

Donlin Gold Project EIS

Alaska Forum for the Environment
Donlin Gold EIS Presentation
February 12, 2015
Dena'ina Center, Anchorage, Alaska

Project Team Attendees:

Keith Gordon, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
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Overview:

The Donlin Gold Project EIS presentation was given on Thursday February 12, 2015, in Anchorage, Alaska at the Dena'ina Center.

The presentation included a summary of the project components; an overview of the EIS process; a synthesis of the scoping comments; the process for developing alternatives; the TEK workshops; results of the fish studies conducted during summer 2014, and a means of contacting the Corps.



Issues Raised:

Question: Are you going to use cyanide leaching or cyanide in extraction of the gold? Or how are you processing the ore?

Response: Cyanide leaching will not be used. Cyanide is used in the mill facility, but in a closed environment.

Question: Would you use boat transportation for the cyanide?

Response: Yes, the cyanide would be transported by boat in federally-approved containers for transportation. The effects of spills will be covered in the Draft EIS.

Question: What would be the height of the tailings dam?

Response: 498 feet

Question: You said there would be natural gas delivery via a pipeline from Beluga to the mine. Does the feasibility study include the availability of gas from Cook Inlet? I've been here a long time and the gas supply is going down. There is a plan to deliver gas to Fairbanks from Cook Inlet, and now there is this plan to deliver gas to the mine. Does feasibility include volume?

Response: Yes, this has been one of the key issues from the very beginning. It's important to note that not all of the gas will come from Cook Inlet; it will be bought on the open market, and could come from other sources.

Question: With 40 million gallons of diesel, would you train people from the villages in HazMat or other chemical response?

Response: A large portion of the hiring for work at the mine come from local residents, and those employees would be trained to work with hazardous chemicals. The Corps cannot

designate whom else or how else Donlin may or may not provide other training opportunities. Local organizations would make decisions on implementing work force training.

Question: How many people in Alaska are trained in HazMat, hazardous chemicals, and response?

Response: That's not a number we have right now, but I could find it for you. There is a heavy focus on spill response in the Draft EIS, and there are many plans in place to respond to possible releases.

Question: Is the information available for public to see what was used in the agency decision making?

Response: There is a high level of accountability in NEPA. The Scoping report documents all the comments during the scoping phase, and this is available on the project website. When public meetings are held on the Draft EIS, the public comments are again documented in detail. Following the meetings, the analysis team must respond to each comment and prepare a comment analysis report. The Final EIS must show where in the EIS those comments are being responded to.

Question: If the public didn't feel that response was enough, we would get a second chance to comment?

Response: Yes, Scoping was a first opportunity, and comments on the Draft EIS will be the second.

Question: Is the proposed route through the Jones River?

Response: Yes, the proposed route is associated with the Jones River. Dalzell Gorge and the Jones River are contrasting alternatives.

Concern: It's going to be 300 barges up and down the Kuskokwim River to whatever landing you choose. I've been going up the river for years and the water is sometimes low.

Response: One of the things we are analyzing is the potential for stranding. We are analyzing the possibility of temporarily staging barges on some days, or breaking down barges into one or two tows. From the beginning we were looking at the feasibility of whether it is possible to barge the necessary fuel and supplies during the barging season.

Concern: I have seen one barge stuck at least every two years. They dump the cargo in the river to get lighter.

Response: A small clarification, there would be actually 122 barges overall, and this is a 3 times or 300% increase. But the project would not result in 300 barge tows per season. The barge management plan focuses on preventing stranding with load management and monitoring of water levels in the Kuskokwim River. If a barge was stranded, it would be illegal to dump the barge cargo into the river. People have heard of that happening, but that would not be permitted. The Corps manages the discharges into the waterways.

Question: If you are incorporating 27 years for the project operation period, the models for the Kuskokwim River say the water levels will go lower. Are those models being incorporated into the design?

Response: Yes, we are looking at all the variations from the past 60 year data sets, and are now taking into account the effects of climate change. Our hydrologists are looking at the SNAP data very carefully. Interestingly, the high and low river stages may be more extreme, but the annual average flow in the Kuskokwim River is estimated to remain about the same. More details will be available in the Draft EIS.

Question: Can the newsletters be available to other communities that would be affected, all the way from Dutch Harbor?

Response: The newsletter will be available to all 66 communities, with 8,000 copies being sent across the Kuskokwim River Delta. We are making a note to add Dutch Harbor to our mailing list.

Question: Newsletters are available on the website, right? So anyone can get the newsletter at any time?

Response: Yes, anyone with internet can get the newsletters at the Donlin Gold EIS website.

Concern: There is a need to target the younger generation about marijuana becoming legal. They need to know that smoking pot could prevent them from getting jobs at the mine.

Question: What would happen if the facility changes over to fuel oil instead of natural gas? Will the pipeline be transferred to oil and therefore make it a hazardous chemical pipeline?

Response: The pipeline as proposed is natural gas. One alternative is a diesel pipeline. There is no expectation that it will change over later.

Concern: The change from natural gas to oil is happening all over the country; pipelines change substances to avoid heavy permitting.

Response: No one has suggested that that will be the case. A design of a gas pipeline is different for diesel. However, we cannot guarantee anything either way.

Question: With the lack of salmon and salmon restrictions, have they thought about restricting barges, and the possibility of a spill? Did you consider a diesel pipeline next to the gas pipeline?

Response: Yes, we have thought about that, and we have considered the barging effects on salmon at certain times of the year. Spills are a very important part of the analysis regarding diesel and what effects they would have on fish, subsistence uses, and the communities.

Question: What are the conclusions if the water is too low?

Response: We have no conclusions yet; not at this stage. We are still developing the information. It appears that from the studies they can operate the mine for 27 years. That's where we are at right now, but we are sending the draft analysis out to experts and agencies to make sure we are coming to the right conclusions.

Question: I presume that wastes will be removed and barged out?

Response: Yes, some wastes, like mercury, will be barged out. The gold will not be barged out; it will be exported by aircraft. Some waste would be processed at the mine site.

Question: The mercury, when it's processed and captured, will it be in cinnabar form, or what?

Response: It is elemental mercury captured in the milling process. Some will be mercury mixed with carbon from the milling process. It will go into the steel drums and containers called "pigs" for removal by barge. The mercury is not in a gaseous form.

Question: Do you have an estimate of the amounts of cyanide that will be barged?

Response: No, I don't know that number without looking it up. I can explain where to find the information on the Donlin Gold EIS website. The cyanide would be barged up to the mine site in sealed steel containers that are designed to survive accidents. Cyanide transport and storage is closely regulated to prevent release to the environment.

Concern: It's just that if it went into the river, it would kill everything.

Response: A spill scenario for cyanide will be analyzed in the Draft EIS. It would take an extreme circumstance to release this substance.

Question: Can you fly out the cyanide?

Response: Detailed information about the transportation of hazardous materials is available on the website. The EIS will identify the regulatory requirements, spill response requirements, and evaluate the environmental consequences of a spill event.

Question: Regarding cooperating agencies, would they be permitting components of the project separately or as one entity (mine site and pipeline)? Would there be two permits from the EPA, for example?

Response: Under NEPA we cannot segment the project to minimize the impacts. We can't break it up into smaller parts to make it look like the impacts are reduced; we must look at the whole project.