



Near Bristol Bay in Alaska is a discovery of copper and gold so vast and valuable that no one seems able to measure it all. At left, an exploratory drill on the prospect. Photo: Stuart Isett for The New York Times



Jonathan Hobson, left, and Eric Vanlandingham in the village of Iliamna at an exploratory drill for the proposed Pebble Mine site. Experts say the mine could yield more than \$300 billion in metals and hundreds of jobs for struggling rural Alaska, but unearthing the metals could mean releasing chemicals that are toxic to salmon. Photo: Stuart Isett for The New York Times



"Perhaps it was God who put these two great resources right next to each other," said John T. Shively, left, the chief executive of a foreign consortium that wants to mine the copper and gold deposit. "Just to see what people would do with them." Gernot Wober, manager of technical operations at the site, is at right. Photo: Stuart Isett for The New York Times



Spawning sockeye salmon in Hansen Creek near Aleknagik Lake. The salmon of this area are central to a fishing industry worth at least \$300 million each year. And while the metals are a finite discovery, the fish have replenished themselves for millennia. Photo: Stuart Isett for The New York Times



An anti-Pebble Mine flag flies on a salmon fishing boat in Dillingham Port. Photo: Stuart Isett for The New York Times



A worker separates sockeye salmon from the silver salmon at a processing plant in Dillingham, Alaska. The fight over the mine is playing out as a war between economies and cultures, between copper and clean water, gold and wild salmon. Photo: Stuart Isett for The New York Times



"If they have one spill up there, what's going to happen?" asked Steve Shade, shown at left unloading nets from his fishing boat. "This is our livelihood. They're going to ruin it for everybody." Photo: Stuart Isett for The New York Times



Sophie Woods, left, preparing salmon for smoking. She and her granddaughter, Shelley, 23, right, are opposed to drilling the Pebble prospect and plan to vote for Measure 4, intended to increase protections for salmon streams. Photo: Stuart Isett for The New York Times



Curtis Ayuluk, 21, right, and his brother Brandon, 8, of Dillingham in front of a mural showing the community's salmon fishing culture. In this conflict, miners have been pitted against fishermen, as have Yupik Eskimos, Aleuts and Athabascan Indians and other Alaska Native people who want the jobs the new mine could bring versus those who fear it threatens thousands of years of culture. Photo: Stuart Isett for The New York Times



Sarah Hinkle, 37, right, with other Iliamna residents who have found work at Pebble base camp. Rarely are Alaskans at odds over which of their natural resources they want to exploit. Oil? Timber? Minerals? Fish? Most Alaskans typically just select all. Photo: Stuart Isett for The New York Times



Workers at Pebble sort and analyze drill cores. The average salary for mine workers in Alaska is around \$70,000. Unlike many bush villages, Iliamna has fresh asphalt on its few roads, which are populated by a handful of shiny new pickups and all-terrain vehicles.  
Photo: Stuart Isett for The New York Times