

# The Bigger Picture Surrounding Pebble

By Rep. Bryce Edgmon

As the Representative for District 37, I've been discussing the proposed Pebble Mine with many legislators, industry representatives, environmental groups, and constituents this session.

It's no secret that I was elected largely on an anti-Pebble Mine platform. My views are shared by the vast majority of residents in the region, and support for our position is growing day by day elsewhere in the state and beyond.

There are also those in Bristol Bay who regard the project differently. They believe that it could restore economic vitality in an area that has suffered greatly from the downturn in the salmon industry and the steady out-migration of limited entry permits.

Their concerns are valid and need to be respected. Communities such as South Naknek, Pilot Point, Port Heiden, Levelock, and Portage Creek are all losing population and facing school closings. This underscores a larger issue prevalent throughout bush Alaska—people are leaving their communities because they can't find work at home.

Clearly, we need to create more jobs for Alaskans, especially those in rural communities. For the record, I am a strong supporter of responsible resource development in Alaska. And I'm well aware that mining exploration and development contributed more than a billion dollars to the state's economy in 2005 alone.

But I am not convinced that planting what might become the largest industrial mine in the history of North America right next to our clear-running salmon streams and rivers is the answer, or that it will bring more benefits than costs over the long haul.

I'm very concerned about Pebble's impact on the most valuable wild salmon fishery in the world, a fishery that is dependent on its wild and pure image in the marketplace. I worry that the wildlife visitor industry—a tremendous economic resource in its own right—will suffer, and that the subsistence lifestyle many of my constituents rely on will also be jeopardized.

Economic opportunities and development are vital to the future of our bush communities, but Alaskans should not be easily lured by ventures that may put Bristol Bay's longer-term economic potential at such perilous risk.

Before allowing any mining in the Bristol Bay watershed, we need to strengthen the regulations that determine what companies can and cannot do in such pristine and environmentally sensitive regions.

As one legislator in a body of 60, I cannot stop or, for that matter, start any resource development project single-handedly. But I can work hard to protect what we already

have and at the same time do everything possible to generate sound economic opportunities for Alaskans.