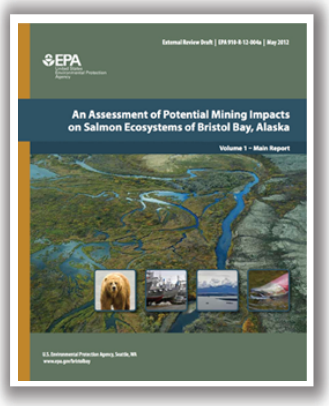
THE PEBBLE MINE:
U.S. EPA BRISTOL BAY WATERSHED ASSESSMENT KEY FINDINGS

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has completed its scientific study on the risks to the Bristol Bay fishery from large-scale mining. The EPA study assessed the economic benefits associated with the Bristol Bay watershed, including the largest wild sockeye salmon fishery in the world. The study analyzed a mine scenario that reflects the expected characteristics of mining operations at the Pebble deposit. The study is available at: http://yosemite.epa.gov/R10/ECOCOMM.NSF/bristol+bay/bristolbay. Key findings include:



An Assessment of Potential Mining Impacts on Salmon Ecosystems of Bristol Bay, Alaska

VOLUME 1 - MAIN REPORT

Value of the Bristol Bay Fishery:

- The Bristol Bay watershed supports the largest sockeye salmon fishery in the world. The Kvichak River produces more sockeye salmon than any other river in the world.
- Bristol Bay's wild salmon fishery and other ecological resources provide at least 14,000 full and part-time jobs, and it is valued at about $480 million annually.
- The average annual run of sockeye salmon is about 37.5 million fish.
- The exceptional quality of the Bristol Bay watershed's fish population can be attributed to several factors, the most important of which is perhaps the watershed's high-quality, diverse aquatic habitats, which are un-touched by human-engineered structures and flow management controls.
- The condition of terrestrial ecosystems in Bristol Bay is intimately linked to the condition of salmon populations. Unlike most terrestrial ecosystems, the Bristol Bay watershed has undergone little development and remains largely intact.

Threat of Large Scale Mining to Bristol Bay Fishery:

The assessment is based on the scenario of an open pit mine that would process 2 to 6.5 billion metric tons of ore, and require the construction of an 86-mile haul road. Likely impacts would include:

- The direct loss of 55– 87 miles of streams used for spawning and rearing habitat for coho salmon, sockeye salmon, and Chinook salmon.
- Removal of 2,512 – 4,287 acres of wetlands in the footprint of the mine would eliminate off-channel habitat for salmon and other fish.
- Although precise estimates of the probabilities of failure occurrence cannot be made, evidence from the long-term operation of similar large mines suggests that over the life span of a large mine, at least one or more accidents or failures could occur, potentially resulting in immediate, severe impacts on salmon and detrimental, long-term impacts on salmon habitat and production.

Bristol Bay fisherman.
PHOTO: Bob Waldrop

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