



December 12, 2011

Governor Sean Parnell
State of Alaska
P.O. Box 110001
Juneau, AK 99811-0001

RE: REQUEST TO CORRECT MISINFORMATION TO ALASKANS

Dear Governor Parnell:

Hundreds of Alaskans wrote to you expressing serious concerns about your Administration's recent decision refusing to designate salmon streams in the Chuitna watershed as unsuitable for coal strip mining. The form letter reply to these Alaskans, however, contained several misstatements, and we're writing now to ask you to correct the record and to provide Alaskans with the facts surrounding this important issue.

For example, the letter from your office¹ states: "*Had the Chuitna watershed been designated by this petition alone as unsuitable for coal mining, any type of surface coal development project of any size by any entity in the area would have been prevented from seeking permits in the future.*"

This is patently false. A simple reading of the title of the petition clearly shows our organizations simply asked you and your Administration to designate **the streambeds of anadromous water bodies and riparian areas within the Chuitna River Watershed** as unsuitable for surface coal mining. Had you and your Administration agreed salmon streams should be protected from coal strip mining in and around salmon streams, such decision would in no way have precluded mining elsewhere in the watershed. To suggest otherwise is a gross misrepresentation, and on this issue alone you should issue a correction to the Alaskans who wrote you.

Your letter also claims: "*Commissioner Sullivan's decision is consistent with a similar decision made by former Commissioner Tom Irwin in 2007.*" This too is false. Commissioner Irwin's 2007 decision never reached the merits of the petition – i.e. whether it's feasible to re-build a salmon stream after large scale coal strip mining. Suggesting otherwise misleads Alaskans into thinking Commissioner Sullivan's decision rests on previous precedent, which it does not.

¹ Despite the fact Alaskans wrote directly to you, their Governor, on an issue vitally important to them (wild, healthy Alaska salmon), you apparently did not find the issue compelling enough to put your own name on your Administration's correspondence.

Finally, your letter states: “*The assertion that reclamation in this area is technically feasible has been consistently upheld by Alaska’s courts.*” Again, this is false. The case in point (*Trustees for Alaska vs. Gorsuch*) actually resulted in an invalidated permit. Additionally, reclamation science has evolved considerably since *Gorsuch*, and today we have a more realistic understanding of the functions and values that support wild salmon streams.

Alaskans increasingly recognize the dangerous precedent posed by the Chuitna coal strip mine; if you allow a coal strip mine to destroy 11 miles of wild Alaska salmon habitat in Cook Inlet, that decision will become state policy. That’s why it’s more important than ever for you, as Governor and Chief Executive of the State of Alaska, to provide honest and objective information to Alaskans. To do otherwise simply undermines confidence in our elected officials and the permitting process surrounding large mine development.

We hope you agree debates over resource conflicts between wild salmon and coal strip mining should be waged on a level playing field of facts and science. Accordingly, we formally request you correct the misinformation you sent to Alaskans on this issue.

Sincerely,



Judy Heilman
Chuitna Citizens Coalition



Bob Shavelson
Cook Inletkeeper