

Have questions about Ballot Measure 4? Join the crowd to discuss Bristol Bay

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Mining in the Bristol Bay region has been a topic for much discussion in recent years. It has resulted in one statewide ballot initiative in 2008 and a local ballot initiative, Lake and Peninsula Borough, 2011. On Nov. 4, Alaskans statewide will vote on another ballot measure concerning mining in the Bristol Bay area, Ballot Measure 4, one the sponsors have nicknamed "Bristol Bay Forever."

On Wednesday evening, Alaska Common Ground will host a forum from 7 to 9 p.m. to discuss this ballot measure at the Wilda Marston Theatre at the Loussac Library.

A yes vote on Ballot Measure 4 would establish a state law that requires legislative approval of a future large-scale metallic sulfide mine within the Bristol Bay Fisheries Reserve. The Legislature must find that a "large-scale metallic sulfide mining operation will not constitute danger to the fishery within the Bristol Bay Fisheries Reserve." The bill defines "large-scale metallic sulfide mining operation" as "a specific mining proposal to extract metals, including gold and copper, from sulfide bearing rock and that would directly disturb 640 or more acres of land." This legislative approval is in addition to any other required permits or authorizations.

A no vote will keep the status quo, which means that the existing federal, state, and municipal permitting processes will address any future large-scale metallic sulfide mine in the region but the Legislature will not be required to give final approval.

The Bristol Bay Fisheries Reserve is defined as the watersheds that drain into Bristol Bay, roughly from Ugashik Bay north and then west to Kulukak Bay, including the Kvichak-Iliamna Lake, Nushagak, and Naknek river drainages.

The reserve was established by the Legislature in 1972 to address concerns about oil and gas development. The existing reserve only requires legislative approval for oil and gas facilities built in state waters. To date the provision has never been used.

The initiative adds large-scale metallic metal mines to actions requiring legislative approval in the Bristol Bay Fisheries Reserve. It broadens the geographic area to include the entire drainage, not just state-controlled waters. It also applies to lands owned by the state and federal governments and by private entities, including Native corporations.

Until recently, there was uncertainty if the measure would be on the ballot because of questions about whether it was allowable as a topic for an initiative under the Alaska Constitution. On June 23, the Alaska Supreme Court ruled that the initiative could be on the November ballot. Litigation on the separation of powers issue may occur if the initiative passes.

This initiative is not a vote to approve or disapprove a future Pebble Mine. The Pebble deposit is within the reserve and would be a large-scale metallic sulfide mine. If passed, this initiative would require legislative approval at the end of the existing permitting process. To date, Pebble Partnership has not submitted applications to develop a mine.

There are other known mineral deposits within the reserve that could also be subject to this state law.

Panelists advocating in favor of the initiative are Christina Salmon of Igiugig, one of the sponsors, and Anders Gustafson, executive director of the Renewable Resources Coalition.

Panelists advocating a no vote on the initiative are Deantha Crockett, executive director of the Alaska Miners Association and Richard Hughes, mining engineer/consultant.

We invite you to join us and learn about the pros and cons of this ballot measure so that you can make an informed decision in the voting booth in November. The forum on Wednesday evening is free and open to the public, and there will be time for questions from the audience.

The event is co-sponsored by the Anchorage Public Library, the League of Women Voters of Anchorage, the League of Women Voters of Alaska, and Alaska Integrated Media.

Dick Mylius is former director of the Alaska Department of Natural Resources Division of Mining, Land and Water and is a board member of Alaska Common Ground, a non-profit, member-supported organization dedicated to engaging Alaskans in respectful conversations about major public policy issues facing our state.

[Link to the full article here.](#)