



Top: A tributary of the mighty Nushagak River meanders across the Bristol Bay landscape. Water is the driving force of Bristol Bay's ecology and span out across the landscape like arteries. Center: Melanie Brown and her set-net fishing crew, including her mother stand in water at Naknek Beach. Melanie and her mother are Native Alaskan set-net fishers and depend on the productive salmon streams of Bristol Bay for their livelihood. Left: A mother brown bear guards her cubs above Brooks Waterfall in Bristol Bay's Katmai National Park. Katmai National Park has one of the highest brown bear densities in the world due in large part to the vitality of the region's salmon populations.

# BRISTOL BAY

## ONE OF THE LAST BEST PLACES

PHOTOS BY NICK HALL

Alaska's Bristol Bay watershed is one of America's last and most important wild places, an unspoiled Eden of vast tundra, crystal-clear streams and pristine lakes. The planet's largest sockeye salmon streams run through this paradise, with tens of millions of salmon supporting an abundance of bears, whales, seals and eagles, as well as Native communities that have thrived here for thousands of years.

Now, a consortium of foreign mining companies—led by Britain's Anglo American PLC and the Mitsubishi Corporation—is planning to dig one of the world's largest open-pit mines, the Pebble Mine, in the heart of this pristine ecosystem. Their proposal calls for a 2,000-foot-deep, two-mile-long gold and copper mine with colossal earthen dams that are supposed to hold back some 10 billion tons of mining waste—despite being built in a known earthquake zone.

If the Pebble Mine is allowed to go forward, it will inflict irreversible damage on Bristol Bay—including the permanent destruction of 60 miles of salmon habitat. The bay currently supports a thriving industry in salmon fishing and recreation valued at \$300 million per year. People come from around the world to fish for its record rainbow trout and photograph its population of extremely large bears, and both commercial fishing and subsistence Native fishing are sustained by the sockeye salmon runs.

The Alaska Department of Natural Resources is favoring the development, but the project is being opposed by Alaskan Natives,

commercial fishermen, sportsmen and conservationists, who are taking the issue to national and international forums. Their efforts now are focused on trying to get the federal Environmental Protection Agency to enforce provisions of the Clean Water Act to block or improve the project.

To learn more about the project, or to get involved, see the following resources. An excellent video is available at [www.renewableresourcescoalition.org/videos/pebble-mine-is-a-trojan-horse](http://www.renewableresourcescoalition.org/videos/pebble-mine-is-a-trojan-horse). A coalition of eight Native corporations in the region opposing the mine is seen at [www.nunamta.org](http://www.nunamta.org). One Native corporation of 8,700 Eskimo, Indian and Aleut people is represented by [www.bbnc.net](http://www.bbnc.net). The nonprofit conservation group Trout Unlimited has made the Pebble Mine issue one of its top priorities—see its Web site at [www.savebristolbay.org](http://www.savebristolbay.org). Another helpful site is [www.ourbristolbay.com](http://www.ourbristolbay.com).

The photographs seen here are the work of commercial and editorial photographer Nick Hall of Seattle. Some of them are drawn from a body of work called "Seasons of Subsistence: Native Life in Bristol Bay," taken a few years ago; others are more recent images. Hall has donated the publication of such photographs to support the struggle against this massive mine. For more of his stunning images, visit [www.nickhallphotography.com](http://www.nickhallphotography.com), or email him at [nick@nickhallphotography.com](mailto:nick@nickhallphotography.com).

— Daniel Gibson





Top: Moxie Andrew sets out his subsistence fishing gear on the beach at Lewis Point, a traditional Yup'ik subsistence fishing camp on the banks of the Nushagak River. Moxie is a Yup'ik Eskimo and Village Council President of New Stuyahok Village. Every summer Moxie travels down river to Lewis Point with his family including grandchildren to catch and smoke king salmon. King salmon are savoured by the Native Alaskans of Bristol Bay for their high oil content and large body size, which makes them ideal for the smoke house. Left: Evan Wonhola on the bank of the Nushagak looks out across the tundra during a springtime goose and duck hunt. Evan Wonhola is one of New Stuyahok village's eminent hunters and invests a great deal of his time passing along his hunting skills to his grandchildren and the youth of New Stuyahok Village.

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Top: Wassillie Andrews pulls a pike fish from his subsistence fishing gear. Wassillie, along with many Native Alaskans in Bristol Bay, is a big fan of spring fishing season when he catches whitefish and pike fish. He's also very partial to whitefish stomach, a delicacy for Was, as he is fondly called. Center: Moxie Andrew Jr. prepares salmon heads at Lewis Point summer fishing camp along the Nushagak River. Moxie will soak the heads in a rock salt solution and eat them later in the year as *salunak*. Left: Anna Andrew hangs her salmon strips up to dry after filleting them on the beach at Lewis Point summer fishing camp. Depending on the weather, she will dry the salmon strips anywhere from half a day to a couple of days. Once they are adequately dried they will be placed in the smoke house for about one week.





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Top: Evan Wonhola's granddaughter, affectionately known as Wubbsy, plays with the carcass of a recently caught beaver. Beaver is highly prized for its fur and widely enjoyed among Bristol Bay's Native People for its tasty meat. Evan and Wubbsy will later sit down with their family and enjoy stewed beaver for dinner. Center: A male sockeye salmon takes a "breather" as he navigates a very shallow section of Hanson Creek, Bristol Bay, Alaska. Nearing the end of his long journey—and his life—he will make one final display of his physical prowess, reproduce, and leave his body to nourish the banks of the river. An estimated 30 million salmon migrate back to Bristol Bay every summer making it the most productive and sustainably managed salmon fishery on planet Earth. Right: A young Yup'ik boy stands on the banks of the Nushagak River holding the skeen (egg sac) of a sockeye salmon.

