

The salmon season turned out great here in Kotzebue Sound this summer. It was a good fall along the Kobuk River, too, even with the rain and flooding - until I got back in internet range and was told about the Bureau of Land Management's new call for comments on the Ambler Industrial Road, and about Mary Peltola's planned letter to Interior Secretary Deb Haaland endorsing that project.

When I say "good fall," I do feel the need to mention that sadly, I have never seen so few animals. It felt cataclysmic, actually, with such a dearth of large mammals, and with the brush so dense now, new spruce trees spreading everywhere, and even the tundra strangely carpeted by new deeper vegetation. There was no sign of a caribou migration at all. Which meant **grizzly bears** weren't along the riverbanks (we have virtually no black bears anymore). And with hunters competing for moose, moose were mostly invisible.

Thankfully, there were a lot of cranberries. I'm still seeing them when I close my eyes. Now I can also see Rep. Peltola smiling in her bright red fancy parky in a photo splashed all over the web. I didn't vote for her, in case anyone wants to know. That vote was before I headed back upriver. I knew Peltola had been a paid spokesperson for Donlin Mine for years, telling villagers the mine was a good idea, and telling Outsiders that villagers believed it was a good idea. The one time I met her, she appeared to be very good at her job.

I predicted she'd do her same promotion for the Ambler Industrial Road. In that, I was correct. Her political platform says "Fish, Family, & Freedom," which sounds promising, although I do recall Sarah Palin and others using Bristol Bay and fishing in past political campaigns, too.

Peltola has stated that Pebble Mine is bad, because of the danger to Bristol Bay. For some reason, she thinks an ever-expanding string of copper mines upstream on the Kobuk is good. Hmmmm, what's so different about different earthen dams holding back different toxic heavy metals? (Except here it would be many, many more mines, and exponentially more probability of a flood of catastrophic pollution.)

It seems obvious this is not really about fish. It's about dollars. There's something else that's obvious: none of the other candidates in the upcoming election would have the ear of Secretary Haaland or President Joe Biden the way Peltola has already shown she does. I predicted that, too - that she'd have a unique position to affect the outcome of the Ambler Industrial Road. I'm sure the corporations and mining conglomerates are keenly aware of this also.

In her recent letter endorsing the mega-project in the Brooks Range, she mentioned strong local support. She seems to have chosen to ignore resolutions against this project by both Inupiaq and Athabascan village tribal councils. She also ignored (or is unaware of) the fact that a huge and silent majority of local people do NOT want this road threatening their culture and subsistence way of life.

Talking with people in villages, I'd estimate that 80% or more of local residents don't trust and/or don't want the Ambler Industrial Road destroying their homeland. That tide has greatly changed in the last year. (Before anyone accuses me of wolf-loving or bunny-hugging or such greenie rhetoric, listen: probably an equal number of residents here do favor most development-just not THIS project.) Does Mary Peltola know of the recent changes in the migration patterns of the Western Arctic Caribou Herd? Or of Department of Fish and Game studies showing that caribou avoid mining areas, and roads often halt herd migrations for 30 days or more? A maze of industrial roads and open pit mines would only make this situation worse.

Does she understand the incredible reliance on sheefish here by Native people, all year long in rivers and estuaries that are presently pristine? Does she know how profitable our salmon fishery has become in the past decade, how fishers are nearly 100% local, how they love fishing, how this is a sustainable industry that meshes perfectly with the cultural mindset of seasonal harvesting?

Or, does our salmon fishery not count because it's not as big and cool, as red and rich as Bristol Bay?

I'd hope she'd learn more about our region before endorsing a mega-project plowing through the Brooks

Range. Maybe even come here - I don't mean flanked by a huddle of protective politicians and corporation handlers murmuring in her ears - I mean to listen to villagers and maybe glean a more representative perspective. I hope people will write to BLM this week, before the Nov. 4 deadline for comments. Be brave and honest, tell them we don't want this road, regardless of what Peltola is saying in Washington, D.C. Tell them we want the Alaska we know and love, unpolluted, with the best possible hunting and fishing - not an Alaska of industrial mess, roads and mega-mines.

Surely many voters like this likeable candidate. I imagine others feel the need to hold tight to this or that promise in her platform. I wish I could. This land and water are my home. Caribou, fish and food from the earth are an integral part of life here. Defending one's land has always been a requirement, as old as humanity, and here, presently, Mary Peltola is actively endangering ours.

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