

Donlin Gold Project EIS

Georgetown Tribal Council Annual Meeting
Presentation regarding the Donlin Gold Project EIS
July 19, 2014

Project Team Attendees:

Don Kuhle, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
Chelsey Beans-Polk, URS Intern
Taylor Brelsford, URS Environmental Scientist

Georgetown Tribal Council attendees:

David “Buddy” Kutch, Tribal Council President
Will Hartman, Tribal Administrator
Traci Fredericks, Council Member
Vanessa Evans, Council Member
Kate Schaberg, Environmental Coordinator

Overview:

At the invitation of Council President Buddy Kutch, Don Kuhle presented an update on the Donlin Gold Project EIS at the annual meeting of the Georgetown Tribal Council on Saturday July 19, 2014. Georgetown Environmental Coordinator Kate Schaberg coordinated the Corps’ participation. The presentation included a summary of the project components, results from scoping, alternatives under analysis, workshops and studies to fill data gaps, and an overview of the EIS process. Mr. Kuhle and Taylor Brelsford answered questions during and after the presentation. Approximately 15 people attended.

Issues Raised:

1. How will the natural gas pipeline cross rivers, like the Kuskokwim River, without environmental damage?
Response: The pipeline will be installed below the Kuskokwim River using horizontal directional drilling. This avoids disturbance to the river during construction.
2. Will the EIS review an alternative with no pipeline?
Response: In an earlier design stage, Donlin Gold planned on using barges to transport all the fuel needed for electrical generation and transportation at the mine site. Because of concerns about barging 90 million gallons of diesel fuel each year. Donlin Gold modified the plan to rely on a natural gas pipeline to fuel the electrical plant and reduce fuel barging to 40 million gallons of diesel per year. There is currently no alternative under review that would eliminate the pipeline as part of the plan. However, one alternative would propose a diesel rather than natural gas pipeline in order to eliminate barging of diesel fuel. The EIS will compare the environmental risks and consequences of the pipeline alternatives.
3. Will the Corps hold additional teleconferences with the tribes as the EIS progresses?
Response: Yes, the Corps intends to hold tribal coordination teleconferences with the tribes on an ongoing basis throughout the EIS. Government to Government Consultation with the Alaska District Commander could also be held if warranted.

4. When there are alternatives for the road to the mine site, will the EIS examine all environmental consequences for each route?

Response: The alternative routes to the mine site will be from the up-river barge landing at Angyaruaq (Jungjuk) for the proposed action, or for an alternative site at Birch Tree Crossing. In both cases, a comparable level of environmental analysis is required.

5. How will the pipeline be maintained to insure it doesn't leak?

Response: In its permit application, Donlin Gold included detailed plans for ongoing monitoring and maintenance of the natural gas pipeline. The adequacy of these plans to prevent leaks will be evaluated in the EIS, and the permitting agencies will include binding permit conditions to insure this maintenance and monitoring work is done.

6. Will meetings be held for public comments on the Draft EIS similar to the scoping meetings?

Response: Yes, public meetings will be held to review the Draft EIS, in the same subregions of the project area as during the Scoping meetings. These meetings are currently scheduled to take place in the fall of 2015.

7. Will the Draft EIS identify which alternative the Corps plans to permit?

Response: The Corps has a different regulatory process than some other agencies. The Corps is required to select the Least Environmentally Damaging Practicable Alternative (LEDPA) in their Record of Decision. A draft LEDPA may be included in the Final EIS. The Corps will not be identifying a preferred alternative in the Draft EIS.

8. What happens if the different agencies disagree on the best alternative for the Donlin Gold project?

Response: A great deal of effort goes into coordination among the cooperating agencies so that the EIS can serve their specific agency needs. The agencies meet once or twice per month to help develop the EIS analysis. It is rare that the agencies would not come to agreement on the best alternative for permitting. However, if that were to occur, we anticipate that there would be high-level discussion among the agencies to come to an agreement.