

The new Pebble Partnership mine proposal and associated infrastructure now stretch from the Bristol Bay side of the mountains to the Cook Inlet side. The application submitted to the Army Corps of Engineers includes a deep water port at Amakdedori beach and road that stretches across prime bear habitat from near Kokhanok, AK to Amakdedori beach. This proposed road comes within a mile of the McNeil River State Game Refuge boundary and the port facility is within sight of a popular bear viewing destination.

McNeil River State Game Sanctuary was established by the Alaska State Legislature in 1967 to preserve the unique congregation of brown bears at McNeil Falls. When under regulated human behavior began to impact the bears in the early 70's a lottery system for access was put into place to limit and structure human presence in the area. This carefully regulated system and the practices developed at McNeil are the foundation for the modern bear viewing industry.

The proposal to put a deep water port so close to the the boundary of the refuge would have negative impact on both the bears in the area that make up this unique congregation and visitors to the the sanctuary and refuge who enjoy wilderness and solitude.

Possible direct effects on bear population:

1. Increased noise levels from construction might deter bears from coming to McNeil River Falls.
2. Dredging off Amakdedori Beach might affect schooling of salmon or Dolly Varden before they run up Chenik Creek, McNeil River and Mikfik Creek. McNeil bears are known to eat fish in these as well as other stream systems in the area.
3. Noise from increased large vessel traffic (boats moving product from the terminal at Amakdedori to the Kenai Peninsula) might affect bear behavior and use of McNeil River by bears.
4. It is likely that there will be increased contact between bears that use McNeil River and humans outside of the McNeil River program that could result in food conditioning of bears or direct mortality of bears by intolerant humans.
5. The road and resulting traffic would fragment habitat and and bisect a travel corridor potentially deterring bears utilizing McNeil Refuge and Sanctuary.
6. Industrial facility in the heart of bear country increases the likelihood of bears becoming food conditioned thus reducing safety for visitors in the sanctuary and refuge.

Disturbance and displacement of bears from increased noise or perturbation of food resources in surrounding areas could diminish the high value visitor experience now associated with MR:

1. Increased airborne noise could diminish the high value visitor experience now associated with MR.
2. Increased waterborne noise could affect distribution and abundance of marine fauna, diminishing the high value visitor experience now associated with MR.

Direct or indirect effects of project on bears that use MR would also affect the MR Visitor Program:

1. Displacement of bears could reduce the number of bears viewed by people, resulting in a diminished viewing experience.
2. Direct mortality of bears from humans would affect the immediate population of bears using MR.
3. Because the viewing program at MR is structured around consistency of human behavior in the Sanctuary and especially around bears, many bears using the area have become habituated over time. The habituation extends into subsequent generations, as young bears typically follow their mothers' feeding and home range patterns. Thus, a less immediate though more serious decrease in bears using MR could also be a result of this project.
4. Exposure to human food waste at industrial site could lead to food conditioning of bears.
5. Food conditioning of bears so close to a bear viewing area would lead to unsafe conditions for bear viewers in the McNeil River State Game Sanctuary and Refuge.