



UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON

March 28, 2010

Representative Bryce Edgmon, Chair  
House Special Committee on Fisheries  
Alaska State Legislature  
State Capitol  
Juneau, AK 99801

Dear Representative Edgmon,

We, a group of scientists with over 100 years of research experience on salmon ecosystems, particularly in Bristol Bay, express our enthusiastic support of HCR 15 requesting the Legislative Council to contract with the National Research Council to assess the potential risks of mineral development in Bristol Bay. Sockeye salmon have supported the most valuable fisheries in the United States over the last century and most of these fish were produced in Bristol Bay. The sustainability and value of Bristol Bay fisheries is a testament to the exceptional biological productivity of these ecosystems and to the long history of effective, science-based management by the State of Alaska. However, the proposed mineral development may pose substantial new risks to the sustainability of Bristol Bay fisheries. Many of the characteristics that make Bristol Bay watersheds particularly suitable for salmon may, in turn, make them especially vulnerable to environmental impacts from large-scale mining. There is no precedent in Alaska for assessing the potential environmental impacts of mineral development, such as that proposed for Bristol Bay, in an ecosystem with the biological, geological, and hydrological characteristics of Bristol Bay.

The National Research Council (NRC) of the National Academy of Sciences was established to provide third party, independent, science-based assessments of politically contentious issues like those that have developed around mineral development in Bristol Bay. You can expect that the NRC will provide a fair, technical, and timely assessment of the potential cumulative risks of large-scale mineral development to the ecosystems and economies of Bristol Bay. The current permitting system relies heavily on science provided by the mining industry which can not be considered an independent and objective assessment of potential risks. An NRC evaluation of the potential risks would add considerable credibility to the permitting process and would help clarify the ongoing debate over the compatibility of sustainable fisheries and industrial scale mining in Bristol Bay.

Sincerely,

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and

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