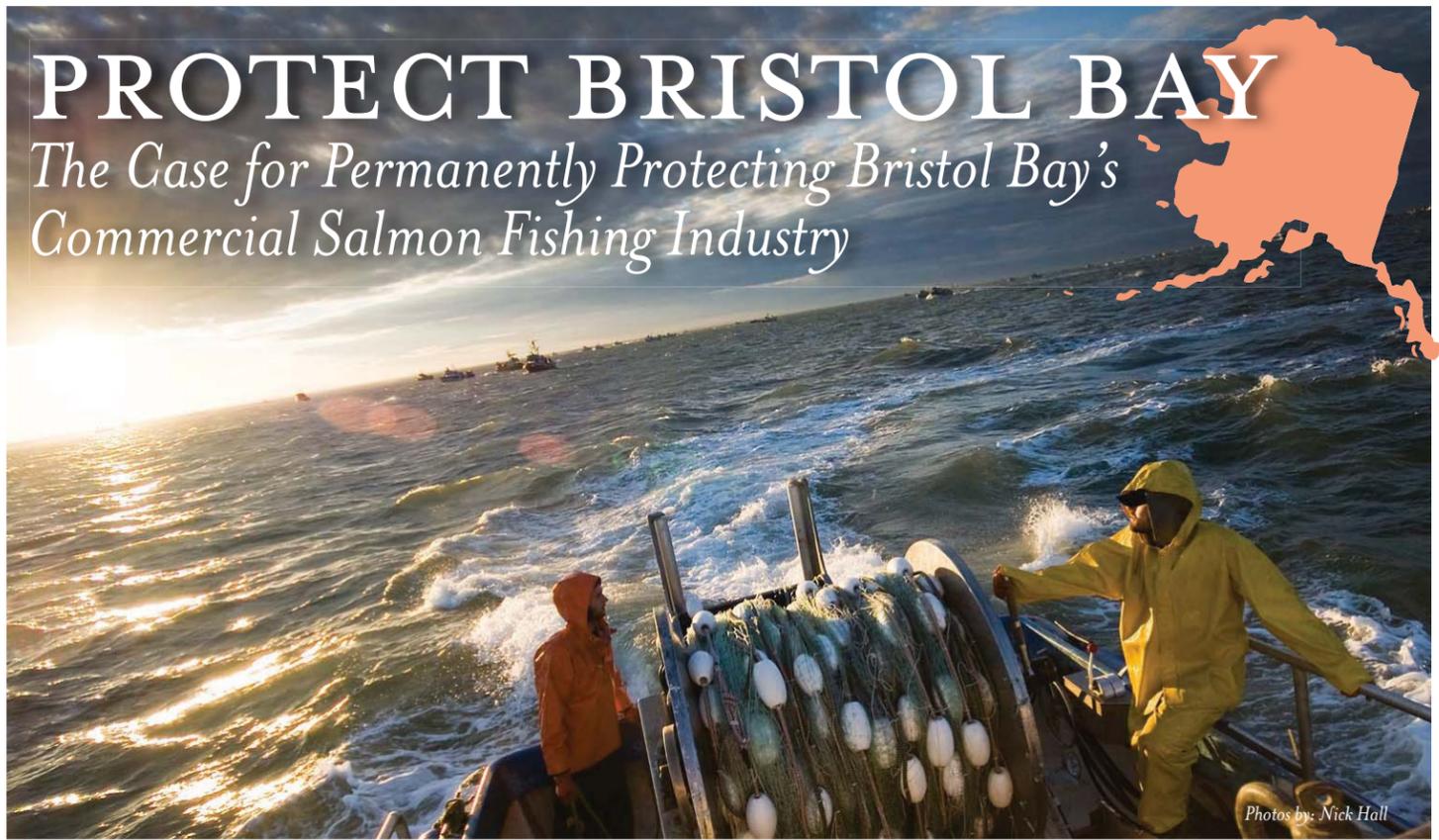
Groups have requested that after this 9-12 month assessment, the EPA use the information gathered to tailor a 404c action that would protect the region, and waters that support Bristol Bay's world class fishery.



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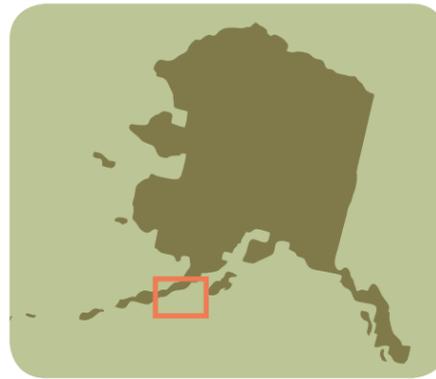
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PROTECT BRISTOL BAY

The Case for Permanently Protecting Bristol Bay's Commercial Salmon Fishing Industry

Photos by: Nick Hall



LARGE-SCALE INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT THREATENS JOBS, WATER AND A WAY OF LIFE

The Bristol Bay region stretches from the snow-capped peaks of the Alaska Range through wetlands laced with major rivers, lakes, and streams and a complex hydrologic regime that is totally unique to this vast region. It is home to the world's most prolific salmon runs and one of the most lucrative fisheries in the nation. Bristol Bay's wild salmon sustain both thriving commercial and sport fishing industries, generating more than \$500 million a year. They are also the heart of traditional subsistence ways of life for Alaska Natives.

