

'Gold Over Life, Literally': How Trump Forced Reversal on Mining Project EPA Scientists Warn Could Destroy Alaskan Salmon Ecosystem

"This is one of the world's most beautiful places, with a thriving salmon run, and now we'll get some...gold."

By [Jon Queally](#)

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"Gold over life, literally."

That was the succinct and critical reaction of Canadian author and activist Naomi Klein to [reporting](#) on Friday that President Donald Trump had personally intervened—after a meeting with Alaska's Republican Governor Mike Dunleavy on Air Force One in June—to withdraw the Environmental Protection Agency's opposition to a gold mining project in the state that the federal government's own scientists have acknowledged would destroy native fisheries and undermine the state's fragile ecosystems.

So Trump meets Alaska's governor in his airplane and agrees to push through a goldmine that had been stopped b/c it will devastate salmon habitat. This at a time that orcas are already starving death. Salmon carry entire ecosystems on their backs. Gold over life, literally. <https://t.co/QcT2UosP0g>

— Naomi Klein (@NaomiAKlein) [August 9, 2019](#)

Based on [reporting](#) by *CNN* that only emerged Friday evening, the key developments happened weeks ago after Trump's one-on-one meeting with Dunleavy—who has supported the copper and gold Pebble Mine project in Bristol Bay despite the opposition of conservationists, Indigenous groups, salmon fisheries experts, and others.

The EPA told staff scientists that it was no longer opposing a controversial Alaska mining project that could devastate one of the world's most valuable wild salmon fisheries, just one day after President Trump met with Alaska's governor, *CNN* has learned <https://t.co/vJmjAYfSw4> pic.twitter.com/TFGjPxSeAR

— *CNN* (@CNN) [August 9, 2019](#)

CNN reports:

In 2014, the project was halted because an EPA study found that it would cause "complete loss of fish habitat due to elimination, dewatering, and

fragmentation of streams, wetlands, and other aquatic resources” in some areas of Bristol Bay. The agency invoked a rarely used provision of the Clean Water Act that works like a veto, effectively banning mining on the site.

“If that mine gets put in, it would ... completely devastate our region,” Gayla Hoseth, second chief of the Curyung Tribal Council and a Bristol Bay Native Association director, told CNN. “It would not only kill our resources, but it would kill us culturally.”

EPA just lifted a restriction blocking [#PebbleMine](#) — which would decimate 3,500+ acres of Alaskan wetlands

"Yet again, the agency charged with protecting our public health and environment is abandoning science to advance the interests of a wealthy few." <https://t.co/8aCOe63eCq>

— Friends of the Earth (@foe_us) [August 5, 2019](#)

When the internal announcement was made by Trump political appointees that the agency was dropping its opposition, which came one day after the Trump-Dunleavy meeting, sources told *CNN* it came as a “total shock” to some of the top EPA scientists who were planning to oppose the project on environmental grounds. Sources for the story, the news outlet noted, “asked to remain anonymous for fear of retribution.”

According to *CNN*:

Four EPA sources with knowledge of the decision told CNN that senior agency officials in Washington summoned scientists and other staffers to an internal videoconference on June 27, the day after the Trump-Dunleavy meeting, to inform them of the agency’s reversal. The details of that meeting are not on any official EPA calendar and have not previously been reported.

Those sources said the decision disregards the standard assessment process under the Clean Water Act, cutting scientists out of the process.

The EPA’s new position on the project is the latest development in a decade-long battle that has pitted environmentalists, Alaskan Natives and the fishing industry against pro-mining interests in Alaska.

Responding to Klein’s tweet, fellow author and activist Bill McKibben—long a colleague of hers at 350.org—expressed similar contempt.

“This is one of the world’s most beautiful places, with a thriving salmon run, and now we’ll get some...gold,” McKibben [tweeted](#). Trump, he added, is “President Midas.”

It’s all so tragic, and criminal. <https://t.co/SB02V25G9P>

— Bonnie Bates (@bonniebates51) [August 10, 2019](#)

After being told that the decision was made, one EPA inside told *CNN*,

“I was dumbfounded. We were basically told we weren’t going to examine anything. We were told to get out of the way and just make it happen.”

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