

THE CHUITNA: ONE OF 2007'S MOST ENDANGERED RIVERS

SUMMARY

A massive, proposed coal strip mine threatens Alaska's pristine Chuitna River, which produces some of the state's largest Chinook (king) salmon. Unless state and federal agencies reject permits for the project, the proposed mine will destroy this wild river's surrounding watershed and dump billions of gallons of mining waste into rich fisheries habitat every year. Beyond the obvious impacts of this huge mine, state and federal agencies should also consider the effects of more greenhouse gases in a state known as "Ground Zero" for global warming.



THE RIVER

Located 45 miles west of Anchorage, the Chuitna River flows freely for 25 miles from its headwaters at the base of the Alaska Range before emptying into Cook Inlet. With only one unpaved road crossing, the river supports a diverse and unique fabric of life, including all five species of North American Pacific wild salmon, trout, Dolly Varden, bald eagles, trumpeter swans, sandhill cranes, shorebirds, songbirds, grizzly and black bears, moose, beaver and small mammals.

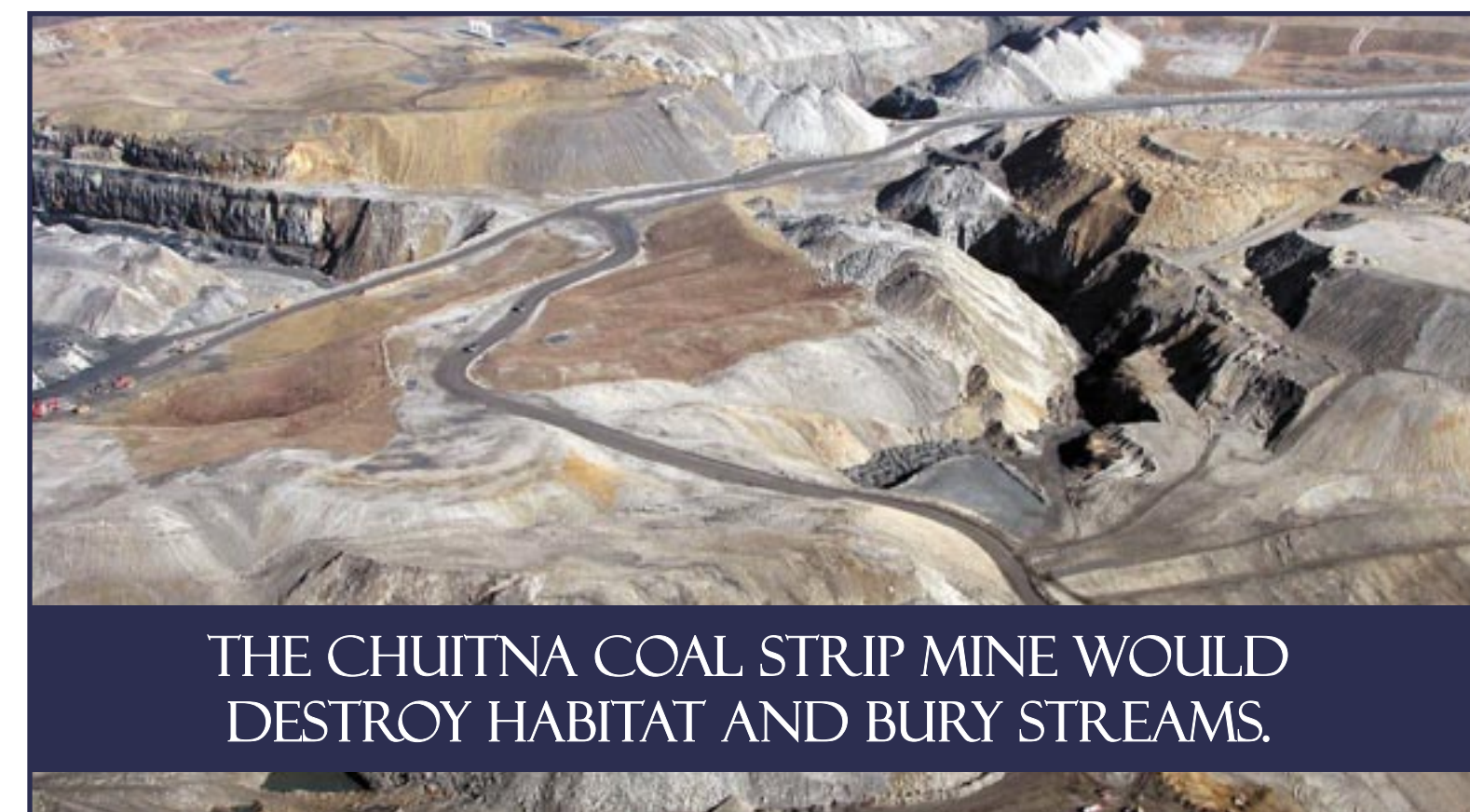
Two communities — Tyonek (largely Alaska Natives) and Beluga — lie near the river's mouth. Because there is no road access to the villages, these communities rely heavily on year-round subsistence fishing, hunting and trapping. Alaska Natives have relied on the rich fisheries of the river for thousands of years. Recreational and commercial hunting and fishing also occur along the river, generating needed revenues for local residents.



