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Bristol Bay Defense Fund Celebrates More Than Half a Million Public Comments Urging EPA to Protect Bristol Bay, End the Threat of Pebble Mine Now

(Dillingham, Alaska) — Today, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) concluded its comment period on the [Proposed Determination](#) (PD) outlining potential protections for Bristol Bay. **More than half a million people**— including a record **30,000** Alaskans and **2,500** Bristol Bay residents—spoke out to once again resoundingly reject Pebble Mine.

Over the last decade, and seven federal comment periods, Americans including Bristol Bay residents, Tribal members, commercial fishermen, sportfishermen, conservation advocates, chefs, investors, businesses, faith-based groups, and more have raised their voices nearly 4 million times to urge the EPA to protect Bristol Bay from the threat of Pebble Mine.

The end of the comment period brings the EPA one step closer to finalizing 404(c) Clean Water Act protections for the region. The federal agency will now consider public input and should release a Recommended Determination (RD), followed by a Final Determination, which provides comprehensive protections for the headwaters of Bristol Bay this year.

For more than a year, the Bristol Bay Defense Fund has called on the EPA to [“Finish the Job”](#) of protecting Bristol Bay by this summer’s fishing season. The clear and consistent call has been met with numerous delays to the 404(c) Clean Water Act process.

In response, Tribes, commercial fishermen, and conservation groups issued the following statements:

“During the busiest season of the year, amidst a record-breaking salmon run, the people of Bristol Bay once again made it clear that EPA must finalize strong protections for our watershed and end the threat of Pebble Mine for good,” **said UTBB Executive Director Alannah Hurley.** “Year after year, in every comment period and hearing held, over 95 percent of all comments and testimony call on the EPA to protect the pristine waters of Bristol Bay. Waters that sustain our indigenous way of life, provide half the world’s sockeye salmon, and contribute thousands of sustainable jobs year after year. The science and record are clear, EPA must finalize strong protections for our headwaters by the end of this year.”

“While thousands of fishermen and processing workers were working hard to deliver a record-breaking 59.5 million wild sockeye salmon to the market, we also made the time to submit comments to the EPA on their Proposed Determination for the Bristol Bay region. Yet again, this pristine watershed has allowed us to feed the world, but as long as we are

threatened by Pebble Mine, our industry suffers. We cannot allow one more fishing season to pass with the Pebble Mine looming over our heads. The EPA must take into account the hundreds of thousands of public comments from Tribes, fishermen, and members of the community and finalize Clean Water Act protections by the end of this year,” **said Katherine Carscallen, Executive Director of Commercial Fishermen for Bristol Bay.**

“It is no surprise that half a million people submitted comments to the EPA telling them to finalize Clean Water Act protections—especially after this summer’s record-breaking fishing season made it clear how important protecting this special place really is. Tribes, fishermen, and communities worldwide have shown up and supported durable protections for Bristol Bay every single time the EPA has asked us to. We’ve done our part; it’s now up to the EPA to finally finish the job and defend Bristol Bay from the threat of Pebble Mine,” **said Tim Bristol, Executive Director of SalmonState.**

“EPA has a wealth of compelling reasons to veto the Pebble Mine,” **said Joel Reynolds, Western Director and Senior Attorney for NRDC (Natural Resources Defense Council).**

“This summer an all-time record of 78.4 million wild salmon returned to Bristol Bay, and over half a million people submitted comments demanding EPA action now. It’s time for the EPA to finish the job that it began over a decade ago to protect this national treasure—and the people and wildlife it sustains.”

Additional Information:

On August 10, 2022, the Alaska Department of Fish and Game [released](#) the final daily run summary for the 2022 fishing season. An estimated 78.4 million sockeye salmon returned to the Bay and its rivers, breaking the previous record of 67.7 million sockeye salmon set in 2021. These record-breaking numbers are due to thousands of years of Indigenous stewardship and sustainable management that has kept the region unpolluted and pristine.

Recently, [122 organizations](#) representing millions of members sent a letter to EPA Administrator Michael Regan and EPA Region 10 Administrator Casey Sixkiller urging them to promptly issue a Final Determination that provides comprehensive protections for Bristol Bay and the people who depend on it.

For two decades, Tribal groups have led the fight to protect Bristol Bay from the threat of Pebble Mine. If fully built, Pebble Mine would produce up to 10.2 billion tons of toxic waste that would remain on-site forever. Bristol Bay salmon sustains the cultural and spiritual identity of the tribes in the area, provides more than 50 percent of the world’s sockeye salmon, supports an economy valued at over \$2.2 billion, and employs 15,000 people in commercial fishing, and thousands more in hunting, sportfishing, outdoor recreation, and tourism.

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