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## JEWELERS PUBLICITY STUNT A DISSERVICE TO SOUTHWEST ALASKA

### **Grassroots Group of Alaskans Calls on Jewelers to Renounce Boycott**

ANCHORAGE, Alaska – Nonprofit organization Truth About Pebble is calling upon national jewelers, such as Zales Corporation, to renounce their boycott of gold from the proposed Pebble prospect and evaluate the project's full picture and economic potential for Southwest Alaska. Truth About Pebble is further encouraging dialogue to take place among these leaders with the Truth group, residents from the communities closest to the project and/or the leaders of the Pebble Partnership in order to broaden understanding of the economic realities in Southwest Alaska and balance misinformation distributed regarding the status of Pebble.

Truth members have pointed out that there is no development project for the public to review at this time and that information generated currently in the public is based on speculation and assumptions. The situation in Southwest Alaska is dire, with rural populations decreasing due to lack of economic opportunities. While fishing is an important element both culturally and economically to the region, diversifying economic opportunities is necessary for long-term sustainability of the area.

"There is no widely accepted, independent certification system to assure retailers or consumers where the gold they purchase is sourced, which is precisely why this appears to be nothing more than a publicity stunt," said Truth About Pebble board member Toni Logan-Goodrich, Vice President of Oxford Assaying and Refining. "Zales has nothing to lose by making such a pledge. What's the risk in pledging to boycott gold that doesn't yet exist, especially when it's nearly impossible to determine or to control the source of the gold purchased?"

Logan-Goodrich indicates that gold from many different sources is pooled together during the refining process before being sold on the open market. From there, it may go to world mints such as the Perth Mint in Australia or the Royal Canadian Mint; or to a jewelry manufacturer in Rhode Island, India or China to be alloyed for manufacturing. It may also be sold industrially for uses such as dentistry and electronics. "There are many different markets where it may be distributed before being delivered to the end-user," explains Logan-Goodrich.

Pebble proponents characterize the pledge as misguided and premature, pointing out that Pebble is predominately a copper mine and any potential development of the resource – gold or otherwise – is still many years away. They say Alaskans should wait to see what the Pebble Partnership proposes for the project and rely on the exhaustive state and federal permitting process to answer important questions about Pebble.

The economic situation in Southwest Alaska warrants a comprehensive and objective evaluation of the project once a development plan is proposed. Electricity costs in this part of the state are between 60 cents and \$1 per kilowatt-hour.

A gallon of milk averages \$9, and gasoline, used for fuel and heating, is more than \$5 per gallon. Few local residents own and fish commercial fishing permits with more than half of the permits fished by non-Alaska residents. The region's population and school population remain in decline as economic opportunities are few and continue to dwindle.

"Pebble is still an exploration project, and no defined development plan has been proposed yet for Alaskans to objectively evaluate," said Truth About Pebble President Gail Phillips, a former two-term Speaker of the Alaska House. "Our state has some of the most abundant and best-managed fish and game resources in the world, which is a testament to Alaska's stringent environmental standards and strict regulatory oversight. So, for anyone to tell Alaskans that we can't develop our own resources and that companies shouldn't be encouraged to invest in our state is an affront to all of us."

"By all accounts, it is not currently possible to accurately identify the source of gold used by jewelers during manufacturing, which calls the sincerity of this whole effort into question," said Truth About Pebble board member Phil St. George. "Additionally, the permitting process exists to enforce exactly what Zales and others have pledged to support – protection of clean water, fish, habitat and other important natural resources. If Zales was truly concerned about sourcing gold and precious metals in a manner that protects the environment and its inhabitants, it would support mineral development in Alaska and other areas with world-class environmental oversight. I hope they will take us up on our offer for a more comprehensive and responsible dialog about this project."

The Pebble Project is one of tremendous potential, but the question today is if that potential can be developed. Many believe the opportunity the project represents for the residents of the region and the people of Alaska is simply too important for it not to receive a full and impartial hearing.

"As an organization and as individuals, we ask that Alaskans wait until a proposed development plan is complete and all the facts are available for true evaluation before making informed decisions about the project," Phillips added.

Truth About Pebble is a statewide nonprofit organization formed to support Alaska's established permitting process and to ensure that Pebble and other resource projects receive a fair hearing under Alaska law.

**For more information, contact:**

Gail Phillips  
907-382-6149