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Alaskans Celebrate: EPA Right to Keep Bristol Bay Protections in Place

DILLINGHAM, AK— Alaska Governor Bill Walker, Alaska House Speaker Bryce Edgmon, and organizations representing the Alaska Native community and fishing industries made the following statements after the Environmental Protection Agency announced it would suspend withdrawal of the proposed restrictions for hard rock mining of the Pebble deposit, located in Bristol Bay in southwest Alaska. Last year, the EPA began the process to consider rescinding restrictions first proposed in 2014 that were based on the Bristol Bay Watershed Assessment, which determined mining on the scale of the proposed Pebble Mine would have "unacceptable adverse impacts" on the Bristol Bay watershed. Bristol Bay and its renowned fishery is responsible for half of the wild sockeye salmon caught around the world that sustain the region's indigenous communities, 14,000 fishing jobs, and $1.5 billion in economic activity.

In the announcement, EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt stated:
"Based on that review, it is my judgment at this time that any mining projects in the region likely pose a risk to the abundant natural resources that exist there. Until we know the full extent of that risk, those natural resources and world-class fisheries deserve the utmost protection. Today's action allows EPA to get the information needed to determine what specific impacts the proposed mining project will have on those critical resources…. However, their permit application must clear a high bar, because EPA believes the risk to Bristol Bay may be unacceptable."

"Today's action is important for several reasons. First, EPA has serious concerns about the impacts of mining activity in the Bristol Bay Watershed. From public comments to community meetings, stakeholders stressed the importance of balancing a singular mine venture with the risk to one of the world's largest commercial fisheries. Second, for EPA not to express an environmental position at this stage would be disingenuous."

Alaska Governor Bill Walker:
"I have spoken to Administrator Pruitt about the Pebble Mine Project many times in the past year, and I have shared with him my belief that in the Bristol Bay region we should prioritize the resource that has sustained generations and must continue to do so in perpetuity. I thank the Environmental Protection Agency and the Trump Administration for listening to my input, as well as the input of thousands of Alaskans who oppose rescinding the EPA's Bristol Bay assessment."

Speaker of the Alaska House of Representatives Bryce Edgmon:
"EPA's announcement could not be more welcome to the people I serve in Bristol Bay as their state representative. The threat of large-scale mining in the watershed has caused far too much stress for far too long in the region. I commend the EPA for crediting the extensive scientific evaluation that led the agency to this conclusion. This is a landmark decision for Bristol Bay that heartens our resolve to bring this fight to a close and ensure Bristol Bay is protected for generations to come."

Norm Van Vactor, CEO of Bristol Bay Economic Development Corporation:
"Today, Administrator Pruitt and EPA listened to Alaskans and science by keeping in place the proposed protections for Bristol Bay. More than 2,500 Bristol Bay, 26,000 Alaskan, and approximately one million American comments were submitted in support of protections for Bristol Bay during the most recent public comment period on the proposal to withdraw, showing clear and widespread support for restrictions on hard rock mining of the Pebble deposit. Alaskans know the Pebble Mine is the wrong mine in the wrong place because they trust independent science and have spent years publicly debating its cost and benefits. We cannot put at risk the thousands of American fishing jobs supported by Bristol Bay's waters by allowing a foreign-owned company to build a massive mine at the bay's headwaters."

Jason Metrokin, President and CEO of Bristol Bay Native Corporation and Ralph Andersen, President and CEO of Bristol Bay Native Association:
"Administrator Pruitt and the staff at the EPA deserve credit for rightly keeping in place proposed restrictions for mining in Bristol Bay. The Pebble Limited Partnership (PLP) appears determined to build its mine despite years of scientific assessment and thousands of years of traditional knowledge and experience that have made it clear to the people of Bristol Bay that a mine such as Pebble cannot be built without harm to the region's fisheries. Today's decision by EPA is unlikely to end this debate. Nevertheless, the decision will mean that any mine plan PLP pursues will have to meet a high standard and address the 'unacceptable adverse impacts' identified in the Bristol Bay Watershed Assessment and the Proposed Determination. This is a high but fair bar and we continue to urge the EPA and other state and federal regulatory and permitting agencies to closely scrutinize PLP's mining proposal to ensure our region's fisheries are adequately protected. Kudos again to EPA and Administrator Pruitt for not abandoning science, American jobs, and the people and communities of Bristol Bay."

Robert Heyano, President of United Tribes of Bristol Bay:
"Today's announcement marks another milestone for Bristol Bay. It shows us that the power of local people, speaking together in a united voice, can still be heard above the noise of today's partisan politics. The United Tribes of Bristol Bay would like to thank EPA

Administrator Scott Pruitt, Regional Administrator Chris Hladick, and the staff at EPA for their work. The fight to protect our watershed from Pebble is far from finished. But, today's decision, and all those who worked so tirelessly to get us here, will be celebrated."

Myrtice Evalt, Interim Executive Director for Nunamta Aulukestai:
"Over and over, Alaskans have spoken. They want our salmon and waterways protected. Americans have spoken. They want EPA to protect places like Bristol Bay. The science has spoken. EPA's own watershed assessment concluded that the proposed Pebble mine would be catastrophic to our fisheries and communities. Even Pebble's permit application has spoken, confirming that it cannot protect our salmon, our homes, or our way of life. Today EPA has listened. The next step is for EPA to finalize its determination once and for all. Bristol Bay is no place for a mine. Those of us who live here, whose families have lived here for centuries, know that, and we will fight the Pebble project every step of the way."

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*The **Bristol Bay Economic Development Corporation** exists to promote economic growth and opportunities for Bristol Bay residents through sustainable use of the Bering Sea fisheries.*

***Bristol Bay Native Association** is the regional nonprofit tribal service provider providing social, economic, and educational opportunities to tribal members.*

***Bristol Bay Native Corporation** is a responsible Alaska Native investment corporation dedicated to the mission of "Enriching Our Native Way of Life." Established through the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act of 1971, BBNC works to protect the land in Bristol Bay, celebrate the legacy of its people, and enhance the lives of its shareholders.*

*The **United Tribes of Bristol Bay** (UTBB) is a tribal consortium representing 15 Bristol Bay tribal governments (that represent over 80 percent of the region's total population) working to protect the Yup'ik, Denai'na, and Alutiiq way of life in Bristol Bay.*

***Nunamta Aulukestai** is a coalition of Alaska Native Village Corporations and tribes in the Bristol Bay region dedicated to protecting the Bristol Bay watershed from unsustainable development.*

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