

## Frontline Video Reflection

### Frontline - Alaska Gold

The segment I watched was called “Alaska Gold”, and it dealt with a growing environmental fight in Alaska’s Bristol Bay Region. The area is one of the largest Salmon fisheries in the world. Salmon is a massive sustainable resource that is very important to the area’s ecosystem and the livelihood of many local families. Nearby to the bay, geologists have discovered largest copper and gold deposit in the world. It is known as the “Pebble Prospect” and lies on the headwaters of the extensive river network that the salmon use as their spawning ground. This is where the salmon come to reproduce, and where newly hatched salmon grow. The potential economic benefits of mining these metals are huge, but so are the environmental risks.

This is a particularly hard problem. It is much easier to identify with something as tangible as the natural beauty of the area and a precious resource like wild salmon. At first glance, the case for building the mine is less apparent, but when you think about the potential amount of economic benefit this mine could have to local communities, the state, and the country through jobs, taxes, and raw material gain, the problem gets more complicated. The project developers continue to emphasize that they think the mine can coexist with the ecosystem through engineering, and being an engineer, I want to believe that this is possible.

I tend to think about this like an equation where you try to equate the potential benefits of the mining project given the risk potential it has to damage the value of the area’s ecosystem. The real problem here is how you value the ecosystem and the things it supports and will support in the future. This is almost a priceless asset, and that is what makes this issue so hard.

After watching the frontline segment, my hope is that the developers will work extremely hard to come up with ways to ensure the protection of the environment. I believe that the mine should be developed, but only with extensive effort and resources devoted to ensuring that the environment goes unharmed.

Courtesy of Philip Crain

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17.922 Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. IAP Design Seminar  
IAP 2013

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