

## Report Series M: Visual Resources

This data release, addressing Pebble's Visual Resources studies, is the 13<sup>th</sup> in the Pebble Partnership's Pre-Permitting and Socio-Economic Data Report Series. Since 2004 the Pebble Partnership has retained independent environmental consulting firm Land Design North to conduct a visual analysis of the Pebble study area, compiling baseline information of the existing landscape's scenic character and quality.

Visual Resources study objectives are:

- 1) to analyze existing landscape character and quality in the study area;
- 2) to provide a framework for comparing the existing scenic conditions to potential landscape changes related to the project; and
- 3) to provide a basis for future determinations of the visual effects of the proposed project.

Visual analysis uses tools and methodologies developed by the US Department of Agriculture (USDA) Forest Service document *Landscape Aesthetics, A Handbook for Scenery Management* (USFS, 1995). The handbook is a standard, widely recognized guide for the analysis of landscapes and provides a useful framework for review of scenic quality.

### Findings

The study indicates that visual resources in the study area are a contrasting mix of landscapes, some of striking visual quality, others quite muted. Of particular note is that much of the landscape is undisturbed and is seldom used or seen by many people.

### Landscape Character

The landscape in the western section of the study area is characterized by low landforms with heavily patterned vegetation, ranging from low shrubs and lichen to sparse stands of spruce. This is in marked contrast to the eastern portion of the study area, which includes incised valleys and complex serrated peaks, as well as rounded valley bottoms with circuitous clear water streams. The Cook Inlet side of the study area has similar attributes to the eastern area, with the addition of a highly complex, high-energy coastline.

### Scenic Attractiveness

The landscape of the western study area is typical of the region, primarily comprised of muted hills within tundra landscapes that extend for hundreds of miles to the west. The landscape in the eastern portion of the project area is characterized by a distinctive landscape of high peaks, valleys and complex water forms.



*View to the south from the Pebble deposit area.*

## Scenic Integrity

The majority of visual resources in the study area are considered intact and whole. Exceptions include the communities of Iliamna, Newhalen, Nondalton and Pedro Bay, various camps in remote locations along creeks, the Iliamna Lake shoreline and the Iniskin Peninsula. Additionally, the Williamsport-Pile Bay Road is considered an intrusion in what is otherwise an intact landscape in the eastern portion of the study area.

## Constituents

Constituents range from residents of the communities in the area to tourists and recreational visitors to the Lake Clark National Park and Preserve, as well as fish camps, lodges and hunting camps located in the study area. The area is also used for subsistence purposes, thus hunters, fishers and gatherers are also a constituent group. The area receives overflights for sightseeing and traveling to camps, as well as some motor vehicle traffic on the Pile Bay/Williamsport Road that includes freight handlers, hunters, fishers, and sightseers. Some traffic on Lake Iliamna exists in the form of boats and float planes. The Cook Inlet shoreline also receives overflights by both light and general aviation, as well as boat traffic along the coast.

## Landscape Visibility

The study area is viewed by constituents from all distance zones (as foreground, middleground or background), although most views to possible Pebble Project developments are middle to background, primarily due to the lack of a developed road system. Many of the possible views of project infrastructure would be from aircraft or boats on Iliamna Lake.



*Aerial view of the Iliamna with Lake Iliamna in the background.*

## Concern Levels

Residents are typically sensitive to the quality of the visual environment, particularly in rural areas. Visitors are also sensitive to the environment because many have traveled great distances to experience what may be considered a "wilderness" experience. Subsistence users also have a high concern for aesthetic disturbances, although their landscape preferences respond to areas of hunting, fishing and gathering instead of complex visual landscapes of high peaks and river valleys.

## Scenic Class

Scenic classes are determined by combining the quantified scenic attractiveness, distance zones and concern levels of a landscape. Classes within this study area vary greatly, as some areas are seldom seen except by aircraft at high altitude, while others are relatively close to communities and routes that are used by recreationalists.

In general, the study area is considered to be of high scenic attractiveness and almost fully intact, with a few exceptions. Much of the landscape is relatively undisturbed and little used or seen by many people.

**\*Preliminary data only. Do not cite or quote.**

**The Visual Resources data report, released as part of the Pebble Partnership's Pre-Permitting Environmental & Socio-Economic Data Report Series, is available online at [www.pebblepartnership.com](http://www.pebblepartnership.com).**