

Biden blocks Pebble gold mine in salmon-rich area of Alaska

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The Biden administration banned the dumping of mining waste near

Bristol Bay, Alaska, issuing a decree that thwarts longstanding plans to extract gold, copper and molybdenum because of potential harm to the region's thriving sockeye salmon industry.

The Environmental Protection Agency's final determination, announced Tuesday, effectively blocks the mine planned by Pebble Limited Partnership as well as future mining of the same deposit in headwaters of Bristol Bay, home to the world's largest sockeye harvest.

"The Bristol Bay watershed is a vital economic driver, providing jobs, sustenance, and significant ecological and cultural value to the region," EPA Administrator Michael S. Regan said in an emailed release. "With this action, EPA is advancing its commitment to help protect this one-of-a-kind ecosystem, safeguard an essential Alaskan industry and preserve the way of life for more than two dozen Alaska Native villages."

Pebble, a subsidiary of publicly traded Northern Dynasty Minerals Ltd., has been seeking to mine in the area for roughly two decades and could challenge the decision in [federal court](#). Representatives of the company did not respond to emails seeking comment.

The ban dovetails with a pledge President Joe Biden made while campaigning for the White House, when he called Bristol Bay "no place for a mine."

Bristol Bay supplies roughly half of the world's wild sockeye salmon, generating an estimated \$2.2 billion in economic activity each year. A record number of sockeye have returned to Bristol Bay to spawn in recent years, even as other salmon runs have declined.

Katherine Carscallen, director of Commercial Fishermen for Bristol Bay, called EPA's final action "surreal," because it "will finally put an end to the threat of Pebble."

"Any mining of that site would do irreparable damage to the watershed," Carscallen said. "This is not just about fighting this mine this year or the last 20 years but making sure we won't be fighting another mine at that site in the future."

The proposed Pebble Mine has been a source of contention for years. Under former President Barack Obama, the EPA recommended restrictions that would rule out the project. But the agency later withdrew the controls after a [legal challenge](#). A [federal judge](#) last year sent the issue back to the EPA for reconsideration.

Critics said the decision conflicts with the Biden administration's commitment to accelerating the deployment of renewable power and electric vehicles that rely on critical minerals.

These goals "cannot possibly be realized responsibly if US government authorities continue on this adversarial path with domestic mining projects," the National Mining Association said in an emailed statement. "This end-run of the proper permitting process creates significant regulatory uncertainty for the mining industry during a crisis point for minerals demand."

The ban, ordered under the Clean Water Act, represents a victory for conservationists and [local residents](#) who lobbied the EPA to definitively kill the mine by wielding broad authority under the statute to veto projects involving the discharge of dredged material. The Bristol Bay move marks only the third time in 30 years the EPA has used the authority.

Under the final determination, the EPA is prohibiting certain waters in the Bristol Bay region from being used as disposal sites for waste associated with Pebble Limited Partnership's plan as well as any future proposals targeting the same deposit that would result in the same or

greater levels of loss or change to aquatic resources.

The EPA "truly listened to the original stewards and first peoples of this land," said Alannah Hurley, executive director of the United Tribes of Bristol Bay. "These Clean Water Act protections provide certainty that Pebble cannot be built in Bristol Bay."

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