

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

August 21, 2006

Nunumta Aulukestai
(Caretakers of Our Land)

MEMBERS

Aleknagik Natives Limited
Choggiung Limited
Ekwok Natives Limited
Koliganek Natives Limited
Manokotak Natives Limited
Saguyak, Inc.
Stuyahok Limited
Togiak Natives Limited

New Stuyahok, Alaska—In an unprecedented move, leaders of 13 Bristol Bay Native organizations have called on state and federal leaders to protect the region’s clean water, fish and wildlife by creating a multi-million acre fish and wildlife resource area in the Bristol Bay Watershed and by opposing the proposed Pebble Mine and Bristol Bay Mining District. Native leaders also formally thanked Senator Ted Stevens for his strong opposition to the proposed Pebble Mine and responded to Northern Dynasty’s water rights application of July 7.

These actions occurred August 17-19 at the third annual meeting of Nunumta Aulukestai (Caretakers of Our Land) an association of Native Corporations joined, for the first time, by Tribes from throughout Bristol Bay.

“This meeting was unprecedented,” said Bobby Andrew, President of Aleknagik Natives Limited and a Nunumta member. “Never before have Bristol Bay tribes and corporations come together on their own to address a common threat and develop strong solutions. This meeting is a watershed event.”

Nunumta Aulukestai is an association of eight Bristol Bay Native Corporations representing hundreds of Alaska Natives. On August 19 it passed a resolution stating strong support for permanently protecting millions of acres of Bureau of Land Management (BLM) land in Bristol Bay from hardrock mining. These lands, which are currently protected and closed to mining, are critical for subsistence activities for residents of Native communities throughout the region.

Luki Akelkok, an Alaska Native elder and subsistence user from Ekwok who is also chairman of Nunumta Aulukestai, commented on the importance of BLM lands.

“Generations of my family have been hunting and fishing on these lands. I have several Native allotments surrounded by BLM lands. I want my kids to be able to hunt and fish, continue the subsistence-way-of-life on these lands and they should not be open to mining. The two do not go together,” Akelkok said. “I hope this resolution sends a strong message to BLM and Department

of Interior leadership and that it will change the course of the land use plan that BLM is currently preparing for the millions of acres in Bristol Bay.”

The resolution called the current BLM management and planning process “flawed and inadequate.”

“Our lands are surrounded by federal lands and BLM wants to open these lands to mining; to that we say ‘No!’” said Herman Nelson, President of Koliganek Natives Limited and New Koliganek Village Council. “These lands are far more important for traditional subsistence use rather than mining because our animals need a vast area to feed and survive so we don’t want BLM to open these lands for mining purposes. We want to keep these lands open for subsistence needs from generation to generation.”

The BLM lands resolution is a strong shot across the deck of the foreign forces that would like to see Bristol Bay turned into a major mining district. Bristol Bay is currently under siege by foreign mining interests, most notably, Northern Dynasty and its proposed Pebble Mine, a large open pit gold-copper mine that threatens the headwaters of some of Alaska’s greatest fishing rivers.

If infrastructure is constructed to support the proposed Pebble Mine (i.e., access road, deep water port, and energy resources), the same infrastructure threatens to create access routes to the currently remote and inaccessible BLM administered lands in Bristol Bay. Residents are concerned that an extensive mining district of millions of acres, precariously located in the headwaters of the world’s largest sockeye salmon fishery, looms on the horizon.

In a letter to Stevens, Murkowski and Young, the Presidents of Aleknagik Natives Limited, Choggiung Natives Limited, Ekwok Natives Limited, Koliganek Natives Limited, Manokotak Natives Limited, Saguyak, Inc, Stuyahok Limited, and Togiak Natives Limited made the following statement.

“We oppose the creation of the Bristol Bay Mining District, including the proposed Pebble Mine. We request the Alaska Delegation take action to permanently withdraw all BLM administered lands within the Bristol Bay watershed from locatable mineral entry. The management priority for these public lands and waters should be the wild salmon fishery, wildlife habitat, and subsistence way of life, not mining.”

The Native Corporation leaders also criticized the BLM for ignoring thousands of requests to protect these lands in late 2005.

“Our fish and wildlife are the real gold mine in this region,” said Bobby Andrew. “Our renewable resources support families, communities and culture and they must be protected. We will not allow a mining district to poison our fish and game and destroy our way of life. We are tired of being ignored by federal bureaucrats and we hope Senator Stevens, Senator Murkowski and Congressman Young will listen to us Alaskans instead of foreign mining companies.”

In a related action, 5 Bristol Bay Tribes responded to Northern Dynasty's recent water rights applications in the Bristol Bay headwaters by submitting a letter to the Alaska Department of Natural Resources (DNR) asking that DNR put Alaskan interests ahead of foreign mining companies.

The letter asks that DNR immediately take four actions, including

1. Reserving sufficient water for fish and wildlife in the rivers threatened by the proposed Bristol Bay Mining District.
2. Placing a five-year moratorium on accepting applications for water withdrawals, diversions and impoundments for large mining projects in the Bristol Bay watershed.
3. Establishing a specific and transparent process for reviewing state and federal permit applications.
4. Creating a protected fish and wildlife area in the Nushagak-Mulchatna and Kvichak drainages, including the areas impacted by Northern Dynasty's water rights applications.

"Like many native allotment owners down river from the proposed Pebble Mine, I am a land owner on the Mulchatna, any mining done in our region will jeopardize our way of life," said Lucy Weedman, President of New Stuyahok Tribal Council. "My family for generations has relied on a subsistence lifestyle and I plan to pass on to my kids and grandchildren our cultural and traditional lifestyle. BLM and DNR won't help me do that, they don't even hear us, our voices echo right back to us unanswered."

Other actions that were taken at the annual Nunumta Aulukestai meeting included three additional resolutions related to opposition of the proposed Bristol Bay mining district and support for more support for the region's tribal entities.

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