

Healing Waters ♦ A Little Bass Talk ♦ Hit The Beach ♦ Hatch Tactics

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September 2007

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Techniques And  
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Skinny Water

THIS MAGAZINE COMPLIMENTS OF:





One of the Pebble Mine's two proposed tailings lakes would fill this entire valley—a pristine area at the very headwaters of the Bristol Bay watershed. The toxic lake would rise to a depth covering this person on the ridge, with a 700-foot-tall dam holding back an inevitable disaster.

# GROUND ZERO

Where water is more precious than gold

Why would any politician advocate the construction of a toxic waste dump at the headwaters of the world's most prolific wild Pacific salmon and rainbow trout fishery? Money, of course—some \$300,000,000,000 worth in the case of former Alaska Governor, Frank Murkowski, until recently the head cheerleader in the effort to build the Pebble Mine, an open-pit gold and copper mine at the headwaters of the famed Bristol Bay salmon fishery. Murkowski got his clock cleaned at the polls last November, but efforts continue unabated to build what promises to be an environmental disaster of epic proportions.

Located in the pristine mountains between Lake Iliamna and

Lake Clark National Park, at the headwaters of Upper Talarik Creek and the Koktuli River, sits the world's second largest gold and copper deposit. The Pebble Mine deposit holds some 67 billion pounds of copper, 82 million ounces of gold, and more than four billion pounds of molybdenum.

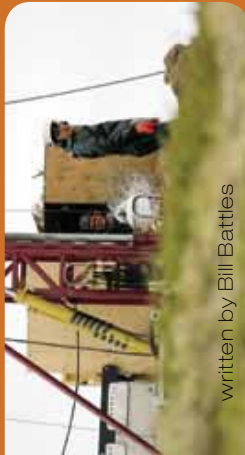
The mine's Canadian developer, Northern Dynasty Minerals, plans to dig an open-pit mine two miles wide and deep enough to swallow the Empire State Building. Two tailings "lakes" covering ten square miles and filling two entire valleys would be built at the headwaters of the Koktuli River to hold more than 2.5 billion tons of waste rock and toxic residue. The earthen dam holding

back the larger of these two lakes would be the longest dam in the world—740 feet tall and 4.3 miles long, and both Upper Talarik Creek and the Koktuli River would be permanently dewatered to fill the lakes. Upper Talarik Creek flows into Lake Iliamna, and then into Bristol Bay through the Kvichak River. The Koktuli River flows into the Mulchatna River, which joins the Nushagak River, and then flows into Bristol Bay.

The loss of Upper Talarik Creek and the Koktuli River would be bad enough, but that pales in comparison to what would lie ahead. Open-pit gold and copper mining has an environmental track record second only to Russian nuclear power plants, and after

Northern Dynasty runs off with the \$300 billion, the flooded mine pit and overflowing tailings lakes will be left to do their dirty work in perpetuity. Just like they did at the Berkeley Pit.

A former open-pit copper mine near Butte, Montana, the Berkeley Pit was closed (read "abandoned") in 1982 by its owner, Atlantic Richfield. The pit soon filled with water, and dissolved oxygen allowed pyrite and sulphide minerals in the tailings to decay, releasing acid. This toxic stew, with a pH of 2.5, is laden with a host of heavy metals and dangerous chemicals, such as arsenic, cyanide, cadmium, zinc, and sulfuric acid. The Berkeley Pit is now one of the largest Superfund sites in America.



written by Bill Battles





In June, we toured the mine site and fished the local rivers and lakes, and came away from the experience committed to do everything in our power to stop this worst of all bad ideas.

A new Superfund site at the headwaters of Bristol Bay is the last thing we need—a bazillion gallons of toxic waste just waiting to wipe out the greatest wild salmon runs in Alaska, and the biggest rainbow trout in the world.

In 1964 Anchorage, Alaska—only two hundred miles from the Pebble site—was leveled by an earthquake that stands to this day as the most powerful seismic event ever recorded in the United States. Alaska is a hotbed of geothermal activity, with dozens of active volcanoes and frequent earthquakes. In fact, if you read down the U.S.G.S. list of the largest earthquakes in the United States, you'll count twelve Alaskan earthquakes before you come to the San Francisco Earthquake of 1906. And it doesn't take a rocket scientist to understand what happens when an earthen dam gets whacked by a major earthquake.

So that's the problem. What's the solution? Politics, of course. At least 67 state and federal permits are required for the Pebble project to go forward, and there's no question that the State of Alaska could kill it by denying the necessary state permits. Murkowski the Hun would have signed those permits in a heartbeat, but Alaska now has a new governor, Sarah Palin. She has the multiple distinctions of being the first woman governor of Alaska, the youngest governor of Alaska, and the only governor in U. S. history to win the Miss Wasilla beauty pageant (1984, and well deserved). None of which, of course, amounts to a warm puddle of spit when it comes to what she stands on the Pebble Mine project.

