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Letters to the Editor

Pebble Mine Project . . .

. . .

I am the State Representative for House District 36, which includes Kodiak as well as the Lake Iliamna region, the area of the proposed Pebble Mine project. I have just returned from hearings related to the Pebble Mine held in my district as well as the surrounding area. I stayed around after the hearings for about a week because I wanted to opportunity to talk with people personally about the project rather than just hearing from those willing to speak at a public forum.

There are two schools of thought concerning Pebble Mine. The first is that this is simply not an appropriate place for a huge mining operation. Period. This is a seismic area at the headwaters of the Kvichak and Mulchatna Rivers and the Talarik Creek drainages. This is the fountainhead of not only Alaska's thriving commercial fishery but active sports fishing and tourism industries as well. No matter how many promises are made relating to safety of the operation, there is always the possibility of human error or natural disaster. After all, they said the Titanic was unsinkable. I come from a fishing community and to me no project is worth poisoning the watershed.

On the other hand, I also recognize the importance of economic diversification and resource development. Many people in my district and the surrounding one are now earning a decent income while the mine is in its exploratory stages.

The central argument of those who favor the development of the Pebble Mine is that we should "let the permitting process run its course" as the state supposedly has a large mine permitting process that will adequately protect the habitat. This argument has a great deal of appeal and is one which I have previously advocated. After all, in this country we all believe in due process. Why kill a project that has the potential for economic development, especially in an area of the state in which jobs are scarce?

However, the problem with the argument of letting the permitting process take its course is that this argument assumes that we

actually have in this state a rigorous permitting process. Unfortunately, our previous governor, Frank Murkowski, "gamed" the system in favor of development, regardless of its affect on the environment.

For example, one way in which the Murkowski administration stacked the deck in favor of large scale industrial mining was when he transferred the Habitat Division from Fish and Game to the Department of Natural Resources. The Habitat Division's role under Fish and Game was to ensure that permits were not issued if such permits compromised the fisheries resources of the state. Murkowski transferred Habitat to the Department of Natural Resources because he believed that the Habitat biologists were making it too difficult to obtain permits

Another Murkowski administration "initiative" that stacked the deck against fish habitat was changing the mixing zone regulations of the Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation so as to permit the discharge of pollutants into salmon spawning areas.


Currently there are bills introduced in the legislature to undo these Murkowski Administration "innovations." I have introduced, along with Rep. Paul Seaton, HB 74, which would forbid mixing zones in salmon spawning areas. In addition, HB 41 returns the Habitat Division back to Fish and Game. Unfortunately, both of these bills have stalled in the legislature. These bills must pass before I, for one, can say with any conviction that we should let the permitting process run its course, with respect to the Pebble Mine or any other large scale industrial mining activity.

The existing fishing industry and the residents of the area deserve a permitting process based on sound science and a full and open public process. There needs to be a thoughtful and thorough benefit/risk analysis, review, oversight and enforcement by appropriate agencies. Passage of these bills would be a step in the right direction.

Gabrielle LeDoux
112 Mill Bay Road
Kodiak, AK 99615
907-486-8872

Submitted by:
Suzanne Hancock, Chief of Staff
Representative Gabrielle LeDoux
District 36
Capitol, Juneau , Alaska 99801
(907) 465-2487
(907) 465-4956 (fax)

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 The logo consists of the word "Forum" in a bold, blue, sans-serif font, centered within a yellow rounded rectangle that has a slight 3D effect with a darker yellow shadow on the right side.	<p>No Forum Currently Running</p>

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