

The impact of mining Alaska's coal

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Alaska, the last great frontier, is being threatened by many proposals to mine an estimated 5.5 trillion tons of coal. Sam Weis, author of "The Local and Worldwide Impact of Mining Alaska's Coal" in the magazine *Environment: Science and Policy for Sustainable Development*, comments on the struggle to keep Alaska untouched.

The [coal industry](#) is in direct conflict with many of Alaska's other industries, such as fishing. One example Weis touches on is the Chuitna River. This habitat supports all five species of wild Pacific salmon, among other fish, moose, brown and black bear, beaver, fox, birds, and waterfowl. Additionally, it provides a place for local Alaskan villagers to carry out their traditions and customs. This is precisely the spot PacRim Coal proposes to build one of the largest open-pit coal mines in the U.S. It will destroy 11 miles of the Chuitna River in just the first phase of its construction among other long-term negative side effects.

Another example provided by Weis lies in the Matanuska Valley. This area has a history of [coal mining](#), beginning in the 19th century when hundreds of coal miners flocked here. Alcohol, disease, and dietary changes destroyed the indigenous population, leaving only 40 survivors by the time the coal mine pulled out in 1922. In addition it chased away animals and destroyed salmon streams. The Chickaloon Native Village spent \$1,000,000 rehabilitating the damaged streams and, after a century of being cut off, the salmon are once again making their annual journey. However, now the villagers are fighting three new [mining](#) project proposals that will destroy 20,000 acres of land and damage the restored streams.

Coal mining is not a unanimously agreed upon subject among the Alaskans, who are known to be pro-development. Coal mining had yet to gain the political influence that the oil industry has because of the major difference between the taxation relating to the oil and coal industries. While the coal industry has yet to gain a foothold in Alaska which currently has only one operating [coal](#) mine, eight new proposals on the table makes the state's future uncertain.

More information: Sam Weis. "The Local and World-Wide Impact of Mining Alaska's Coal." *Environment: Science and Policy for Sustainable Development*, Volume 56, Issue 1, 2014. [DOI: 10.1080/00139157.2014.861677](#)

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