



CHUITNA CITIZENS COALITION

NEWS RELEASE

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February 3, 2010

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

Dennis Gann (907) 299-2239

Alaskans Ask Governor to Decide: Salmon or Coal?

Proposed Chuitna coal mine in Cook Inlet would mine through salmon stream

JUNEAU, Alaska – Alaska Gov. Sean Parnell must decide whether he will support a proposed coal mine that will rip through 11 miles of salmon-bearing streams, or Alaska's wild salmon after he received a petition today signed by over 1,500 Alaskans who support fish habitat protections.

The petition asks Parnell to help protect the livelihoods of Alaskans who depend on healthy salmon populations, and urges him to protect fish and game resources from the massive proposed Chuitna coal strip mine in the Upper Cook Inlet.

The proposed coal strip mine would be the first large mine project in the state's history allowed to mine directly through 11 miles of vibrant salmon habitat if the Alaska Department of Natural Resources gives the mine the go-ahead. Governor Parnell could order the department to protect the Chuitna River – one of Cook Inlet's most vital salmon streams. It was named one of the nation's most endangered rivers in 2007 because of the threat posed by the mine.

"We're just ordinary Alaskans who love to hunt and fish," said Judy Heilman, a resident of Beluga. "But a couple of Texas millionaires are planning to mine through our salmon streams so China can get cheap energy. But it's not cheap for us, and it's not fair."

In a speech to the Resource Development Council on September 3, 2009, Governor Parnell stated he would "never trade one resource for another." Yet state agencies – including the Alaska Department of Fish and Game – continue to consider permitting documents that will allow the project to destroy salmon resources in exchange for coal destined for Asian markets. While Alaska bureaucrats often hail the state's so-called rigorous permitting regime, Alaska currently has no law that bans mining directly through a salmon stream.

"We're pro-development," said Bobbi Burnett with the Chuitna Citizens Coalition. "We've had excellent relations with the oil and gas industry in our backyard for many years. But this massive coal strip mine will destroy our hunting and fishing habitat. It's not responsible development."

Last year, scientists produced a series of reports which concluded the proposed Chuitna coal strip mine

would permanently destroy salmon resources feeding the rich Chuitna River in Upper Cook Inlet. Additionally, the reports found that science does not support PacRim's claims that the area could be restored to sustain salmon after twenty five years or more of mining.

"The Governor has to decide whether he's for wild Alaska salmon or dirty coal," Heilman said. "We can't have both."

The Chuitna Citizens Coalition is an association of residents and property owners near the communities of Beluga and Tyonek working to protect fish and wildlife resources from the proposed Chuitna coal strip mine.