

EDITOR'S NOTE



Alaska Sporting Journal sales manager Brian Lull points to the kind of precious metal that matters most in the Bristol Bay watershed, chrome salmon. BRIAN LULL

They won't let me put this on the cover, but I say, to hell with the Pebble Mine! We do not need it messing up Bristol Bay, the last, best pristine salmon sanctuary on earth.

Let me be clear: I don't write this out of any desire to keep local residents - who otherwise may benefit from jobs at the mine - and the region poor. Nor do I mean to sound like an overbearing big brother from the Lower 48.

But all the other salmon systems - the Columbia, the Klamath and the Sacramento in the 1900s, New England in the 1800s and 1700s, Northern Europe in the 1600s and before - have been mutilated. We do not need to make the 2000s the century we crippled the Nushagak.

In case you haven't been following the story, Pebble is a giant gash in the headwaters of the Bristol Bay tributary that a pair of companies would open to get at veins of copper, gold and other metals.

Right now, their plans are at bay, thanks to the Environmental Protection Agency, which is assessing how development might affect the area.

Here's what they'd like to do: dig a 1,700-foot-deep, 2-mile-wide pit to get at the ore, and then create massive piles of rock and settling ponds to deal with all the tailings.

Sporting groups and others worry that if an earthquake should strike this quake-prone region, 10 billion - billion! - tons of toxic waste could be flushed into the watershed. It would go on maiming and killing forever in what is heralded as "the single most important wild salmon fishery in the world."

True, mining has come a long way since my grandpa and great-grandfather toiled at Kennecott, but I have little trust in mining companies. And even less for a multinational. What do they care about our soil rather than to rape it and run?

I stand with the 360-plus organizations - fly anglers, big game hunters, environ-

"As a professional fish biologist for 43 years and former chief of fisheries in Oregon, I've spent my life trying to put Humpty Dumpty back together again in places where irreparable damage to the rivers and habitat have led wild salmon to the edge of extinction. Have we learned nothing as a people? Do we have to repeat our mistakes once again in a region where wild salmon still thrive?"
- Jim Martin, Berkeley Conservation Institute
Feb. 24, 2011, The Oregonian

mental groups, commercial fishermen, gear manufacturers - who are urging EPA to use the Clean Water Act to keep Bristol Bay uncontaminated by large-scale mining and development.

I call on President Obama to, as Trout Unlimited put it, "protect the extraordinary ecological, economic and cultural value of this place and this fishery."

As a spokesman for the Dallas Safari Club pointed out, the real gold mine in Bristol Bay is its "salmon, trout, wildlife," - renewable resources that can support local businesses and communities forever.

A mine is a wham-bam-thank-you-man deal, to hell with the future.

And so I say, to hell with Pebble.

Join with me and sporting groups, organizations and companies such as the American Sportfishing Association, Backcountry Hunters & Anglers and Delta Waterfowl; Alaska's Alagnak Lodge, Alaska King Salmon Adventures, Dierick's Tsiu River Lodge, Jake's Nushagak Salmon Camp and Women's Fly Fishing; Oregon's Berkeley Conservation Institute, Jim Teeny and Koffler Boats; and Washington's Fish First and Spokane Fly Fishers in helping protect the bay.

Go to SaveBristolBay.org to learn more. Then compose a letter and tell EPA chief Lisa Jackson that she can use the Clean Water Act's Section 404(c) to give Bristol Bay the protection it deserves and desperately needs. -Andy Walgamott