

The Bay area is home to the world's largest wild salmon fishery which contributes to the economic prosperity of the state of Alaska and the nation. On March 31, 2010, President Obama announced that he would disallow federal drilling near the waters of Bristol Bay. Secretary Salazar said that some places are "simply too special to drill." However, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) manages onshore lands that surround Bristol Bay that are just as important to this important ecosystem. If onshore lands and waters are opened to hardrock mining and oil and gas development, these actions could permanently disrupt salmon streams and pollute clean waters. In order to ensure a strong future for the sustainable and renewable resources throughout the region and the families who depend on them, BLM must prioritize clean water, wildlife habitat and human health over activities that leave a legacy of pollution – such as mineral and oil and gas development.



BLM opened 99 percent of its 2 million acres to mineral development!

The 2008 Record of Decision (ROD) for the Bay planning area opened 2.0 million acres of BLM-managed lands in the planning area to mining and leasing. The Bay Resource Management Plan (RMP) revoked historic mineral withdrawals: a significant action that opened over 99 percent of the pristine planning area to mineral development and habitat disturbance. The BLM failed to properly review the sustainable values of the Bay planning area in their undeveloped nature and has inaccurately found that allowing mineral development is the best economic choice for the region.

The BLM overlooked the longevity of the fishery in comparison to the boom and bust nature of mineral development and its potentially devastating impacts to the fishery – that could ultimately result in long term economic losses. The agency justifies this planning decision in the belief that there will be low interest in resource development but this decision is an important one, as it will forever open a door to development that is incredibly hard to shut.

Carter Spit ACEC – 36,220 acres. Though designated as an Area of Critical Environmental Concern, the BLM did not provide any real protections to maintain species diversity and protect critical habitat for the threatened Steller's Eider and other migratory birds, harbor seals, brown bears, and rare and endangered plant species. This area contains subsistence resources and cultural sites important to local communities. Despite these important values and resources, the agency opened this critical area to oil and gas and mineral development.

- The BLM prepare a special fish and wildlife management plan under this Record of Decision.
- Under the BLM's Record of Decision, the entire area is open to oil and gas leasing and hardrock development, subject to discretionary "required operating procedures" and stipulations.

Bristol Bay ACEC (NOT DESIGNATED IN THE RMP DESPITE PUBLIC SUPPORT) - 989,202 acres.

Along with the incredible fisheries resources the area provides: calving grounds and winter range for the Mulchatna Caribou Herd, spawning grounds for five species of salmon and freshwater fish, year round habitat for moose, summer fisheries forage base for brown bears, and habitat for nesting trumpeter and tundra swans. Despite these amazing natural resources, under the BLM's management plan, this area is not afforded any protections! Bristol Bay fisheries are the backbone.

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of the regional economy - employing over 12,000 people and contributing \$450 million annually to the state of Alaska. Sport anglers and hunters generate \$60 million annually and 25 native and rural communities depend on the health of the system for subsistence and their traditional way of life. Bristol Bay has a long history of international, national, and state acknowledgement as deserving protections for the remarkable and unmatched fisheries resources – yet BLM has elected to ignore the best interests of the public.

- A special management plan for fish and wildlife was not established.
- The entire area is open to oil and gas leasing and hardrock development subject to general regulations.

Summary of Management Alternatives Chosen Alternative for the Record of Decision

Alternative A	The ‘no action’ alternative: all lands would remain closed to oil and gas leasing, and hard rock mining.
Alternative B	The pro-development alternative: recommends lifting historic withdrawals to allow mineral development on all BLM lands. No rivers found eligible for Wild and Scenic River nominations.
Alternative C <u>Alaska Wilderness League’s preferred Alternative</u>	The pro-conservation alternative: recommends designating Carter Spit area and Bristol Bay as ACECs closed to hardrock mineral development with seasonal restrictions for oil and gas leasing. Portions of the Goodnews and Alagnak Rivers to would be nominated as Wild and Scenic Rivers and closed to hardrock development. Seasonal restrictions on oil and gas leases would be enacted in caribou calving grounds and aggregation areas.
Alternative D	BLM’s ‘preferred alternative’: Same as alternative B with the exception that there will be seasonal restrictions for oil and gas leasing in the Carter Spit ACEC and caribou calving and aggregation areas. <i>Does not designate the Bristol Bay ACEC and finds no rivers eligible for Wild and Scenic River status.</i>

Stakeholder Action

Nunamta Aulukestai, Alaska Wilderness League, Alaska Bear Trail Sportsman’s Lodge and several conservation groups submitted a group protest opposing the management prescriptions of the Bay RMP.

We can still take action to secure real protections for the entire Bay area!

The BLM is tasked to act in the public’s best interest and balance uses in a way that ensures protection of the resources for future generations. Despite this mandate the BLM has prioritized mineral activities over all others, even in areas that the BLM has identified as worthy of protections.

Within the plan, BLM states, “an area in the beginning stages of economic development could become unprofitable by imposing restrictive guidelines.” BLM further states that lease values could be reduced as a result of the “application of stipulations and regulations” that could increase operating costs.¹ BLM’s statements undermine even the least stringent regulations that it has placed on sensitive areas by making them discretionary instead of mandatory.

These decisions further threaten a region already under pressure by mineral and oil and gas developers. To ensure Bristol Bay resources remain healthy, follow-up action and proper congressional oversight must be taken to encourage BLM to reconsider these potentially damaging decisions before irreversible damage is done. The nation needs BLM to prioritize existing uses and protect sensitive areas while taking a balanced approach to responsible development.

The public and stake holders worked with the agency through the entire administrative process with no result. We are now urging BLM to make an effort to work with the public stakeholder to find solutions and a balance for development and protection. The BLM needs to put 17(d)1 withdrawals back in place, thoroughly inventory wilderness characteristics, and apply more importance to a conservation alternative than to the oil and gas, and mining interests.

¹ Bay Proposed Resource Management Plan and Environmental Impact Statement at 2-81.