PEBBLE MINE PROJECT

OVERVIEW

The Pebble Deposit in Bristol Bay’s headwaters is a low-grade ore body with copper, gold, and molybdenum. It was first explored in 1988 and in 2005 Northern Dynasty Minerals (NDM) – a Canadian junior mining company – bought the mining rights. The deposit was originally located by Cominco Alaska Exploration, which began exploring the area in 1986. It wasn’t extensively explored until NDM optioned it in 2001. Early efforts focused on a deposit area known as Pebble West. In 2005, NDM discovered Pebble East, a higher concentrated deposit. According to developer Pebble Limited Partnership (owned by Canadian company NDM), the deposit area contains 80.6 billion pounds of copper, 107.4 million ounces of gold and 5.6 billion pounds of molybdenum. It is worth an estimated $400 billion. If the full Pebble deposit was developed as an open-pit and underground gold and copper mine, Pebble would be the largest mine in North America; eight times larger than all the rest of the mines in Alaska combined. The Pebble deposit is located on state land in the Bristol Bay watershed, about 17 miles northwest of the village of Iliamna.

A preliminary assessment prepared for NDM in 2011 studied the economic benefit of operating an open pit mine at Pebble for 25, 45 and 78 years. Under the 45-year reference case, economists predicted that initial capital invested in the mine would be paid back within just 3.2 years, and that only 32 percent of the mine’s resources would be extracted in the first 45 years.

In 2010, federally recognized tribes, commercial fishermen, conservation groups, sport businesses, and trade associations petitioned the EPA to initiate the Clean Water Act (CWA) 404(c) process, which gives the EPA the ability to protect wetlands and watersheds in which projects would “have unacceptable adverse effects on municipal water supplies, shellfish beds and fishery areas, wildlife, or recreational areas.”

In response to their concerns, in 2014 the EPA released a peer-reviewed Bristol Bay Watershed Assessment, which concluded that open-pit mining in the Bristol Bay watershed could have negative impacts on Bristol Bay’s salmon populations. The EPA also began to take steps under the Clean Water Act to protect Bristol Bay’s salmon from the Pebble Mine. The Pebble Limited Partnership (whose sole partner is NDM) immediately sued the EPA and the Pebble Mine issue remained at a standstill from 2014-2017.

Map of Bristol Bay watersheds. The star indicates the location of the proposed Pebble Mine.

Map from Alaska Department of Fish and Game
**BRIEF TIMELINE OF ACTIONS**

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**The Pebble deposit**

**A TIMELINE**

**DISCOVERY/DEVELOPMENT**

- **1988** Domino discovers Pebble West.
- **2001** Northern Dynasty (NOM) acquires rights to Pebble.
- **2005** NOM discovers Pebble East.
- **2007** Anglo American and NOM form the 50%/50% Pebble Partnership (PLP).
- **2011** Developers release preliminary assessment and environmental data.
- **2013** Anglo American leaves the project. NOM begins search for new investors.

**EPA IN BRISTOL BAY**

- **2011** EPA begins a 3-year assessment of the Bristol Bay watershed in response to Alaska Native tribes' request for its protection.
- **2014** EPA publishes assessment and begins the 404(c) process to add protections for Bristol Bay and its fisheries.

**LEGAL/REGULATORY**

- **2014** EPA is forced to halt work on the 404(c) process pending the outcome of litigation PLP has brought against the agency.
- **2014** “Bristol Bay Forever” ballot initiative passes, requiring Alaska’s legislature to give final approval for a large-scale mine in Bristol Bay.
- **2017** State of Alaska Department of Natural Resources issues PLP permit renewal; requires first-ever reclamation bond of $130 million.
- **2017** EPA and PLP reach a settlement: Pebble will drop suit. EPA will hold off on 404(c) action; can still use the watershed assessment.

**PERMITTING TO PRODUCTION**

PLP has stated that it is ready to begin the permitting process once it has new investors. If permits were submitted in late 2017, the soonest the mine could be operational is 2024.

- **3-4 YRS** Anticipated length of permitting process, which includes more than 40 federal, state and local permits.
- **4-5 YRS** Predicted construction period: to include mining and port facilities, housing, transportation corridor, and more.
- **20-25 YRS** PLP plans for an initial length of operation of 20-25 years, but says it could extend to 100 years.

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**PEBBLE WATCH**

For more fact-based resources like this, visit www.pebblewatch.com.
CURRENT STATUS

The Pebble Mine is currently in the middle of the federal permitting process under the National Environmental Policy Act (a.k.a. NEPA). The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers - the lead agency overseeing the process - just completed its public comment period for Pebble's Draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) on July 1st. During the comment period, nearly 700,000 public comments were submitted to the Army Corps, including a comment letter from the EPA saying that the Pebble Mine would have adverse impacts on Bristol Bay’s salmon fishery. The Army Corps will spend the coming months reviewing the public comments and revising its Draft EIS. A Final EIS and Record of Decision are expected in early - mid 2020.

In addition to the current permitting process, several other recent events could affect the Pebble Mine’s trajectory:

In June, the US House of Representatives voted to pass an appropriations amendment that would block funding for the Army Corps to complete the Pebble Mine’s Final EIS during FY 2020. In other words, the appropriations amendment would suspend the Pebble Mine permitting process from moving forward for a year. The appropriations amendment is now being considered by members of the Senate and if it moves forward will be voted on by the Senate in the fall.

At the end of June, the EPA made a surprise announcement that it would move forward with reversing its own Clean Water Act protections in Bristol Bay; these are the same protections that the EPA proposed in 2014 after completing its peer-reviewed Bristol Bay Watershed Assessment. The news came several days before the EPA submitted its comment letter to the Army Corps expressing concerns with the Draft EIS and its scientific conclusion that the Pebble Mine would adversely impact Bristol Bay’s salmon populations. It’s anticipated that the EPA will finalize its reversal any day without a public comment period.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Pebble Project EIS: https://www.pebbleprojecteis.com/
Pebble Watch: https://pebblewatch.com/
Businesses for Bristol Bay: https://www.b4bb.org/