PRISTINE ALASKAN WATERS

THE THREAT

The Chuitna River is under immediate threat from PacRim Coal's proposed Chuitna Coal Project, a massive strip mine on a permitting fast-track that will extract a staggering one billion metric tons of coal. Two new developments have revived interest in this mine, which was originally authorized in 1990. First, Asian and other markets are clamoring for cheap energy. On top of this demand, plans to build the massive Pebble gold and copper mine nearby would require significant new power production, and coal is a likely source.



THE CHUITNA COAL STRIP MINE WOULD DESTROY HABITAT AND BURY STREAMS.

WHAT'S AT STAKE

This massive mine will have an adverse impact on this biologically significant river. The proposed project will discharge more than 7 million gallons of mining wastes per day into tributaries of the Chuitna River. The mining pollution will severely threaten resident fish and salmon spawning beds. One salmon-bearing tributary of the Chuitna will be mined directly. The mine will also disturb more than 30 square miles of the watershed, including the wetlands that sustain the water quality of the Chuitna River.

Even in the unlikely event that the mine avoids a single illegal discharge, the project will pollute and negatively affect water flow in and around important salmon spawning and other fish and wildlife habitat. Burning more coal could even increase the mercury in Alaska's prized fisheries. This will pose a significant threat to the communities that lie near the river's mouth and depend upon subsistence, commercial and recreational fishing.



ALL FIVE SPECIES OF PACIFIC WILD SALMON

COAL AND CLIMATE CHANGE

On an even larger scale, coal-fired power plants are one of the largest single human-generated sources of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere. A massive new coal mine in Alaska would contribute to global warming in a state already witnessing melting glaciers and warming salmon streams. Alaska should protect those natural ecosystems that are the best defense against the climate disruption the state is already experiencing. For decades to come, Alaskans will bear the full costs of environmental degradation, while a private company reaps profits from its destructive strip mine.



RESIDENTS ARE CONCERNED ABOUT AIR POLLUTION FROM COAL DUST.

WHAT MUST BE DONE

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) will issue a final Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement by summer 2007. Additionally, the state of Alaska has convened its Large Mine Permitting Team to oversee all of the permits necessary for the mine's approval. Final permits and authorizations are expected late in 2007. The EPA and the Large Mine Permitting Team should reject these permits, resisting pressure from mine operators.

