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Trout Unlimited, Together With Hundreds of Fishing and Hunting Groups, Applaud Call for Federal Protection of Bristol Bay Watershed

(April 22, 2010, Anchorage, Alaska) – Trout Unlimited and the Sportsman’s Alliance for Alaska, along with nearly 300 hunting and fishing groups, today welcomed news that the current and former chairmen of the House Interior Appropriations Committee have urged the Bureau of Land Management to protect federal lands near Bristol Bay, Alaska, from hard rock mining.

Chairman Jim Moran (D-VA) and former committee Chairman Norm Dicks (D-Wash.) have asked the Bureau of Land Management to protect 1.1 million acres near Bristol Bay, home to the world’s largest sockeye salmon fishery.

“We fully support keeping this high-value habitat that’s critical to Bristol Bay’s rich fisheries off-limits to mining, and we applaud Mr. Moran and Mr. Dicks for taking a stand and urging the BLM to do the right thing,” said Tim Bristol, director of Trout Unlimited’s Alaska Program.

During the final days of the former administration, BLM developed a management plan for federal lands in Bristol Bay. The plan recommended opening for mining some 1.1 million acres that is crisscrossed by miles of pristine rivers and tributaries and that provides prime spawning and rearing habitat for Bristol Bay’s famous salmon runs.

For three decades this land was closed to mineral development. But in 2008, BLM opened it up to hard rock mining and oil and gas exploration despite widespread public concern about the potential harm to the area’s abundant salmon, trout, bear, caribou and moose populations.

The management plan is especially problematic because the 1.1 million acres lie adjacent to the proposed Pebble gold and copper mine. This colossal mine is but one of several potential mining developments on nearby lands. If Pebble and other mines are allowed to proceed, these projects risk exposing Bristol Bay’s commercial, sport and subsistence fisheries to toxic mine discharges. The combination of Pebble, plus potential mineral

leasing on BLM land nearby, would pose a grave risk to Bristol Bay's sensitive freshwater habitat that supports fisheries that are valued at more than \$400 million annually

Last August, nearly 300 sporting groups and businesses, including the Sportsman's Alliance for Alaska (SAA,) had urged BLM Director Bob Abbey to keep the mining prohibitions in place. SAA's director, Scott Hed, said today that he is heartened by Moran and Dicks' action.

"From catch and release anglers to big game hunters, from fly rod makers to firearms manufacturers, the hunting and angling community has deemed the Bristol Bay region a place worth fighting for. Seeing this sentiment shared by members of Congress is very encouraging – and a sign that our message is being heard," said Hed.

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