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Bristol Bay

Native
Association

June 18, 2019

The Honorable Jared Huffman
1527 Longworth House Office Building
Independence Ave., SE
Washington, DC 20515

VIA EMAIL: logan.ferree@mail.house.gov

Dear Congressman Huffman:

We are writing in support of your Amendment 63 being called the “Huffman Amendment” to the Energy and Water Appropriations Act (H.R. 2740) bill that would suspend funding for permitting of the proposed Pebble Mine in Federal Fiscal Year 2020. This pause would give us time to ensure the process values local voices, prioritizes science (the Pebble Partnership still needs time to gather critical baseline data), and properly weighs the risks associated with the Pebble Mine. Recent polling continues to demonstrate that the majority of Alaskans oppose this project.

It is our hope that Congress will support our community here in Bristol Bay. Support for the “Huffman Amendment” is support for the people and economy of Bristol Bay. The waters of Bristol Bay drive our region’s economy. There is no avoiding this simple fact. The thousands of jobs that are created in the tourism, commercial fishing and seafood processing industries are critical to a community of our size. Without the jobs these waters support, our region’s economy would be devastated.

The Pebble Mine would put these jobs and many others in the region that are supported by the Bay at risk. The biggest question for our community is how big is that risk? What are the chances that the mine’s tailings dam fails and poisons the water in our region? What is the mining company’s plan for cleaning up after a potential failure? When can the people of Bristol Bay expect the mine to start creating jobs for local residents? How secure will those jobs be? Will they pay enough to replace any economic impact that is lost from contaminated waters or a decline in our region’s salmon population?

These are the kinds of questions that the federal government should be asking as the Pebble project pursues federal permits. Unfortunately, it is clear that the current administration is failing to ask those tough questions and is simply pushing the Pebble project ahead on a fast track. They have failed to require the company to submit an economic feasibility study. They have failed to require the company to submit a plan for environmental cleanup in the event of a failure that jeopardizes our region’s ecosystem. They have failed to even ask Pebble to present a plan for the worst case scenario where a tailings dam fails and exposes the waters of our region to toxic mine waste. These kinds of answers are what helps our region to determine whether or not this mine makes sense and a failure to ask these tough questions makes us suspicious.

It is also clear that the input of the people of Bristol Bay is not of much value to the federal government. Local tribal governments have not been included in the permitting process in a meaningful way and the Army Corps of Engineers’ public comment periods have been shorter than any we can remember.

Thankfully, there is something that can be done when federal agencies are unresponsive to the citizens they are meant to serve. Congress has a role in overseeing those agencies and can help to re-align their work with priorities that serve Americans.

Sincerely yours,

Alannah Hurley
UTBB Executive Director

Norm Van Vactor
BBEDC President & CEO

Ralph Andersen
BBNA President & CEO