

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE



REPRESENTATIVE LES GARA

October 26, 2011

Governor Sean Parnell
550 West 7th Avenue, Suite 1700
Anchorage, AK 99501

Commissioner Dan Sullivan
Department of Natural Resources
550 W. 7th Ave, Suite 1260
Anchorage, AK 99501-3557

Re: State Decision to Let Dredging Of Chuitna King Salmon Waters Move Forward

Dear Governor Parnell and Commissioner Sullivan:

Alaska has a good track record of responsible mining, at least since statehood. We've developed Red Dog Mine, Ft. Knox, Kensington and others, with little if any wild fisheries impact (Kensington has a detrimental impact on hatchery, not wild fish), and have jealously guarded our fish. The Governor promised he would never trade Alaska's fish for another resource.

But that has all changed with this week's decision to destroy 11 miles of one of the best king salmon streams in the State of Alaska – the Middle Fork tributary of the Chuitna River by Tyonek.

I was deeply disheartened by the recent DNR decision to allow the Chinese Chuitna Coal Mine project to move ahead, which occurred over the objections of the Village of Tyonek and many fishing organizations. Not since statehood has the state allowed a mining project to move ahead that would destroy a wild king salmon riverbed. The argument – that 25 years after destruction, the stream can be re-built – seems erroneous, and takes away a prized fishing stream for a generation of Alaskans.

I would ask for the following information:

1. What is the statutory authority that allows the destruction of a salmon bed for 25 years, and what are the standards for rebuilding it?
2. In 2004 Governor Murkowski's commissioner's weakened the "no pollution in mixing zones" regulation that forbade pollutants in salmon streams. Can you please provide me with a copy of the replacement regulations?

3. What are the examples of wild king salmon streams that have had 11 miles completely dredged (which will drop lethal sediment into the lower parts of the river), and then restored back to their original level of production with wild, and not hatchery fish?

I worry this state has lost its way. Until 2004 we had the strongest fisheries protection standards in the world, and it's no mistake that we have the strongest fish runs in the world. In 2004 Governor Murkowski changed the law. Your administration has now threatened to move ahead with two projects, Pebble Mine and the Chitna Coal Project, that will destroy a way of life for local residents, and threaten to vastly damage this state's prized king and red salmon, trout and other fish that subsistence, commercial and sport fishermen rely upon.

While I suppose we disagree on these projects, I would like the information I have asked for.

Thank you.

Rep. Les Gara