Large-scale industrial development in the Bristol Bay watershed does not yet exist. However, a foreign mining corporation with a questionable environmental record and its junior partner, which has no experience developing a mine, are proposing to turn this amazing watershed into an industrial mining district. At the forefront of their mineral development efforts is a location known as the Pebble deposit. It is a vast low-grade deposit of gold and copper located in the headwaters of the Kvichak and Nushagak Rivers in Bristol Bay, Alaska. If built, Pebble would be one of the largest mines in the world and would put at risk the world's largest commercial wild

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Photo by: Robert Glenn Ketchum



Photo by: Ben Knight

sockeye salmon fishery. The Pebble Limited Partnership (PLP) has said that the Pebble mine complex, which would cover some 54.5 sq miles based on most recent PLP estimates, would produce between 2.5 and 10.78 billion tons of waste that will have to be treated in perpetuity. Any release of this waste into the surface or groundwater has the potential

WORLD CLASS FISHERY AT RISK

Alaska is the top producing seafood state in the nation. If it were a country, it would rank fourteenth among seafood-producing countries in the world. The seafood industry in Alaska accounts for \$1.3 billion a year in ex-vessel value and \$3.3 billion in wholesale value. Alaska's commercial fishing industry provides 80,800 jobs.

Bristol Bay is the most productive and valuable of Alaska's fisheries. Each year between 30 and 40 million sockeye salmon return to Bristol Bay's rivers. Bristol Bay's 125 year old commercial salmon fishing industry, valued on average at \$325 million each year, supports over 3,500 full-time jobs and many more than that seasonally.

to damage Bristol Bay's salmon populations and the businesses that depend on them. Pebble's size, its location at the headwaters of two rivers that support world-class salmon populations, and the type of the mineral deposit makes it an unacceptable and dangerous risks to the existing salmon-based economy in the region.

Every year fish return to Bristol Bay in astounding numbers, largely due to the sound, scientific management of state and federal agencies. For instance, in 2008 the Bristol Bay sockeye salmon run produced approximately 42 million fish. National Geographic listed Alaska as one of only three well-managed fisheries in the world, the others being Iceland and New Zealand. With its astounding beauty and prolific salmon runs, Bristol Bay is a place of international importance. Its future is threatened by the proposed Pebble mine as well as hard rock mining on adjacent state and federal land. The Bristol Bay watershed must be put off-limits to Pebble and other large-scale mining projects.

EVERETT LEROY THOMPSON driftnetter, business owner, father



Everett is a lifelong resident of Naknek, Alaska, and a driftnet fisherman who fishes all five districts in Bristol Bay. He also subsistence fishes and hunts in the wilderness between Naknek to Iliamna.

"I've fished this area for 25 years, every season, since I was 7 years old," Everett said. Everett is now 33 and this year is his 26th year fishing Bristol Bay.

Everett is a shareholder in the Bristol Bay Native Corporation and a tribal member of the Naknek Native Village. He is co-owner of a small family business, Naknek Family Fisheries.

In recent years, Everett has become an activist for Bristol Bay's protection, opposing the proposed Pebble Mine project north of Iliamna and proposed off-shore drilling in Bristol Bay.

"The pure waters of Bristol Bay have sustained my family for generations. This watershed provides a subsistence lifestyle and commercial fishery worth fighting for," Everett said. "We will fight to save this place with all we have so that my daughter and her generation have the opportunity to carry on living from and protecting Bristol Bay – a home beyond compare."

In addition to the successful commercial salmon fishery, there is a growing sport fishing and tourism industries that make significant contributions to the local economy and available jobs in the region. These salmon support a strong salmon-based economy and an Alaska Native culture that has been sustained on the land and its resources for thousands of years. Pebble mine puts all of this at risk.



Photo by: Nick Hall

LOCAL COMMERCIAL FISHERMEN, TRIBES AND SPORTSMEN CALL ON EPA TO PROTECT BRISTOL BAY'S FISHERY

Due to the lack of protection for commercial, subsistence and sport fishing in Bristol Bay and the looming threat of mining, local tribes and organizations have asked the Environmental Protection Agency to initiate a Clean Water Act 404(c) process to permanently protect Bristol Bay's waters and wetlands. The EPA has the authority and an unprecedented opportunity to safeguard this unique and valuable habitat and the health of local people by exercising its Clean Water Act Section 404(c) authority to protect the Bristol Bay watershed. The

unique conditions of the Bristol Bay headwaters justify an immediate action by EPA to prohibit dredge and fill activity related to large-scale mining. The Clean Water Act (CWA) is our nation's primary law to prevent pollution of important waterways. Section 404 of the CWA regulates placement of fill and dredge material into our waters. The EPA implements the Clean Water Act and under section 404(c) has the authority to restrict dumping material into important waters, including wetlands and rivers when it will:

"have an unacceptable adverse effect on municipal water supplies, shellfish beds and fishery areas (including spawning and breeding areas), wildlife, or recreational areas." EPA may "prohibit [such discharges].... before a permit application has been submitted."

EPA, using sound science and public input, can use its authority to prohibit or restrict disposal and storage once it finds there are unacceptable and adverse impacts.

"I think everyone has to realize that we have something in Bristol Bay that doesn't exist anywhere else on earth, and we owe it to ourselves and each other to protect it."



Katherine Carscallen
Bristol Bay resident, gillnetter

