



EMBARGOED UNTIL 1 P.M. EDT 8/26/09

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## Hunters and Anglers to Salazar: Keep BLM Lands near Bristol Bay Off-Limits to Mining

Nearly 300 Groups Representing Millions of Outdoorsmen Ask Interior Secretary to Protect Salmon-Rich Area in Southwest Alaska from Mineral Development

(ANCHORAGE, Alaska, Aug. 26, 2009) -- Hundreds of hunting and fishing groups representing millions of America's conservationists and anglers, outfitters, guides, lodge owners and others have asked Interior Secretary Ken Salazar and Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Director Bob Abbey to protect from mining 1.1 million acres of federal fish and wildlife habitat near Bristol Bay, Alaska.

This large swath of BLM land is near one of the world's most productive salmon and rainbow trout fisheries. In a letter to Salazar, the group expressed deep concern that during their final days in office, Bush Administration officials finalized a plan to remove existing protections for fish and wildlife on the BLM lands and to open the area for mining. The group called on Salazar to direct Abbey to reverse that decision.

"Sport fishing in Bristol Bay is a \$60 million business while commercial fishing pumps another \$300 million into the economy," said Chris Wood, Chief Operating Officer of Trout Unlimited. "One out of four wild fish sold in America comes from Bristol Bay. Thousands of Alaska Native families depend on the area for subsistence. Never before have commercial fishermen, recreational anglers and subsistence users been so united on

a single issue. Secretary Salazar and Director Abbey have a chance to do the right thing for Alaska Natives, commercial fishermen, and recreational anglers and hunters who come to Alaska from all over the world.”

The acreage under consideration has been closed to mineral development for more than three decades. In Nov. 2008, just weeks before leaving office, Bush Administration officials finalized a plan to lift the prohibition on mining. The BLM plan for its lands around Bristol Bay is especially troubling in light of a proposal to build one of the world’s largest open-pit copper and gold mines in virtually the same area. The Pebble deposit is located on state land in the headwaters of the Kvichak and Nushagak Rivers, systems that host some of the biggest runs of sockeye and king salmon left on the planet. The developers (Anglo American and Northern Dynasty) recently stated that they are months away from applying for state permits to build the giant mine. The controversial project poses the risk of acid mine drainage, a catastrophic release of mine waste, and irreparable harm from habitat alteration to the Bristol Bay watershed.

“The Pebble mine is bad enough but to have the BLM opening the door for a mining district in Bristol Bay is simply unacceptable. My business and so many others like it out here depend on the world-class salmon and trophy-sized trout that this area is famous for. You can’t have a mining district without putting these fish at serious risk,” said Brian Kraft, owner of the Alaska Sportsman’s Lodge and Bear Trail Lodge, both in the Bristol Bay region.

In addition to the threat Bristol Bay faces from proposed offshore oil and gas development and the Pebble project, the signatories to the Salazar letter maintain that opening the BLM lands to mining creates enormous potential for a development rush in the watershed. They believe the cumulative impacts to Bristol Bay over time could destroy the fishery. The group wants Salazar to maintain the mining prohibition while the BLM works to produce a better land use plan for Bristol Bay that will generate economic opportunity while conserving commercial, sport and indigenous fishing traditions for future generations.

“Director Abbey has the opportunity to protect Bristol Bay and make these biologically important federal lands permanently off-limits to mining. This fishery is too rare, too productive, and too valuable to put it at risk,” said Gary Berlin, President of the American Fly Fishing Trade Association.

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