

In January 2012, the Pebble Limited Partnership released its Environmental Baseline Document (EBD), presenting data collected in and around the Pebble deposit area and transportation corridor. It contains thousands of pages of information and data about the physical, biological and human environment in Bristol Bay and Cook Inlet study regions.

The Pebble Watch team has compiled a new series of publications, “Pebble Watch Explores,” to provide readers with an overview of the topics presented in the EBD. This is the first in that series.

Readers will find links to the complete reports in the EBD at www.pebblewatch.com.

About Pebble Watch

The Pebble Watch team consists of scientists and science communicators who can research and answer your questions about Pebble mine development—from science reports to permitting. Write us at staff@pebblewatch.com.

EBD by the numbers

Chapters: 53

Pages: 27,000+

Years in production: 7

Cost: More than \$150 million

Consulting firms: 40+

What is it all about?

The Environmental Baseline Document (EBD) is a report commissioned by the Pebble Limited Partnership (PLP) to describe—or “characterize”—the environment in the area surrounding the Pebble deposit. The report includes 24 topic areas for two different study regions: the Bristol Bay area, where the Pebble deposit is located, and the Cook Inlet area, where PLP has proposed building a transportation corridor to bring material to and from the Pebble deposit.

The topics each fit into one of three broad categories: the physical and chemical environment, the biological environment, or the human environment.

How the EBD relates to the development of Pebble mine

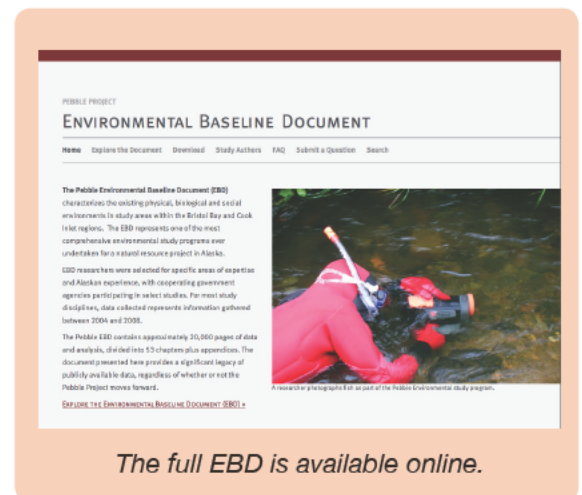
PLP has called the EBD “the cornerstone” of the permitting process. This is likely because it includes many of the same topics and data that would appear in an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) before mine permits are granted. However, an EIS would also include other elements, such as analysis of how the mine plan would impact the environment, and a range of alternative actions that would cause fewer impacts. Baseline data such as that included in the EBD is also typically used to support engineering design as a mine plan is being formulated.

Creating the EBD

Developers hired a number of contractors representing different specialties to prepare reports for the EBD. These primarily focus on data collection from 2004 through 2008. According to PLP, the reports were combined, then edited and reviewed for consistency to produce the final document.

Some of this data was available to the public earlier, through a preliminary report series. These reports are still available on the PLP web site.

Additional baseline data from continuing studies may become available in separate documents in the future, but are not a part of this EBD.



The full EBD is available online.



Accessing the EBD

Visit www.pebblewatch.com to find links for:

- the entire EBD online in PDF format,
- a short overview produced by ad agency Bradley Reid (pictured above), and
- videos of presentations by PLP contractors to government agency representatives when introducing the EBD in early 2012.

A printed copy of the entire EBD is available at the ARLIS Library in Anchorage.

Public input

There is no public input period for the EBD, but PLP has scheduled public meetings and is taking questions on its web site. It has said that some studies are ongoing, with results to be released in the future as separate documents. If you have a question or concern about what you read in the EBD, it may be helpful to follow up with PLP, or write to Pebble Watch, where our team will research an answer for you.

Further exploration

With any report of this magnitude, readers will be looking critically at the content. Scientists reviewing the EBD might watch for:

Methodology - How were the studies conducted? Were methods consistent from year to year? Were they appropriate to the region?

Data gaps - Is the data complete?

Age of data - Is the data current enough for an accurate characterization?

Outlier data - Were there “outlier” data points significantly different from other results? If so, how were these addressed?

Availability of data - Is the raw data available in a format that other scientists could use to assess its quality themselves?

References - When references are made to past literature or studies, were these the best sources? Were there others not considered?

Peer review - Was the document reviewed by other scientists (peers) for accuracy?

Digging in on your own

At more than 20,000 pages, it would take a long time to read the EBD from cover to cover. However, becoming familiar with the EBD will help readers understand topics that would most likely be included in a future EIS.

Start by checking out the table of contents to find topics that interest you. Or skim through the Technical Report for descriptions of what was studied along with conclusions. Full reports dive into detail, in lengths ranging up to 6,500 pages, along with appendices of supplementary data and maps.

Another place to start is www.pebblewatch.com, where you will find more “Pebble Watch Explores” titles as they become available.

Getting the most from your reading

Individuals should be able to read the EBD critically, following general guidelines that scientists use to understand and evaluate reports. The questions at right are provided to help readers assess the reports.

Additionally, Columbia University’s web resource on “Responsible Conduct of Research” may provide context for general readers. Topics range from “Conflicts of Interest” to “Responsible Authorship and Peer Review,” and “Data Acquisition and Management.” Visit www.pebblewatch.com for a link.

What questions does the EBD chapter address?

What are the main conclusions of the chapter?

What evidence supports those conclusions?

Does the data actually support the conclusions?

What is the quality of the evidence?

Why are the conclusions important?