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WHY YOU SHOULD CARE ABOUT THE PEBBLE MINE



by Scott Hed - Director, Sportsman's Alliance for Alaska

“I used to fly right over the Pebble Mine site to go to and from my camp and I could always see moose and bears and caribou. But with six helicopters running full-time, going back and forth across that country, it looks like a nuclear wasteland. There’s nothing that lives in that country that is ever out during daylight hours. When the helicopters are out flying, the animals have become totally nocturnal. It’s just changed everything – and not for the good,” says Alaska Master Hunting Guide Tony Lee. He’s guided hunters in southwest Alaska for over 35 years. Lee’s clients take big bears and trophy moose in some remote and wild country. But in recent years, things have changed, and he’s had to adapt his business. Not surprisingly, Lee proclaims “I’m not a big advocate of the Pebble Mine.”

Chances are, you’ve not heard of the Pebble Mine. While just a proposal for now, this project could impact one of the world’s most productive game and fish regions in southwest Alaska. The Bristol Bay region is home to the world’s largest wild salmon fishery. These tremendous pulses of life that return from the ocean to swim up rivers and create the next generation of salmon also support the region’s other species. Hunters come from across the globe to pursue some of the highest densities of brown bears in the world. The famed Mulchatna caribou herd has been a staple for hunters for generations. Trophy-size moose roam the river corridors. On the fishing side, anglers reel in all five species of Pacific salmon as well as some of the largest wild rainbow trout found anywhere on Earth. The Bristol Bay region is a sporting Mecca. Hunting, fishing, or both...it’s got it all in spades.

Which makes it especially troubling to learn that a partnership of two foreign mining companies is proposing to

construct what could become one the largest open-pit mines in North America, if not the world, in the heart of the Bristol Bay watershed. You can search for “Pebble Mine” on the internet and find tons of information. But instead of regurgitating the facts and figures here, it may be better to have you hear from some respected groups and individuals about their thoughts on this controversial proposal. These aren’t your tree- and bunny-hugging liberals; these are hunting guides, gun-makers, and conservative politicians. This threat is real, but don’t take it from me. Take it from these guys...then get involved.

Mike Fifer, President & CEO of Sturm, Ruger & Co.: “Hunting is an integral part of our American heritage, and it is important to help protect critical wildlife habitats to ensure that our hunting opportunities continue. The Pebble Mine - as proposed - would devastate thousands of acres of prime caribou, moose, and bear habitat in southwest Alaska. An accident at this mine site would devastate not only this wonderful land, but also the richest wild salmon fishery in the world. We believe that the Pebble Mine is not worth the risk – there are much better ways to create jobs while saving so much of what is truly wonderful about Alaska.”

Gray Thornton, former Executive Director of the Dallas Safari Club: “America needs mineral resources to sustain our economy and standard of living. We also need wild places, wildlife and wild fish to sustain our quality of life. In Southwest Alaska, hard rock mining of a staggering scale is proposed in one of the world’s greatest fish and wildlife regions and

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fabled hunting and fishing destinations. As hunter and angler conservationists we must each decide what we deem more valuable as huge tradeoffs are at stake. Yes, we need minerals – but at what cost?”

Position Statement of the Dallas Safari Club: “Without habitat there is no wildlife...it is that simple. Dallas Safari Club opposes any development in the Bristol Bay region that would jeopardize this critical ecosystem. The risks are too great and the costs to fish, wildlife and wild places too high.”

Former U.S. Senator Ted Stevens (R-AK): “If this was some essential commodity that we absolutely had to have to run our economy it would be a different matter, and even then I would want to have a lot better attention being paid to the environmental process. But this one, I just don’t like it.”

Patrick Mundy, Communications Manager – Leupold & Stevens: “As members of the hunting and shooting industry, we are in full support of protecting places like Bristol Bay to preserve hunting lands for future generations for several reasons. Not only is the natural environment critical to conserve, but without hunting lands to access, we lose hunters--which we can ill afford in this day and age.”

