

# Salmon Roulette

Pebble Mine could destroy one of the world's best fisheries

>BY KIRK DEETER

**A** PROPOSED MINE in the heart of Alaska's greatest wild salmon and rainbow trout region is forcing the state to decide if those fish are literally worth their weight in gold and copper.

By most estimates, the Pebble Mine could yield a mother lode of minerals exceeding \$300 billion in value. The richest U.S. mine, the Bingham Canyon Mine in Utah, has grossed approximately \$100 billion to date. Projections show Pebble Mine's copper and gold deposits to be many times greater.

The dilemma is that the Pebble Mine would sit smack in the center of the Bristol Bay watershed, headwaters to the largest wild sockeye salmon fishery in the world. Bristol Bay's commercial salmon harvest accounted for roughly 29 percent of the \$374 million statewide total in 2007. The area is also home to one of the most prolific rainbow trout fisheries in North America, which draws over 65,000 recreational anglers each year, generating more than \$60 million for the Alaskan economy.

Furthermore, Pebble Mine's pollutants might be stored as lakes of toxic waste,

held by giant dams, in an area where earthquakes are common—Bristol Bay lies within the Pacific Ring of Fire. These concerns have galvanized commercial and sport fishing interests into opposing the development of Pebble Mine.

## Wealth or Disaster?

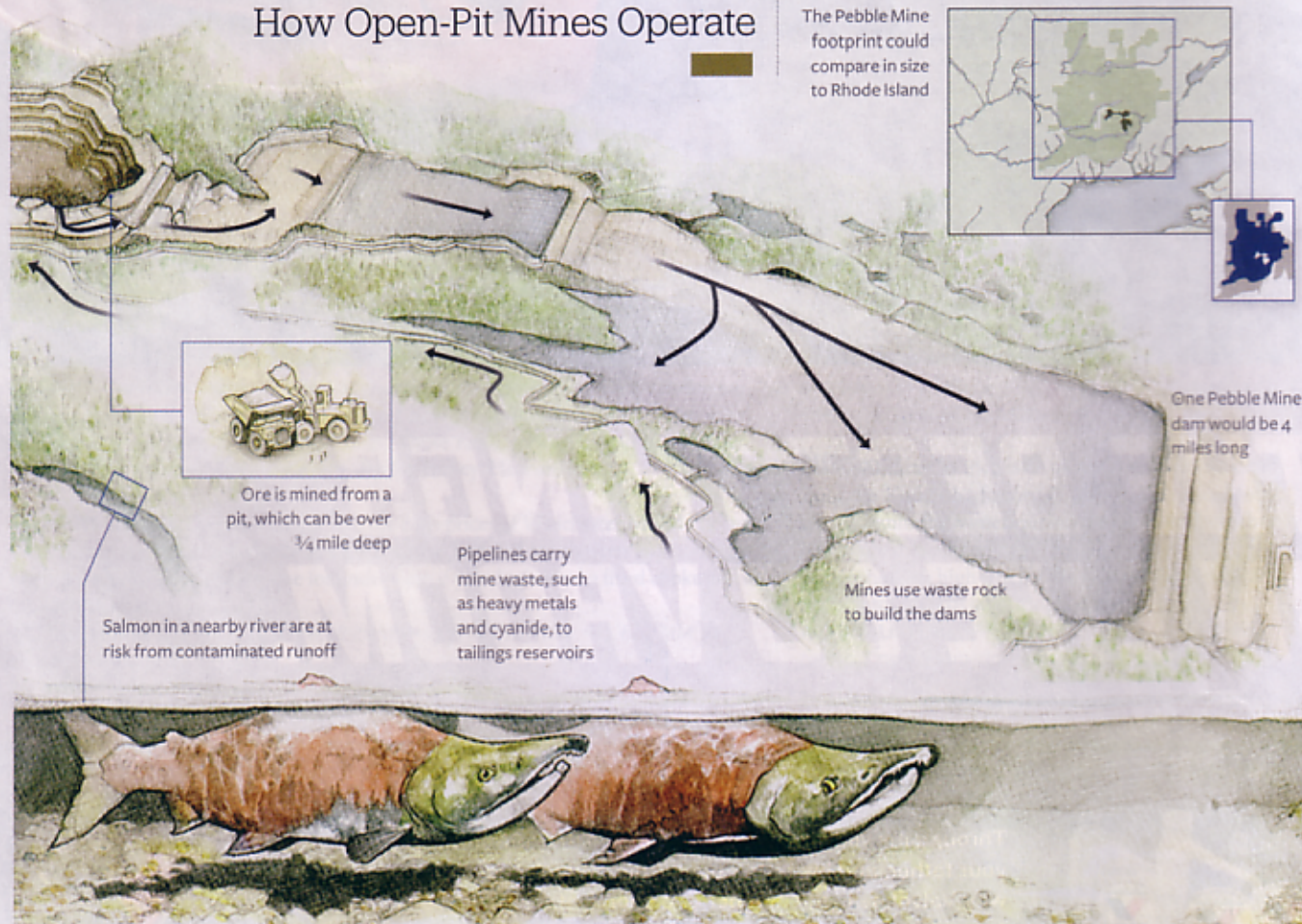
MINE ADVOCATES CONTEND that Pebble could be the next Prudhoe Bay, creating jobs in a region relatively untouched by the Alaskan oil boom. They add that vast scientific resources are being poured into the project to ensure the mine coexists with rivers.

"We have no interest in trading one resource for another," says Sean Magee, director of public affairs for the Canadian-based Pebble Partnership, which represents the mining interests that will research and plan, and could ultimately develop, Pebble Mine. He points out that Northern Dynasty, the company that acquired the mineral exploration rights for \$10 million, will have invested another \$80 million in environmental-impact studies to ascertain the best approach for extracting ore before the digging starts. "We do not want a project that would put at risk the fishery of Bristol Bay," he says. "And we understand that we will be held accountable to that standard."

However, opponents such as Trout Unlimited, the

## How Open-Pit Mines Operate

The Pebble Mine footprint could compare in size to Rhode Island



Ore is mined from a pit, which can be over 1/4 mile deep

Salmon in a nearby river are at risk from contaminated runoff

Pipelines carry mine waste, such as heavy metals and cyanide, to tailings reservoirs

Mines use waste rock to build the dams

One Pebble Mine dam would be 4 miles long

