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EPA bans Pebble Mine project to protect 'valuable' wild salmon fisheries in Alaska's Bristol Bay

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By Responsible Seafood Advocate

Biden administration protects Bristol Bay salmon fisheries, which bring an estimated \$2.2 billion and 15,000 jobs annually

U.S. President Joe Biden's administration has moved to protect Bristol Bay in Alaska – one of the world's most valuable wild salmon fisheries – by vetoing the development of the Pebble Mine project.

As reported in *The New York Times* (<https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/31/climate/pebble-mine-epa-decision.html>), the Pebble Mine proposal called for an open-pit mine on a square mile of land, eventually dug to a depth of about 1,500 feet. Each year, millions of tons of rock ore would be removed and processed to extract gold, copper and molybdenum. A power plant and pipeline would also be constructed, as well as an access road and a port.

On January 31, 2023, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) issued a Final Determination under the Clean Water Act to help protect Bristol Bay, the most productive wild salmon ecosystem in the world. This action bans the disposal of mine waste in part of the bay's watershed, about 200 miles



The EPA says it will protect Bristol Bay in Alaska – home to one of the world’s most valuable wild salmon fisheries – by vetoing the Pebble Mine project. Shutterstock image.

southwest of Anchorage. A copy of the Final Determination is available on EPA’s **Bristol Bay website** (<http://www.epa.gov/bristolbay>).

“After reviewing the extensive scientific and technical record spanning two decades, EPA has determined that specific discharges associated with developing the Pebble deposit will have unacceptable and adverse effects on certain salmon fishery areas in the Bristol Bay watershed,” said EPA Assistant Administrator for Water Radhika Fox. “Our Final Determination helps prevent those adverse effects while helping protect a vibrant and magnificent watershed. It’s also important to note that EPA’s action does not apply to current or future resource development projects in Alaska.”



(<https://events.globalseafood.org/responsible-seafood-summit>).

The Bristol Bay watershed's fishery resources are a thriving economic driver for the region, generating significant nutritional, cultural, economic and recreational value. The total economic value, including subsistence uses of the Bristol Bay watershed's salmon resources, was estimated at more than \$2.2 billion in 2019 and results in 15,000 jobs annually. The Bristol Bay Watershed is home to 25 Alaska Native villages and communities and supports one of the last intact, sustainable salmon-based cultures in the world. Salmon provides more than half of the subsistence harvest for some Alaska Native communities in the Bristol Bay region.



Ocean mining's energy potential could put global fisheries at risk

Interest in ocean mining is growing, but hundreds of scientists warn that impacts may devastate existing marine industries, including fisheries.



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"The Bristol Bay watershed is a vital economic driver, providing jobs, sustenance and significant ecological and cultural value to the region," said Michael Regan, EPA administrator. "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."

[Read more about this decision here \(https://www.epa.gov/newsreleases/biden-harris-administration-announces-action-help-protect-bristol-bay-salmon-fisheries\)](https://www.epa.gov/newsreleases/biden-harris-administration-announces-action-help-protect-bristol-bay-salmon-fisheries). More to come in the *Advocate* next week.

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