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Groups praise Army Corps denial of Pebble mine permit, call for lasting protections

Groups advocating for the protection of Bristol Bay waterways, salmon, and communities applaud the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers decision today to deny a Clean Water Act permit for the proposed Pebble mine.

“For decades now, the shortsighted proposal of Pebble Mine has threatened to poison Bristol Bay, destroy the world’s largest remaining wild sockeye salmon fishery, and spoil critical habitat for the endangered Cook Inlet beluga,” **said Katharine Bear Nalven, Alaska representative for Defenders of Wildlife.** “Bristol Bay is the lifeblood of Alaska. We celebrate this decision as we continue to fight for permanent protections for Bristol Bay and its world-class fish and wildlife resources.”

Science and public input overwhelmingly oppose the mine. Pebble’s proposed large-scale mine would destroy wetlands; produce toxic ponds that could devastate salmon fisheries throughout the watershed; and threaten the cultures, livelihoods, jobs, and food sources of over 30 Alaska communities. It would further risk a thriving salmon economy that provides food to the world and thousands and thousands of jobs throughout Alaska and the Pacific Northwest.

“It was clear from the day Pebble submitted its application that the mine would destroy headwater streams and wetlands at an unprecedented scale and pose grave risks to the world’s largest sockeye salmon run and Bristol Bay communities,” **said Brian Litmans, legal director of Trustees for Alaska.** “The Environmental Protection Agency already found that mining would jeopardize this intact ecosystem and its thriving fishery. The Corps has confirmed that this mine poses significant unacceptable impacts to Bristol Bay. Now we need EPA action to ensure lasting protections.”

In its decision, the Army Corps found that Pebble’s mitigation plan failed to overcome the significant impacts from the mine and that the mine was not in the public interest. The public interest review includes an assessment of a number of factors including the long-term environmental, economic and social harms associated with destruction of the headwaters of the Kaktuli watershed, as well as the ongoing operations of a mine that will produce massive amounts of toxic waste that must be managed in perpetuity. Ultimately, the public interest is best served by protecting Bristol Bay.

To ensure that Bristol Bay obtains real and lasting protection, the EPA must use its authority under the Clean Water Act to permanently foreclose any future large-scale mining in the headwaters of Bristol Bay.

Group statements:

“We applaud the Army Corps’ decision to follow the overwhelming science demonstrating the unacceptable adverse effects of the proposed Pebble Mine,” said **Sierra Club Senior Attorney Peter Morgan**. “That same science also demands more permanent protections for the natural beauty, abundant wildlife, and thriving fishing economy of the Bristol Bay watershed.”

“The US Army Corps’ decision prioritizes the health of the people, national parks and wildlife of Bristol Bay, including the world’s largest salmon run and highest concentration of brown bears,” said **Jim Adams, Alaska Regional Director, National Parks Conservation Association**. “While we applaud today’s decision to halt the Pebble Mine, the National Parks Conservation Association will continue to support the people of the region in their efforts to permanently safeguard Bristol Bay from future threats to the remarkable lands, water, and wildlife of the region.”

“The denial of a permit is a good step but does not provide the permanent protections Bristol Bay deserves,” said **Drew Hamilton, president of Friends of McNeil River**. “We intend to keep fighting until this project is vetoed under the Clean Water Act. With permanent protections for Bristol Bay in place, the people, wildlife, and businesses of Bristol Bay will have something to be truly thankful for.”

“Today’s announcement is a step in the right direction for the more than 190 bird species that spend time in Bristol Bay’s 3,500 acres of wetlands, lakes, ponds, and salmon streams,” said **Dr. Natalie Dawson, executive director of National Audubon Society’s Alaska office**. “The global significance of Bristol Bay’s waters for fish and wildlife require permanent protections and the federal government should use this permit denial as a springboard to secure permanent clean water protections.”

“This permit denial shows that Alaskan voices are being heard,” said **Shanelle Afcan, community organizer for The Alaska Center**. “The permitting process should be based on good science and the health and economic needs of the Bristol Bay community. It’s heartening to see the work of so many people finally having an effect on this administration’s policies. But the Pebble Partnership has millions to spend on litigating themselves out of the grave (they have done it before)--that’s why it’s even more crucial that our elected leaders push for an EPA veto. Alaskans deserve certainty, we deserve long term protections for Bristol Bay.”

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