

Berners Bay | Daxanáak

Between Two Points



•••• Berners Bay, Daxanáak in Tlingit, meaning “between two points”, is an incredibly rich estuary system, teeming with life. It is located about 40 miles north of Juneau, and is home of the Wooshkeetaan Auke people who have lived, hunted, fished, and gathered berries at the Bay for thousands of years. Berners Bay was designated an Aquatic Resource of National Importance by the EPA during the Clinton Administration and is considered one of Southeast Alaska and the nation’s most valuable public resources.



4 GLACIAL RIVERS 

feed the Bay: Antler River, Berners River, Lace River, and Cowee Creek.

60,000 COHO SALMON 

spawn in these glacial rivers each year, along with chum salmon, pink salmon and cutthroat trout.

10-20 million EULACHON & HERRING 

(small, energy-rich fish) flood into Berners Bay every spring to spawn in what is known as the “silver tide”.

EACH SILVER TIDE

draws many other species that depend on it for food including: humpback and killer whales, harbor seals, and tens of thousands of shorebirds.

600 BALD EAGLES 

have come to feast off the silver tide, forming the second largest congregation of bald eagles in North America, second only to the Chilkat River.

900 STELLER SEA LIONS 

have been observed feeding in the Bay during silver tides. Steller Sea Lions, a threatened species, are dependent on Berners Bay eulachon runs for maintaining a viable population level in northern S.E. Alaska.



AREA

The Bay is about 3.5 miles wide at the entrance, which is formed by Point Bridget and Point St. Marys. It runs in a north-northwest direction for 6 miles from Point Bridget, with a width of 3 miles opposite Point St. Marys. The bay is surrounded by Tongass National Forest, which is home to black and brown bears, wolves, moose, and mountain goats.

INDUSTRIES

Berners Bay is a favorite destination for recreation and is increasingly important for commercial tourism.



REASONS FOR CONCERN

Kensington Mine



Road to Nowhere

Coeur Alaska operates the Kensington Gold Mine in the uplands above the northwest corner of the Bay. The mine has generated 4.5 million tons of mine waste since 2010, all dumped into Lower Slate Lake - the only mine in the U.S. allowed to dump chemically processed mine waste into a natural lake, destroying it. To accommodate the waste, the lake was expanded behind a 88-foot-tall, 500-foot-wide dam made from waste rock. If this dam ever fails, the toxic waste will end up in Berners Bay, contaminating the habitat for all who live and harvest food there. It will have to last forever.

Coeur recently applied to the Forest Service for a permit to raise the dam 36 feet and expand the lake to hold another 4.5 million tons of toxic waste. If approved, the ticking time bomb above Berners Bay will double in size.

Berners Bay is also threatened by the "Juneau Access" Project. Juneau is an isolated community accessed only by plane or boat. For years, the State of Alaska backed by pro-development corporations, has wanted to build a road around and through Berners Bay to end at the Katzehin River where travelers would still have to get on another boat. While the road would not provide any additional access to Juneau, it would provide direct access to the Kensington Mine.

Studies have shown that the road is a bad idea for many reasons. The proposed route would:

- Divide corridors used by bears heading to the rivers and Bay to hunt for salmon
- Bisect moose habitat, and
- Run through important mountain goat winter range

TAKE ACTION

Current Need:

- The U.S. Forest Service (FS) is accepting public comments on the expansion of Kensington Mine. It's important to comment on **how you enjoy Berners Bay** so that the FS can take your "use" into account during the environmental analysis.
- The FS must **ensure that the proposed expansion does not impact other users** of the Bay and find an **alternative closure plan** that does not include destroying another natural lake with waste.
- Send comments to Matthew Reece at the FS by Monday, December 14, 2020 by:

Email: SM.FS.Kensington@usda.gov

Mail: 8510 Mendenhall Loop Rd, Juneau AK 99801; Attention Kensington Mine Plan Amendment

Fax: 907-586-8808

Learn More:

- www.seacc.org/berners-bay

