Celebrating National Seafood Month

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Alaska's mining industry sees another record year

The Alaska mining industry, which topped $1 billion for the first time in 1996, continued its record growth in 1997, according to the latest edition of the annual report Alaska's Mineral Industry, released by the state last month.

"Alaska's world-class mineral deposits continue to attract attention from around the globe," said Governor Tony Knowles. "The mining industry continues to show strong growth thanks to the healthy partnership between the industry and state," Knowles added.

"That partnership means making Alaska open and ready for business by working with industry to expedite the permitting process while the mining industry works with the state to do development right, which means protecting Alaska's air, water and fish and wildlife habitat."

The rise follows on the heels of a 10 percent improvement over 1995 levels. According to the report, exploration investment of $57.8 million in 1997 was up 30 percent from 1996, and production expenditures of $936.2 million were up 59 percent. Those increases combined to more than offset a 57 percent decline in development expenditures from $394 million in 1996 to $168.4 million in 1997.

A record number of mines were developed around Alaska in 1997, despite falling metal prices. Pictured above is the Red Dog Mine which is currently increasing production.
Agencies move to implement federal Clean Water Action Plan

The Clinton Administration’s Clean Water Action Plan (CWAP) is becoming a reality. This summer federal and state agencies took one of the first steps toward implementing the plan. Under guidelines set forth in the CWAP, the Clinton administration requested each state prioritize its watersheds in anticipation of additional funding for water quality monitoring and restoration.

The plan directed the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and state environmental agencies to convene a watershed prioritization process this past summer and to submit a list by October 1 to ranking watersheds in need of restoration and protection. The plan’s short time frame made it extremely difficult for the Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation (ADEC) to compile detailed information about dozens of watersheds.

Many of our readers are familiar with the 303(d) impaired waterbody list, waterbodies identified by the state as not meeting federal water quality standards. ADEC did its homework on the most recent impaired waterbody list, but it took years to compile the information—not months.

As for the Clean Water Action Plan, NRCS and ADEC set forward a process to determine what watersheds in Alaska require either restoration (Category I) or protection (Category II). There are also pristine watersheds (Category III) and watersheds with insufficient data (Category IV), but initially NRCS and ADEC had set out to look at Categories I & II.

RDC began closely tracking this effort in July, given the potential regulatory impact and greater federal involvement in water quality management in Alaska. The initial process of nominating the first list of watersheds had some problems. First, because of the rigidity in the timeline, certain essential stakeholders were not appropriately involved in the process. Second, many of the watersheds that were picked were initially selected on “best professional judgment” and not strict scientific guidelines.

After NRCS and ADEC took public input on the list, they convened a final work group meeting and submitted a draft to ADEC Commissioner Michele Brown who in turn submitted a list to EPA upon her final approval.

The final product is a reasonable first step. Alaska’s Unified Water Assessment submittal includes Category I watersheds/waterbodies, presented in two groups. The first priority includes nine items, most of which are from the impaired waterbody list. The second priority consists of the remaining waterbodies on the 303(d) list.

Using items from the impaired waterbody list for waters in need of restoration makes sense given the information available on those waters. ADEC will nominate any Category II watersheds at this time. Identifying those waterways in need of protection is much more difficult since many of the watersheds that were initially in this category were nominated because of potential development that might occur years from now.

RDC will encourage EPA to simplify its efforts to regulate water use by coordinating the impaired water bodies program with the new Clean Water initiative.

A more thorough process could be created by slowing the evaluation cycle and coordinating the two programs. RDC believes one process and one list is sufficient. Also, clear definitions of watersheds and waterbodies need to be spelled out to the public. How are they the same, how are they different?

Federal funding for the Clean Water Action Plan is not assured. It is not clear at this time how much money will be directed to the various agencies charged with administering the plan. Also, Category II is the regulatory outlet of the program.

RDC will keep you informed as other parts of the CWAP unfold.

members of the Alaska Forest Association (AFA) have voluntarily adopted new habitat protection standards for timber harvests near salmon streams.

“...This is a very progressive move,” said Executive Director Jack Phelps. “Our companies are again taking the lead in applying science to practical, on-the-ground activities. By voluntarily going beyond the current requirements of the law protecting fish habitat, they are demonstrating their commitment to scientific forest management and the spirit of the Forest Practices Act.”

AFA proposed new fish habitat protections to the Board of Forestry last January. The standards, developed in cooperation with state agencies and commercial fishing interests, were based on the body of science which has identified salmon habitat as a key factor in productivity for salmon runs.

“..."AFA members have decided to implement the standards anyway, and will begin going so in the next operating season. The measures include adding 66-foot riparian buffers along all streams containing salmon, imposing tougher-slope stability standards for land development and mining projects, and encouraging operators to leave trees in place along the upper reaches of streams where it is both beneficial to the stream and economic to do so..."

