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Tribes, Commercial Fishing, Conservation Groups Celebrate First Bristol Bay Fishing Season in Two Decades Without the Threat of the Pebble Mine

Alaska Department of Fish and Game estimates that the 2023 Bristol Bay sockeye salmon run will be 51.07 million fish

(Dillingham, Alaska) – Today, the Bristol Bay fishing season formally began, and it's [estimated](#) that the 2023 sockeye salmon run will be more than 50 million fish. This is the first fishing season in decades that fishermen are gearing up for the first opener without the threat of the Pebble Mine—a proposed massive open pit mine at the headwaters of the Bay that would have produced up to 10.2 billion tons of waste—threatening the salmon that return each year, clean water, and health of the entire ecosystem.

In January, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) [issued](#) 404(c) Clean Water Act protections that vetoed the Pebble Mine due to the adverse risks the project posed to Bristol Bay's waters and the surrounding ecosystem. This decision has been widely celebrated by Tribes, commercial and sports fishers, and people in the region who first petitioned the EPA to step in and use its authority to veto Pebble Mine [thirteen years ago](#).

President Biden and other members of his Administration recently held an event at the [White House](#) to celebrate Bristol Bay, its record-breaking salmon runs that feed the world, and all those who worked together to secure the Clean Water Act protections over the years. Notably, President Biden [said](#), “*The amazing thing about resources like this: if you take care of it, it can go on forever... Once a resource like this is harmed or destroyed, it may be impossible to bring it back.*”

President Biden's remarks underscore the need to protect the entire Bristol Bay watershed from any and all threats. The EPA's 404(c) Clean Water Act protections do not address more than twenty remaining active mining claims throughout the region, leaving much of the watershed threatened by large-scale mining development and the toxic waste it would bring. These threats will persist unless legislation is passed to fully protect the entire watershed.

To address the remaining threats in the fight to protect Bristol Bay, the Bristol Bay Defense Fund just launched our new campaign, “[Bristol Bay Forever](#),” in an effort to secure permanent protections for the entire Bristol Bay watershed, and nothing less.

Below are statements from Tribes, commercial fishermen, and conservation groups on the start of the 2023 fishing season and the importance of watershed-wide protections for the Bay:

“We are so grateful to the Biden Administration that for the first time in almost twenty years, we are starting this fishing season without the threat of the Pebble Mine hanging overhead. Although the EPA has ended the threat of the Pebble Mine, we need further action from our elected leaders to address the more than twenty other active mining claims throughout our watershed. Our people are celebrating a major victory against Pebble but are gearing up and will not rest until Bristol Bay is protected forever,” **said Alannah Hurley, Executive Director of Bristol Bay.**

“Thanks to final Clean Water Act protections enacted by the EPA, for the first time in two decades Bristol Bay’s fishing season will go forward without the threat of the Pebble Mine hanging over our region and fishermen’s heads. We are so thankful to finally have the path cleared to focus on delivering wild sockeye salmon to the world and continuing to work toward a sustainable future in Bristol Bay. Threats to our salmon’s pristine habitat still remain in the watershed, and we will continue fighting for permanent watershed-wide protections for Bristol Bay which will sustain healthy communities, an irreplaceable fishing economy, and continue feeding the world.” **said Katherine Carscallen, Executive Director of Commercial Fishermen for Bristol Bay.**

“Today, the 2023 fishing season in Bristol Bay officially begins, marking the first fishing season in over twenty years without the threat of the Pebble Mine in the region. I am thankful to President Biden and the Environmental Protection Agency for finishing the job and allowing us to go into this fishing season with the Clean Water Act protections in place. But there’s more that needs to be done to protect the entire watershed, communities, and the salmon fisheries. Thousands of acres of critical wetlands and habitat in Bristol Bay remain under threat to mineral development. We need our leaders to enact watershed-wide protections for Bristol Bay through an act of Congress, so that we can continue to enjoy this special place forever,” **said Tim Bristol, Executive Director of SalmonState.**

“It is cause for celebration that this Bristol Bay fishing season will begin without the threat of the Pebble Mine. After a decade and a half of unrelenting work by Bristol Bay Tribes and a diverse coalition of support in Alaska and the Lower 48 states, President Biden’s EPA enacted 404(c) Clean Water Act protections for Bristol Bay. But Pebble’s Canadian owner Northern Dynasty Minerals will never walk away, and we understand that legislative protection for the watershed will ultimately be needed to protect communities, wildlife, and fisheries across Bristol Bay forever,” **said Joel Reynolds, Western Director and Senior Attorney for the Natural Resources Defense Council.**

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The Bristol Bay Defense Fund is a broad coalition of local, state and national groups representing Bristol Bay Tribes, commercial fishermen, businesses, and conservation nonprofit organizations including the United Tribes of Bristol Bay, Commercial Fishermen for Bristol Bay, Businesses for Bristol Bay, SalmonState, Wild Salmon Center, Native American Rights Fund, and Natural Resources Defense Council.