

PRESS RELEASE

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Alaskans Seek Common Sense Rules to Protect Salmon Habitat

Petition also requests public notice to ensure meaningful participation

ANCHORAGE, AK – Fishermen, private property owners and conservationists today petitioned the Alaska Department of Fish & Game (ADF&G) Commissioner Cora Campbell to adopt basic rules to protect wild salmon habitat and provide Alaskans a meaningful opportunity to participate in salmon habitat decisions.

State law allows citizens to petition state agencies to establish or modify existing regulations. Cook Inletkeeper, Chuitna Citizens Coalition, Northern District Setnetters Association of Cook Inlet, and United Cook Inlet Drift Association today petitioned ADF&G to modify existing rules to 1) ban coal strip mining through wild Alaskan salmon streams, and 2) provide public notice to Alaskans for so-called "Title 16" permits to destroy or impair wild fish habitat.

"Alaska's wild salmon are a public resource. They're my fish, your fish, our fish, and we have an obligation to protect them for our kids," said Rob Ernst, a commercial fisherman and Cook Inletkeeper Board member. "Alaskans have a right to know when a corporation wants to impact our wild salmon runs so we can have a meaningful opportunity to engage in the process. Getting public notice of projects that will harm our salmon habitat is a good start."

The groups are also asking ADF&G to establish a rule that would prohibit surface coal mining operations through wild salmon streams; it would not implicate other types of mining, including placer mining. At the heart of the issue is the proposed Chuitna coal strip mine in Upper Cook Inlet, where PacRim Coal LLC is proposing Alaska's largest coal strip mine with plans to export coal to China and other Asian countries. PacRim's plan calls for the total removal of over 11 miles of wild salmon streams - from bank-to-bank, down hundreds of feet. PacRim claims it will create a new salmon stream after mining, but it's never been done before and [experts say it's impossible to re-create the complexities of a wild salmon stream](#).

Inletkeeper and the Chuitna Citizens Coalition previously submitted a petition to Governor Parnell asking him to declare the salmon streams within the Chuitna project area "unsuitable" for coal strip mining, but after 3 years, the groups are still waiting for a final determination.

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“Governor Parnell promised Alaskans many times he would “never trade one resource for another,” and recently he stated “Sustainability is in our DNA”” said Judy Heilman, spokesperson for the Chuitna Citizens Coalition. “Mining through salmon streams is a horrible precedent for Alaska. The Governor must not realize his habitat policy does not reflect his assurances of sustainability, so we’re asking for these rule changes so we do not trade away our sustainable salmon.”

The State of Alaska routinely touts its rigorous permitting system. Yet there’s no law or policy that prohibits the complete destruction of salmon streams from coal strip mining.

“It should be clearly illegal to strip mine through a salmon stream,” said Ernst. “Without predictable, consistent rules, industry and citizens lack the consistency needed to ensure well thought-out development.”

There is [strong opposition](#) in Alaska to mining through salmon streams, with numerous groups and Tribes opposed to the Chuitna coal strip mine, including: United Fishermen of Alaska (UFA), Native Village of Tyonek, Native Village of Nanwalek, United Cook Inlet Drift Association (UCIDA), Kodiak Old Harbor, Chickaloon Village Traditional Council, Kenaitze Indian Tribe, Nunamta Aulukestai, Renewable Resources Coalition, Tyonek Fish & Game Advisory Committee, Anchorage Fish & Game Advisory Committee, Homer Fish & Game Advisory Committee, Central Peninsula Fish & Game Advisory Committee, and the Kenai Area Fisherman’s Coalition.

The petition also highlights [disturbing trends](#) in salmon habitat management, and notes Alaska is starting to repeat the habitat mistakes made elsewhere where once-healthy fish runs have collapsed.

In addition to the legal petition, the groups also submitted to ADFG signatures from over 6600 individuals, including over 6000 Alaskans, calling for better salmon habitat protections and to keep salmon streams intact.

Complete media packets are available at: www.inletkeeper.org and www.chuitna.org

The nonprofit public interest law firm Trustees for Alaska representing the petitioners stated that ADF&G has 30 days to respond the petition.

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