

**From:** [Enos, Nick](#)  
**To:** [donlingoldeis, POA](#)  
**Subject:** [EXTERNAL] Donlin Gold Draft EIS comment  
**Date:** Tuesday, May 31, 2016 7:26:15 AM  
**Attachments:** [image003.png](#)  
[Donlin Gold DEIS Comment Letter REnos\\_053116.pdf](#)

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Dear Mr. Gordon,

Please consider the attached written comments on the Donlin Gold Project Draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). Please consider my comments in preparation of the Final EIS.

Thank you for this opportunity to provide comment, and improve the accuracy of the Final EIS.

Best Regards,

**Robert (Nick) Enos, CPG**

Senior Environmental Project Manager



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Robert Enos  
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May 31, 2016

Mr. Keith Gordon, Project Manager  
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Alaska District  
CEPOAK-RD-Gordon  
P.O. Box 6898  
JBER, AK 99506-0898

Dear Mr. Gordon:

I appreciate this opportunity to submit written comments on the Donlin Gold Project Draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). The Notice of Availability for the Draft EIS was published in the Federal Register on November 27, 2015, and was recently amended to extend the comment period to May 31, 2016. Please consider my comments below in preparation of the Final EIS. I have tried to limit my comments to those that would be considered substantive, and as such hope that the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Corps) will adequately address them in the Final EIS.

In the interest of disclosure, please note that I was previously employed by the applicant, Donlin Gold. I served as the Project Environmental Coordinator from 2005-2007, Environmental Manager from 2007-2012, and Permitting Manager from 2012-2015. I also previously served as Exploration Geologist for the landowner, Calista Corporation from 1997-2004. I am no longer employed by, nor do I serve in any capacity on behalf of, either Donlin Gold or Calista. I believe that I have an extensive understanding of the project, and the relevant issues, so the comments below are mine alone.

**No Action Alternative:** *The EIS must disclose the significant negative socioeconomic impacts of “Alternative 1 – No Action”.* The Draft EIS does not adequately address, and in some cases downplays, the negative direct, indirect, and cumulative impacts to employment, income, infrastructure, services, and human health of the No Action Alternative, as compared to Alternative 2. The Draft EIS finds that socioeconomic

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impacts of Alternative 1 “would be minor”, and that impacts to the larger state economy “would be negligible”. That finding is not accurate, does not reflect current socioeconomic trends, and fails to fully disclose the negative socioeconomic impacts that would result from no development.

The Draft EIS states that the No Action Alternative represents “a baseline for comparison of effects”. But that “baseline” does not adequately recognize current trends. Guidance on establishing a baseline is well documented in the Council on Environmental Quality’s *Considering Cumulative Effects under the National Environmental Policy Act* (1997), as well as the US Environmental Protection Agency’s *Consideration of Cumulative Impacts in EPA Review of NEPA Documents* (1999). As described in those documents, the description of baseline conditions should include “how they are likely to change in the future without the proposed action”. Contrary to this guidance, the Draft EIS treats the current socioeconomic baseline as a static condition, thereby downplaying the negative future impacts of No Action.

Residents of the Yukon-Kuskokwim region currently experience poverty and unemployment rates among the highest in the United States. As described in Section 3.18 of the Draft EIS, these rates are trending worse, not better. Also as noted in the same section of the Draft EIS, “(m)any people are leaving these small communities for economic opportunities in urban areas.” As a result of these socioeconomic trends, the No Action Alternative would adversely impact the Yukon-Kuskokwim region, as well as the State, by halting economic development, and contributing to worsening socioeconomic conditions. Therefore, the Final EIS should properly disclose the significant adverse impacts of no development, and the summary socioeconomic impact level of “Alternative 1 - No Action Alternative” should be revised from “Minor” to “Major”.

**No Action Alternative:** *The EIS must disclose that “Alternative 1 – No Action” does not meet the Purpose and Need.* The Purpose and Need, as described in the DEIS recognizes the unique land status of the mineral resource at Donlin. This project

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represents an opportunity to realize the congressional intent of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA), by allowing Calista Corporation and The Kuskokwim Corporation (TKC) to develop their lands for the economic benefit of their shareholders.

The proposed mine is located on lands owned by Calista Corporation and TKC, the regional and village ANCSA corporations owning the respective mineral and surface estates. In enacting ANCSA, Congress specifically identified the need to "provide for the real economic and social needs of Natives ... with maximum participation by Natives in decisions affecting their rights and property." As the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals has recognized, "Congress intended...that those Native corporations that did select land for its economic potential would be able to develop that land and to realize that potential." The No Action alternative would extinguish Calista and TKC's ability to maximize economic benefits for their shareholders, from those lands which were conveyed to them under ANCSA. The Final EIS should disclose this and state that "Alternative 1 – No Action" does not meet the Purpose and Need.

**Alternative 2 – Donlin Gold's Proposed Action:** *The socioeconomic impact levels underestimate the beneficial impacts of "Alternative 2".* The Draft EIS summarizes the socioeconomic impacts for Alternative 2 as "moderate and beneficial". While the Draft EIS acknowledges that "increased employment opportunities would benefit low-income and minority populations in particular", and that a lack of "economic opportunities appears to be a predominant cause of out-migration ...", it does not appear to accurately weigh those factors in arriving at a moderate impact level.

In over 18 years of traveling among the communities of the Kuskokwim River region, I've had the opportunity first-hand to witness the positive impact that employment and business opportunities have had during Donlin Gold's exploration phase. Of the approximately 200 locally-hired employees during the peak of exploration activity, the majority stayed as residents in their home communities. Although some individuals chose to relocate, I observed that most did not. They continued to be active members of their communities, and with a source of good income, they could afford to continue to

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support and enjoy subsistence activities with their families. Although obliquely referenced in the Draft EIS, this important information about the socioeconomic benefits of steady employment does not seem to be factored into the final impact level.

Therefore, the Final EIS should accurately summarize the socioeconomic impact level from “Alternative 2 – Donlin Gold’s Proposed Action” as being “major and beneficial”.

In summary, the Corps should incorporate the following changes in the Final EIS:

1. Disclose the significant adverse impacts of no development, and revise the summary socioeconomic impact level for “Alternative 1 - No Action Alternative” from “Minor” to “Major”.
2. Disclose that “Alternative 1 – No Action” does not meet the Purpose and Need.
3. Revise the socioeconomic impact level from “Alternative 2 – Donlin Gold’s Proposed Action” to “major and beneficial”.

I appreciate the opportunity to provide these comments, and hope that the Corps finds them constructive. I have been fortunate to have worked and traveled among the communities of the Kuskokwim River region for nearly two decades. In that time I have observed the clearly positive impact that employment and opportunity has had on the local communities and residents. Development of Donlin Gold truly has the potential to positively transform the region with opportunity, economic growth, and hope, for decades to come. Please ensure that the Final EIS fully and accurately characterizes that impact.

Sincerely,



Robert (Nick) Enos