



PRESS RELEASE

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DUNLEAVY PLANS TO INCREASE INDUSTRY POLLUTION IN COOK INLET FISHERIES

Contrary to Law, Toxic Discharges from Oil & Gas Facilities Will Increase

HOMER, AK—Cook Inletkeeper today called-out the Dunleavy Administration for weakening a key Clean Water Act permit that will allow the oil and gas industry to increase toxic dumping in prime salmon, halibut, and beluga whale habitat. The proposed permit covers oil and gas production wastes from offshore platforms and other facilities in Cook Inlet.

“I’ve never seen more egregious pollution rollbacks anywhere in Alaska,” said Bob Shavelson, Inletkeeper’s Advocacy Director. “Cook Inlet is already the only coastal water body in the nation where industry enjoys a toxic dumping loophole. Now it’s clear ADEC simply asked the industry what it wanted to dump, then built a shoddy permit around it.”

The proposed permit relies on massive mixing zones in Cook Inlet to dilute billions of gallons of industry waste streams; the area within these mixing zones fails to meet state water quality standards designed to protect fisheries and other uses. Industry waste streams contain toxic hydrocarbons and heavy metals, including mercury, lead, cadmium and arsenic.

“Clean water and healthy fish and wildlife are the backbone of Cook Inlet and are vital to subsistence, recreational, and commercial users,” said Maresa Jenson, a lawyer with the public interest law firm Trustees for Alaska, which submitted detailed comments on the draft permit. “Instead of protecting these important resources, the State is ignoring the law and letting industry dump billions of gallons of toxic waste into Cook Inlet waters and fisheries.”

In order to accommodate increased pollution from aging Cook Inlet fields, ADEC used inaccurate computer models to increase the size of the mixing zones. For example, at the permit's largest discharge point at Trading Bay on the west side of Cook Inlet, ADEC increased the size of the mixing zone more than 80%, creating a sacrifice zone nearly 3 miles across in Cook Inlet where industry does not have to meet basic standards to protect fish, wildlife, and human health.

In a letter today to ADEC Commissioner Jason Brune, Inletkeeper wrote: "In your short time as Commissioner, ADEC has already come under heavy criticism for its anti-science approach to the PFAS problems across the state. Now, your agency has proposed a permit for oil and gas discharges in Cook Inlet that turns science on its head, and makes a mockery of the state and federal laws and rules governing water pollution."

Importantly, ADEC's draft permit fails to protect human health.

"Our village is concerned about our subsistence foods," said Tom Evans, a resident of the Native Village of Nanwalek in Lower Cook Inlet. "In 2003, EPA found the same types of chemicals in our fish and shellfish as the ones dumped by the oil and gas industry. But that study got swept under the rug."

ADEC's refusal to embrace science and law in Cook Inlet raises questions for other projects across the state, including the proposed Pebble mine.

"During your confirmation hearings, over two thousand Alaskans expressed their concerns with your willingness and ability to apply facts and science to your permitting decisions. One commenter noted "[p]utting Brune at the helm here in Alaska will make it impossible for Alaskans to trust that fair, science based and honest decisions will be made in permitting for Pebble," Inletkeeper wrote to Brune.

"So, the question becomes, if you're willing to ignore science and law with toxic industry dumping in Cook Inlet fisheries, what confidence should Alaskans have in your decisions regarding Pebble?," the letter asked.

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