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Board of Fisheries resists pressure to establish fish refuge in Bristol Bay

Dillingham, Alaska — In a unanimous decision today, Alaska's Board of Fisheries resisted efforts by Renewable Resources Coalition and Trout Unlimited to create a fish refuge in the Bristol Bay region near the Pebble Project site.

In tabling Proposal 121, the Board agreed to establish a committee to review "*current protections for fish and habitat*" in the Bristol Bay region, and consider whether additional protections – including a fish refuge designation – are necessary.

Previously, the Board of Fisheries' sport and subsistence committee had recommended opposing Proposal 121, stating that "*current permitting processes and standards were considered adequate in providing protection to the Bristol Bay area in regard to development of resources and habitat protection.*"

The committee also reported that "*local stakeholders were concerned of increasing outside interest and control over the land and resources.*"

"Proposal 121 and other efforts to establish a fish refuge in Bristol Bay are a clear and unapologetic attempt by the opponents of the Pebble mine to deny our project a fair hearing under Alaskan law," said Northern Dynasty Mines Inc. COO Bruce Jenkins. "In doing so, they would also severely restrict other resource developments and land uses in the region – including, potentially subsistence uses.

"Of course, we're very pleased that the Board of Fisheries has not lent its good name to this effort, and we welcome its interest in learning more about the environmental standards and permitting regulations that the Pebble Project must satisfy if we are to achieve development permits in the future."

Jenkins noted that Northern Dynasty has invested some \$50 million on its environmental study program to date in an effort to develop a mine plan for Pebble that optimizes benefits for local people while protecting fish, water, wildlife and traditional ways of life.

He said the company expects to finalize its mine plan proposal in 2008, after which time it will be subject to an exhaustive permitting process involving 11 state and federal agencies, more than 60 individual permits and extensive opportunities for public participation. The permitting process for Pebble is expected to last three years.

"We encourage the Board of Fisheries and all Alaskans to learn more about our project, about the environmental standards it must meet and the regulatory process by which it will be judged," Jenkins said. "Ultimately, we believe that the Board will agree that fishing, mining and traditional ways of life can co-exist, and we look forward to the opportunity to complete our technical and environmental studies and present our project for the consideration of the people of Alaska."