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Bristol Bay Wild Salmon Featured in Prestigious Science Journal

Study's Main Authors Suggest a Large Mineral Development Such as Pebble Could Pose a Substantial Threat to the Fishery's Long-Term Health.

(Anchorage, Alaska, June 2, 2010) -- An article published today in *Nature*, a highly respected weekly journal of interdisciplinary science news, examines more than five decades of data on Bristol Bay's sockeye salmon fishery and finds that Bristol Bay is one of the world's best examples of a highly productive, sustainable fishery.

The University of Washington biologists who authored the study, Daniel E. Schindler and Ray Hilborn, found that Bristol Bay's many different populations of sockeye salmon act like a diversified portfolio of investments, buffering fisheries and fishermen's incomes from the ups and downs of particular stocks.

If Bristol Bay's existing salmon diversity suffered harm, the study found that the fishery could crash once every two to three years rather than once every 25 years as is currently the norm. The study quantifies, for the first time, how the long-term productivity of Bristol Bay salmon depends on this "portfolio effect."

The authors determined that each salmon-producing river in Bristol Bay contains "tens to hundreds of locally adapted populations distributed among tributaries and lakes." The salmon's "remarkable diversity" reflects their ability to thrive in a wide range of habitat conditions.

In response to a question during a media briefing on Tuesday, Schindler said the proposed Pebble copper and gold mine poses “substantial risks” to the fishery because of the enormous volumes of water it would require both for operation and containment of mine waste. According to preliminary design plans the developers filed with the Alaska Department of Natural Resources, Pebble could generate some 8 billion tons of waste over the course of its lifetime. Because of its toxicity, the waste would require environmental treatment in perpetuity.

“This study confirms yet again that Bristol Bay and its wild salmon are a precious, sustainable and renewable resource not just to Alaska but to the entire world. While highly diverse and remarkably resilient, these amazing fish should never be subjected to the risks the Pebble mine poses. This is the wrong mine in the wrong place, period,” said Tim Bristol, director of Trout Unlimited.

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