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TRIBES OF BRISTOL BAY

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Bristol Bay Native organizations appeal land use permit for proposed Groundhog mine

Permit issued by DNR lacks adequate protections for watershed and fisheries

ANCHORAGE—Nunamta Aulukestai (Nunamta) and United Tribes of Bristol Bay (UTBB) appealed a land use permit issued to Chuchuna Minerals Co. for the proposed Groundhog copper mine located near the proposed Pebble mine. Today's administrative appeal to the Alaska Department of Natural Resources (DNR) seeks protections for the Bristol Bay watershed and fisheries.

Specifically, the appeal asks DNR to amend the permit to

- Prohibit discharge of drill cuttings directly into the tundra.
- Require specific conditions for protecting the watershed.
- Require a performance guarantee.
- Limit the permit to one year.

DNR issued the land use permit earlier this month. It will allow Chuchuna to do exploration activities on state lands. Today's appeal seeks to prevent wetland contamination like that left by Pebble Limited Partnership during exploration activities that began in 1989.

“Here we are with record salmon runs and the state hands out a permit that ignores the mess Pebble left behind,” said Myrtice Evalt, interim executive director for Nunamta Aulukestai. “You can't keep doing things that impact the tundra and water and act like it doesn't add up. It does add up. The toxins add up—and we watched it add up with Pebble's drill sites. Our salmon have fed our culture and people for thousands of year. They provide thousands and thousands of jobs to Alaskans. We will fight any activity that threatens this watershed and our homes.”

Alannah Hurley, executive director of UTBB, recently returned from her set net camp in Bristol Bay. “We had a record sockeye run this year and fish prices are at an all-time high,” said Hurley.

“Yet, once again, the people of Bristol Bay have to turn our attention away from our salmon and focus on the prospect of mining in our backyards. The economic engine of Bristol Bay is the salmon runs, and right now that engine is running strong. Why DNR would issue a blanket permit, after all the damage that’s been done at the Pebble site, is beyond me. This was DNR’s chance to ensure that mine exploration in our region is done in a safer and more responsible way. Instead they chose to ignore our concerns and go back to business as usual.”

The mining company in question, Chuchuna, is jointly owned by Anchorage-based Alaska Earth Sciences and the Kijik Corporation, the Native corporation for the village of Nondalton. A recent deal between Canada’s Quaterra Resources and Chuchuna gives Quaterra the option to buy a 90 percent interest in Chuchuna in exchange for \$5 million in exploration activity at Groundhog and a \$3 million cash payout.

“As this summer’s fishing season shows, our salmon are a resource worth more than any short term development project like the Groundhog Mine,” said Hurley. No matter what, we will continue to push DNR to step up and defend Alaskans and our fisheries against companies seeking to make a quick dollar at the expense of everything we value.”

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Nunamta Aulukestai is a coalition of Alaska Native Village Corporations and tribes in the Bristol Bay region dedicated to protecting the Bristol Bay watershed from unsustainable development.

The United Tribes of Bristol Bay (UTBB) is a tribal consortium representing 14 Bristol Bay tribes working to protect the Yup’ik, Denai’na, and Alutiq way of life in Bristol Bay.