"...Our own studies helped identify the value of the new standards," said Phelps. "AFA members are dedicated to following the science."

Alaska’s mining industry sees record growth in ‘97

Exploration was widespread throughout the state. Highlighted the addition of new reserves at the Red Dog mine near Kotzebue, doubling of the resource at Pebble Copper near Iliamna and at Donlin Creek near Iliadford, identification of a 4.5-million ounce high-grade gold resource at Pogo near Delta, and many exciting prospects throughout the Interior and Southwest Alaska.

Development projects included work on the mine and port site at Red Dog, on the pit and leach pad at Illinois Creek mine, and tailings dam at Fort Knox, and permitting at the Kensington Mine near Juneau, which is now fully permitted.

“Despite falling metal prices and market concerns, there was a record number of mining locations established in Alaska in 1997,” said Department of Natural Resources Commissioner John Shively. “Exploration and future production will be vital, especially in areas where mineral development provides well-paid jobs.”

Mining employment increased by 3 percent overall to 3,862 jobs, with decreases in the development sector, but increases in production jobs. These changes, along with higher gold employment, reflected Fort Knox and Illinois Creek mines becoming operational during 1997. Hardrock mine employment also increased during the year, due to increased production at Red Dog and Greens Creek mines, and the commissioning of the Fort Knox and Illinois Creek mines. Coal mining and rock production employment was essentially the same in 1996, but extensive road building in Southeast and Southwest Alaska caused a substantial increase in employment in sand and gravel production.
Similarities abound among Alaska's basic industries

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program. The largest employer in the state, the seafood industry is one of the few sectors in Alaska with entry-level positions available. People without much training or work experience can find opportunities. We take every chance to learn from other Alaskan employers what is working and what lessons they have learned. Involvement in organizations like RDC prevent us from "reinventing the wheel."

As the saying goes, "there is strength in numbers." Departments of Environmental Conservation and Fish and Game are just two examples. Business needs to stick together. As the saying goes, "there is strength in numbers."

RDC members, primarily resource-based industries, also have similar concerns related to permitting, especially when it comes to air and water quality issues, as well as extraction rights. We all need permits to conduct business. The process of permitting can be a critical issue if conducted in the wrong way. Glancing at the agencies listed in the chart above, it becomes very apparent the role regulators have in seafood operations.

Environmental groups have forced resource-based industries to become well-versed in public relations. Educating the public about who we are and what we do is an area consuming more of our time and, of course, our budgets. By belonging to groups like RDC, we are able to pool efforts to keep pace with campaigns opposing resource development. Another similarity among Alaska's basic industries is the market place. The seafood industry shares its primarily-Asian market with many other industries in Alaska, including mining and timber. The challenges Alaska's basic industries are facing today because of the Asian "crisis" have been a topic facing today because of the Asian "crisis" have been a topic of several RDC meetings. It will take many people using creative strategies to overcome the challenges posed by the global economic downturn.

Birds of a feather do flock together and I believe the seafood industry is a logical component of RDC's long-established membership base. I believe it is important for all of us to learn more about each other's industry and to work closer together on common issues. It will help as we move forward in finding solutions to our common problems.

Since October is National Seafood Month, quit beefing and eat more seafood! Stephanie Madsen is Executive Director of the Aleutian Seafood Processors Association.
Red Dog isn't just a mine, it's a world-class zinc deposit. Located 90 miles north of Kotzebue, Red Dog is the largest zinc concentrate producer in the world. The mine sits on lands owned by NANA Regional Corporation and leased by Cominco. Both NANA and Cominco are working together to expand Red Dog production by 40 percent while securing the mine's production life for 50 years. At top right, RDC board members, staff and guests gather at the mine. Pictured are Ken Freeman, Frank Brown, Amanda Marvin, Tara Candelaria, Mark Anderson, Rep. Jeannette James, Mark Hanley, Debbie Reinwand, Elizabeth Rensch and Allen Bingham. At bottom right, Alice Brown, Scott Thorson, Brent Horn and Robert Nelson join the group for a photo opportunity at the Red Dog port site on the Chukchi Sea. One of two large concentrate storage buildings can be seen in the background. Below, a conveyor tube carries the concentrates to barges offshore. Fifteen vessels a season ship the concentrates to foreign markets.

The “Three Swedes” credited with the first discovery of gold at Anvil Creek near Nome in 1898, are honored in this new memorial in downtown Nome. (Photo by Frank Brown)

Frank and Alice Brown, as well as Mark Hanley try gold panning on Anvil Creek. (Photo by Frank Brown)