So where does she stand? Good question. Obviously a fast learner, she's straddling the fence, waiting for the political winds to decide

A fence-sitting governor, a pro-mining DNR commissioner, and a legislature that bends to the will of the mining lobby make the fight to stop the mine at the state level an uphill battle.

which way they're going to blow. On the encouraging side, we found this straightforward policy statement on her website ([www.palinfo.gov/nor.com](http://www.palinfo.gov/nor.com)):

"As part of a Bristol Bay fishing family myself, I would not support any resource development that would endanger the most sensitive and productive fishery in the world."

Somewhat less encouraging is this quote from her inaugural address: "We'll engage in safe development, and we'll show the way for the rest of the world—that we can be good stewards of God's green Earth. We haven't always done that."

And that's the extent of her on-the-record statements concerning the Pebble Mine. Not giving a hoot about her need to divine the political winds, we sent her a straight-up e-mail asking for "a succinct

statement of your current position on the Pebble Mine project." As of this writing, all we've received is this canned response:

"Thank you for writing to Governor Palin. The concerns, opinions, and/or information you have sent are important and valuable to the Governor. Although she is unable to respond to every email herself, your message is being reviewed by the staff person who can best address your need, suggestion, or comment."

Because the Pebble Mine site is on state land, key decisions in the permitting process will come from Alaska Department of Natural Resources Commissioner Tom Irwin, a former mining executive whose avowed mission is to promote development.

A bill introduced in the Alaska legislature last January would have created a game refuge covering the Pebble site, and would have barred



Upper Talarik Creek and the Koktuli River would be permanently dewatered to fill the tailings lakes. This loss would be bad enough, but it pales in comparison to what would lie ahead.

polluting or diverting rivers or streams used by salmon for spawning. Unfortunately, Northern Dynasty lobbyists beat it into the ground.

The combination of a fence-sitting governor, a pro-mining DNR commissioner, and a legislature that bends to the will of the mining lobby makes the fight to stop the Pebble Mine at the state level a decidedly uphill battle.

Thankfully, uphill battles are Bob Gillam's specialty. The head guy at McKinley Capital Management in Anchorage, Gillam founded the Renewable Resources Coalition, the lead organization in the fight to stop the Pebble Mine, and is funding it out of his own pocket to the tune of \$3 million to \$5 million annually. Deep pockets aren't Bob's only attribute. He's an avid hunter and fly angler, and a pretty good guy to boot. He put himself, his Chief Pilot (he has five of them), his 10,000 sq. ft. "cabin" on Lake Clark, and his pristine 1949 De Havilland Beaver at our disposal for three days last June. We toured the mine site and fished the local rivers and lakes, and came away from the experience committed to do everything in our power to stop this worst of all bad ideas.

What about the Feds? The federal government could also kill the Pebble Mine by denying the federal permits required to build and operate it. Better yet, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency—the federal agency charged with enforcement of the Clean Water Act—could do just that . . . enforce the damned thing! More

than any local action, conscientious enforcement of the Clean Water Act would deal the Pebble Mine the fatal blow it deserves.

But the Feds had better get right on it. Northern Dynasty is mounting a massive PR campaign, helicoptering nearly 1,000 politicians and other influential Alaskans to the site. They're also signing up development partners, like London-based Rio Tinto and Anglo American, two of the world's largest mining companies. Rio Tinto is involved in the Oyu Tolgoi mine in Mongolia, where it partnered with Robert Friedland's Ivanhoe Mines of Vancouver. Friedland has been dubbed "Toxic Bob" by Forbes magazine for his role in the largest mining disaster in the United States—Summitville in Colorado, where toxic chemicals leaking from a tailings lake have so far cost taxpayers over \$200 million to clean up.

This is the real deal, and we're asking for your help. Join the Renewable Resources Coalition (500 L St., Suite 502, Anchorage, AK 99501; Tel.: 907-743-1900; Web: [www.renewableresourcescoalition.org](http://www.renewableresourcescoalition.org)). Contact your Congressional delegation and insist they light fires under the EPA to enforce the Clean Water Act, and the Bureau of Land Management to deny federal permits. And by all means, **e-mail Governor Palin voicing your opposition** (<http://gov.state.ak.us/> and click on "E-mail the Governor"). A few hundred thousand e-mails might just get her off the fence, and ". . . show the way for the rest of the world—that we can be good stewards of God's green Earth."