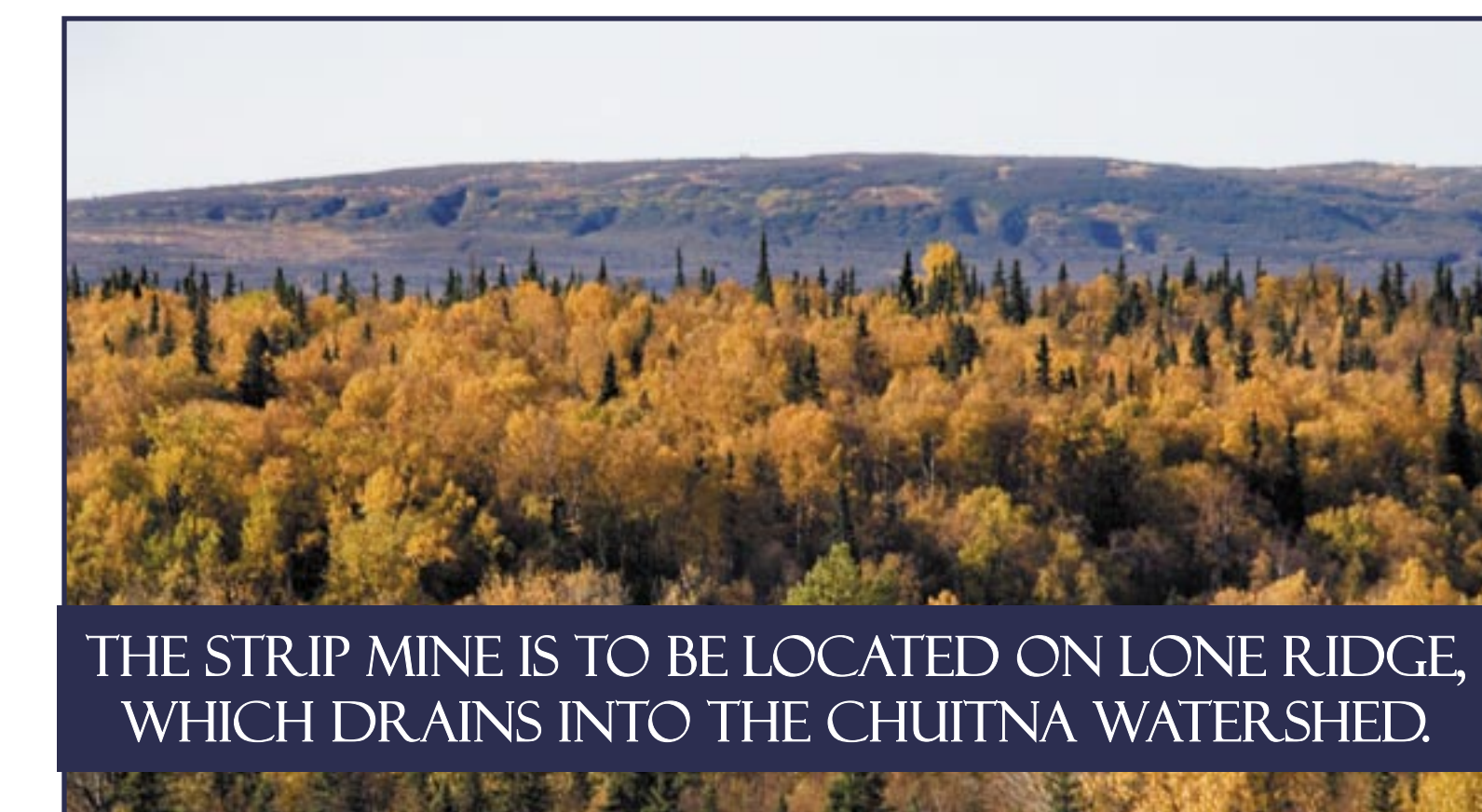
The Alaska Legislature recently created the Alaska Climate Impact Assessment Commission to offer recommendations and provide possible solutions to minimize the impact of global warming. The Commission must not ignore the impacts of coal production and combustion on the Chuitna River and other wild Alaskan salmon streams in their final report and proposals for action to the Legislature.



FRAGILE WETLANDS AND HABITAT

TAKE ACTION

Coal strip mines have already devastated landscapes and communities in the lower 48 states, and we want to prevent this from happening in a state that cherishes its wildlands and in a state that can think differently about its energy needs due to its vast potential for renewable energy solutions. You can make a difference by writing a letter to the editor, contacting your state legislators, and testifying in opposition to the Chuitna Coal Strip Mine Project. You can also get more information about this and other mining projects in Alaska by visiting the websites provided below.



THE STRIP MINE IS TO BE LOCATED ON LONE RIDGE, WHICH DRAINS INTO THE CHUITNA WATERSHED.

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