Clark Whitney, Jr., Alaska Hunting Guide: “I shot my first trophy bull caribou right at the mouth of Talarik Creek (one of the creeks that would be drained to provide water for the mine) when I was 13 years old, and the mine footprint area is a traditional calving grounds for the Mulchatna caribou herd. If this mine is permitted, it will have a devastating effect on these animals and this region’s wild character will forever be lost.”

Jonathan Hart, Founder and Co-Owner of Sitka hunting products: “The bottom line is that the mining proposals would forever compromise the health of the area. The tundra, the big game, and the fisheries in southwest Alaska are a sustainable resource. The long-term health of the area, both in an economic and an ecosystem sense, depends on those resources. If my kids and your kids can’t hunt and fish there when they’re older, we’ve screwed up big time.”

Rick Halford, former Alaska Senate majority leader, bush pilot, hunting guide: “They (the Pebble Partnership) say we can have both; we can have the fishery and the mine. Life is full of choices, and some of them aren’t necessarily easy. Alaska is the last great stronghold for wild salmon. It is not worth the risk in this case. Mining can do a lot of good things. I certainly don’t mind seeing money go into communities. But the bottom line is this is the last place on Earth that we should have a massive sulfide mine.”

Phil Shoemaker, Alaska Master Hunting Guide: “Bristol Bay is home to one of the few remaining great game fields of the world. Like Tanzania’s Serengeti plains and Ngorongoro Crater and Botswana’s Okavango Delta, it is a natural jewel that deserves protection. There will always be jobs and money, but once the world’s natural treasures are exhausted, they are gone forever.”

Captain Sig Hansen, Deadliest Catch television program: “I’m not against mining. That’s a natural resource. Alaska itself is one big, beautiful natural resource with gas and oil and minerals and all that. It’s the proximity to Bristol Bay and that ecosystem that I have a problem with. It’s just common sense for me, because of the fact that it is Bristol Bay. I just don’t feel taking that risk is worth it.”

Position Statement of Wildlife Forever: “Massive mining development in the Bristol Bay region puts at risk the productive habitats that we have sought to conserve. The size, scope, and risks associated with the proposed Pebble Mine project are staggering, and if additional state and federal lands are developed in the region, the wild character of Southwest Alaska will be forever lost. Accordingly, Wildlife Forever opposes any development in the Bristol Bay region that would jeopardize one of the world’s premier hunting and fishing destinations.”

Dave Egdorf, Sport Fishing Camp Operator: “I fear that politicians will not give us the shake that’s due for what’s here, the importance of what this all amounts to. And to see that disappear would be a sin of mankind.”

Brian Kraft, Sport Fishing Lodge Operator: “It’s our responsibility to be sure that we don’t go and screw this up, so that in 15 years... or 20 years... or 50 years people aren’t looking at us saying ‘What? How did you let that happen?’ What protects the fisheries is common sense, and not putting them at risk. Just because it’s put down on paper that they’re going to operate in a safe manner doesn’t mean that’s what’s going to happen.”

Tim Bristol, Alaska program director for Trout Unlimited: “What they’re gambling with is not theirs, and it’s irreplaceable. In some places you just have to say ‘no.’ That the risks are too high and we can’t engineer or mitigate ourselves out of the mess we’re about to create. This is just the wrong idea in the wrong place.”

Quick Take

The Pebble deposit holds gold, copper, and molybdenum and is located in the headwaters of two of Bristol Bay’s major river systems (the Nushagak and Kvichak). If built, Pebble would be one of the largest mines of its type in the world. The foreign developers (London-based Anglo American and Northern Dynasty from Canada) have not released final mine plans, but company executives have said that the Pebble Mine complex, which would cover some 15 square miles, would include the largest dam in the world (larger than Three Gorges Dam in China). Located in a seismically active area, the massive earthen dam would be designed to contain the toxic waste created in the mining process. But whether it could withstand a major earthquake is questionable. Since it is a low-grade deposit, most of the material removed from the Pebble mining area will not have value. Over its lifetime, Pebble is estimated to produce 2.5 billion tons of sulfide-laced waste rock that would have to be treated in perpetuity. Any release of this waste into the surface or groundwater has the potential to destroy Bristol Bay’s salmon runs forever. To learn more visit www.SportsmansAlliance4ak.org.