

BLOCKING ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IS . . .

Not an honor

A LASKA NEEDS a new wildlife refuge like it needs a hole in the head. It already has 58 million acres of designated wilderness and another 90 million acres of parks, wildlife refuges, preserves and other conservation units.

That's out of a total land area of about 365 million acres — approximately 41 percent of Alaska's land area is largely locked away in the hands of government agencies of one kind or another.

The big rush is on by opponents of Pebble Mine, who would do anything to block development of one of the world's largest mineral deposits and foreclose thousands of jobs the mine could generate. Many of those jobs would go to the people of Bristol Bay. Not those who visit in summer to fish; those who live in the area year-round.

And experts knowledgeable in mining will attest that the prospect — primarily copper, gold and molybdenum — can be developed with no damage to the fishery, one of the world's greatest and well-worth protecting.

So what's the big worry? Actually the objections — and the money for the expensive television commercials — come mostly from fishing lodges in remote areas. Their access is by air and visible portions of a mineral development can be an unwanted reminder of civilization for those flying over them. Few people on the ground would be impacted, but wealthy and influential lodge clients — mostly from out of state — might not enjoy seeing signs of human activity as they flew by.

ACTUALLY THE Bush pilots who transport them should be able to fly around the developed areas and their clients would be none the wiser. But the lodge owners are using the big-bucks advertising campaign to rile people up about it. They don't want anything to change.

Bella Hammond, widow of the late Gov. Jay Hammond, would like to see a new refuge established and named in honor of Jay. We don't blame her; she and her family have lived for many years on their homestead on Lake Clark, an idyllic spot surrounded by Lake Clark National Park and Preserve.

Bella endorsed the new refuge and urged that it be named for Jay. The colorful former governor should certainly be memorialized in a highly visible way, but blocking high-potential economic projects is the wrong way. Such lands are Alaska's statehood dowry and were selected to provide the young state the makings of an economy.

Mrs. Hammond wants primarily to see adequate protection and management of the fish and game of the area. Few would object to doing just that — and it had better be done — but the problem comes with locking up such a vast area in a new and unnecessary conservation reserve.

By all means, make sure the fish and game resources are not damaged by mineral developments. But for goodness sake, let's not foreclose an economic future for the people of Western Alaska.

ADN

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