

The Pebble Partnership responds to The Huffington Post

Submitted: January 10, 2008

Glenn Hurowitz's [December 25th post](#) about the proposed Pebble mine in southwest Alaska would have benefited from the addition of some facts, and the subtraction of several clichés about as poignant as a Christmas tree in January.

In Glenn's article, he talks about the "gold lust" of mining company CEOs who want to gild their bathrooms and fill their swimming pools with the precious yellow metal. Unfortunately, the gold mine he's referring to will actually be a copper mine. As much as 95% of the recoverable metal contained in the Pebble orebody is copper.

Somehow, a copper toilet bowl, or filling a swimming pool with pennies, just doesn't create the image of a greedy corporate executive Glenn was shooting for.

And what exactly is driving the demand for copper today? Among some of copper's many uses, as described by the [International Copper Association](#): copper is used in computers to build integrated circuits, chips, and printed circuit boards—many computer makers are now using copper in computer chips instead of aluminum, which makes their production cheaper and allows a computer to make faster calculations; copper is widely used as a superior conductor of electricity—almost all electronic devices rely on copper wiring of some kind; copper is used in water piping, as an inexpensive, water-proof, corrosion-resistant building material—The Statue of Liberty, for example, contains 179,220 pounds of copper—and in-house fixtures, cookware, and flatware; and copper is used in medicine—such as copper-64 and copper-67 isotopes—to study brain function and to treat cancer.

Hybrid cars use about twice as much copper as traditional vehicles. And the metal is required both by emerging countries to build the infrastructure necessary to enhance living standards and by modern countries, like the United States, to sustain economic growth.

But Glenn is talking about gold. And to mine these "piles of gold," he suggests that Pebble will "build the world's biggest dam", that it will "destroy the world's largest salmon fishery," and "prevent the salmon from reaching their spawning grounds." Talk about your doomsday scenarios.

In reality, the Pebble mine hasn't even been designed yet. A proposed development plan for the project is at least a year away, and will undergo several additional years of scrutiny by federal and state agencies before permits are issued.

While there will be a tailings embankment (or dam) proposed as part of the Pebble development, it will not be the tallest in the world. Nor will it prevent salmon from reaching their spawning grounds. Indeed, the goal of mine planning is to ensure that mine facilities are placed in areas with low habitat values and do not disrupt natural systems.

As for destroying the world's largest salmon fishery, this is a physical and practical impossibility. Some 80% of Bristol Bay sockeye are produced in river systems that are in no way connected to the watersheds in which Pebble would be built.

Our goal – indeed our promise to the people of Bristol Bay and Alaska – is that Pebble will not diminish any fishery in the region. In fact, we've said we won't pursue the project if we can't meet this commitment.

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And modern hard rock mines have certainly been shown to co-exist with salmon fisheries in many other places around the world. In fact, Alaska's most famous copper mine – Kennecott – operated for three decades on a tributary of the equally famous Copper River. That's the same Copper River that today produces the premium sockeye salmon in the world – the Copper River Red.

Glenn is correct when he says we are investing hundreds of millions of dollars on environmental studies and other activities necessary to design and permit a responsible mine. We are also already employing hundreds of local people each year, and contributing to the economic diversity of a region with a faltering economy, few job opportunities and significant out-migration among Native communities.

Our aspiration is for Pebble to be developed in partnership with local people to become an environmentally sound and socially responsible project that contributes to a sustainable economic future for southwest Alaska. Not only is it a globally significant copper deposit within the United States – at a time of growing world competition to secure access to mineral resources – Pebble also has the potential to make a major contribution to Alaska's economy.

That means thousands of well-paid jobs for 3-4 generations of Alaskans. New and much needed infrastructure for an under-served region. And billions of dollars in taxes over the life of the mine.

There are many years of hard work to go, however, before permitting is complete and we'll know whether Pebble is the right project for Bristol Bay. In the meantime, we have made and will continue to make our plans available to anyone who's interested in reading about them at <http://www.pebblepartnership.com>. I invite readers to learn more about Pebble so they can make up their own minds (in the absence of golden toilet bowls or other festive clichés).

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