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## EPA releases assessment on mining in Bristol Bay

On January 15, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) published a report on the potential environmental impact of a major open pit mining operation in Alaska's Bristol Bay watershed. Currently, Northern Dynasty Minerals Ltd. is attempting to develop a new mining project within the region but has not applied for mine permits yet. Their Pebble Mine might become the largest copper and gold mine ever constructed.

Some Alaskan tribes and residents believe the Pebble Mine could be economically beneficial, while others are concerned about the detrimental impacts to the salmon population, which many rely upon for their livelihoods.

The Bristol Bay watershed is home to the largest sockeye salmon fishery in the world. "Bristol Bay's ecological resources produced \$480 million of direct economic expenditures and sales in 2009, " and supported more than 14,000 full- and part-time workers, according to the EPA. Report findings conclude that a mine could contaminate between 24 and 94 salmon streams and 1,300 to 5,350 acres of wetlands, ponds and lakes. A mine would produce large amounts of mine waste, leachates, and waste water that would require long-term management.

The EPA reports that they considered input from independent scientists and reviewed public comments from more than 1 million people in their assessment. The preliminary report has no regulatory effects, but will be used by as a technical resource by decision makers.

Critics of the EPA report include Pebble LP CEO John Shively, who said \$600 million dollars have been invested in environmental/engineering studies to plan a responsible mine. Since Pebble has not yet submitted a project request, Shively considered the hypothetical report outdated and completely inaccurate.

Sources: E&E News PM; EPA Bristol Bay Assessment Press Release

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