



POSITION STATEMENT

IWLA Position on the Pebble Mine Development Proposal in Southwest Alaska

October 2007

Position

The Izaak Walton League of America opposes the proposed Pebble Mine development in Southwest Alaska due to the enormous threat that the mining would pose to the region's salmon population and other natural resources.

Background

Southwest Alaska's sockeye salmon fishery has been threatened by a proposal for mining development on state lands. Northern Dynasty Mines, based in Vancouver, British Columbia, has partnered with Anglo American in the United Kingdom to develop Pebble Mine. The mine is located between Iliamna Lake (Alaska's largest lake, the size of Lake Erie) and Lake Clark National Park and Preserve.

The Pebble Mine project would be one of the largest open-pit, hard-rock mines in the world. The proposed plan is to extract gold, copper, silver, and molybdenum from mined ore. Hard-rock mining is the largest source of pollution in the nation, according to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. Contaminants result from a combination of toxic metals and cyanide heap leaching, a technique that Pebble Mine would likely use to extract gold from the mined ore. Cyanide heap leaching creates problems with cyanide run-off as well as creating sulfuric acid leachate. The Pebble Mine proposal also includes plans to build a new 100-mile road and slurry pipeline from the mine site to Cook Inlet for ore to be shipped out and processed.

Pebble Mine's open pit would be 2.5 miles wide and 1,700 feet deep. The site would also contain a 20-square-mile tailings pond holding 3 billion tons of leftover waste rock, all held back by a 750-foot high earthen dam more than seven miles long, built over Frying Pan Lake. The proposed site is located in a very active seismic area where there are three active volcanoes, one of which experienced an earthquake at its base in 2005 just a few miles from the proposed mine site. If the dam were damaged or destroyed by an earthquake, contaminated substances from the tailings pond would pollute the surrounding watershed.

Under the proposed Pebble Mine operation, contaminated run-off from the mining operation could destroy the region's sockeye salmon population. The potential for problems lies in the mine's location, at the headwaters of the Bristol Bay watershed in Southwest Alaska. Each year, 25 to 30 million sockeye salmon through Bristol Bay's lake and river systems to spawn. This number can reach 50 million in peak years. Their ecosystem would suffer if contaminants from the mine leaked into the environment. Trace amounts of copper as low as 2 parts per billion in the water can destroy a salmon's sensory guides, so that it loses the homing instinct that helps it return to its spawning grounds within the Bristol Bay watershed.

Support and Opposition

The primary argument in favor of the Pebble Mine is economic development. The developers estimate that the mine could employ up to 2,000 workers to develop the mine, and 1,000 workers during the 40- to 50-year life of the mine in an area where jobs are very scarce, and where these jobs would pay an average of about \$80,000 per year.

The mine would also bring additional economic development to the Bristol Bay area and to Alaska; hundreds of millions of dollars in annual operating expenditures; tens of millions of dollars in annual tax payments to state and local governments; and other spin-off benefits and business opportunities for Alaska.

In contrast, the salmon fishery is estimated to generate \$350 million per year and to provide about 16,000 part-time jobs (equivalent to about 6,000 full-time jobs).

Support for the Pebble Mine comes from the mine's developers, as well as some of the native villages and native corporations in the mine site area. These include the village of Iliamna, Alaska Peninsula Corporation, Alaska Village Initiatives, village tribe of South Naknek, Twin Hills Native Corporation, King Salmon Tribe, and the Kenai City Council.

Opposition to the Pebble Mine comes from a fairly wide array of individuals and organizations, including U.S. Senator Ted Stevens, at least six native tribes and villages, a wide variety of conservation organizations (Trout Unlimited, National Wildlife Federation, Alaska Coalition, Renewable Resources Coalition, American Rivers, Federation of Fly Fishers, United Fisherman of Alaska, and others), the *Anchorage Daily News*, and numerous other native or village councils in Alaska.

For a more complete listing of supporters and opponents, see: http://www.renewableresourcescoalition.org/pebble_scoreboard.htm.

IWLA conservation policies on mining issues relating to the proposed Pebble Mine

“J) Mining

3) Mining should be prohibited unless it can be assured that radioactive or other hazardous substances will not enter the environment.”

“K) Strip Mine Controls

2) Environmental damage from cyanide “heap-leach” techniques for mining gold and silver ores should be limited by:

b) Prohibiting any contamination of surface or subsurface waters.

c) Requiring restoration of mine and mill sites to original contour, vegetation, and productivity.”

It appears extremely unlikely that the proposed Pebble Mine could meet these standards from our Conservation Policies.

For Additional Information

Renewable Resources Coalition <http://www.renewableresourcescoalition.org/>

Alaska Coalition <http://www.alaskacoalition.org/campaigns/the-oceans>

Sportsman's Alliance for Alaska <http://www.sportsmansalliance4AK.org>

Trout Unlimited article <http://www.tu.org/bristolbay>

NPR story <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=15053463>

Northern Dynasty Mines website <http://www.ndmpebblemine.com>

State of AK <http://www.dnr.state.ak.us/mlw/mining/largemine/pebble/index.htm>