

## **Donlin Gold Project EIS**

November 4, 2015

Larson Charlie Community Hall

Galena, Alaska



### **EIS Project Team Attendees**

Jessica Evans, AECOM Public Involvement Lead

Donne Fleagle, AECOM Senior Specialist, Rural Community Engagement

### **Western Interior Alaska Subsistence Regional Advisory Council:**

Jack Reakoff, Wiseman, Chair

Pollock Simon Sr., Allakaket

Darrel Vent Sr., Huslia

Ray Collins, McGrath – was excused 11/4/2015 @ 11:15 a.m.

Donald Honea Jr., Ruby

Tim Gervais, Ruby

### **Galena Interior Learning Academy Government Highschool Class:**

16 High school students attended for about an hour in the afternoon of 11/4/2015



### **Others:**

Melinda Burke, OSM

Pat Petrivelli, BIA

Orville Huntington, TCC – telephone

Arnold Demoski, Nulato

Percy Lolnitz, Koyukuk

Ken Chase, Anvik

Hugh Demoski, Anvik

Vince Matthews, USFWS

Tim Bodony, Galena

Jeremy Havener, USFWS Nowitna National Wildlife Refuge

Stewart Cogswell

Jeff Ressik, NPS

Jason Hill, Galena

Bruce Seppi, BLM

Plus 10 others

### **Prior to Ray Collins departure he was asked to comment:**

**Comments:** Donlin is working hard to keep communities informed. The only concern is the Right-of-Way where the gas line runs at the base of the hills out of Farewell. This is where there are migratory moose routes. Hunters will use the ROW having flown in 4-wheelers to Farewell. There isn't hunting pressure now but it will open new areas in Unit 19(c).

**Chairman Reakoff:** The pipeline needs to avoid high productivity terrains and migratory moose routes.

**Status Report on the Donlin Gold Project Draft EIS:**

Using a presentation approved by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Jessica Evans and Donne Fleagle provided a status report on the Donlin Gold Project EIS on November 4, 2015, at the Larson Charlie Community Hall in Galena, Alaska, to the Western Interior Alaska Subsistence Regional Advisory Council. The presentation focused on promoting participation in reviewing the Draft EIS, to be released on November 30, 2015. Topics included: major issues addressed in the Draft EIS, organization of the Draft EIS, proposed locations for meetings on the Draft EIS, and methods for submitting comments.

**Western Interior Alaska Subsistence Regional Advisory Council Chairman, Jack Reakoff,** invited BLM Biologist, Bruce Seppi to join AECOM at the microphone(s).

**Question:** Will there be jobs?

**Response:** Yes during the construction of the gas pipeline, during construction of the mine facilities and during the life of the mine.

**Statement:** The road proposed looks like it is crossing traditional subsistence land.

**Response:** It will be crossing Village Corporation and Regional Corporation land from the port at Angyaruaq or Birch Creek to the mine.

**Question:** Is it close to salmon spawning grounds?

**Response:** The mine site will be above Getmuna and Bell Creek where the majority of spawning occurs.

**Question:** Donlin Gold has been at the site for several years. Why are they doing the EIS and these meetings now?

**Response:** Donlin has been doing some exploration and studies at the site for a long time. They are just now to the point where they can apply for federal permitting, which triggers the EIS.

**Statement:** Mercury mining where gold is leached out seems dangerous. The EIS should have been done sooner.

**Question:** Will there be cyanide heap leaching?

**BLM Responded [Bruce Seppi]:** No. The procedure would be closed circuit and not include a heap leach field.

**Question:** Will the pipeline be too invasive?

**Response:** It will be buried. The Right of Way permits are up to individual permittees because it crosses State of Alaska, BLM and Alaska Native Regional Corporation Land.

**Statement:** One of the alternatives that was dismissed is a pipeline route that avoids moose habitat near Farewell. They said it was because of wetlands, but I don't know of any wetlands in that area. The goal is avoidance of impacts to natural resources to the highest degree, and targeting low versus high productivity terrain. I am concerned about use from the Farewell airstrip and impacts to subsistence resources that could bring.

**Question:** Can the BLM deny a ROW?

**Response by BLM Seppi:** The pipeline is 315 miles long and BLM lands are approximately 97 miles of that. BLM could deny a ROW then the Project couldn't happen. The NEPA Process is just a disclosure document. There is nothing in it to say that a project can't happen, just to disclose what the impact will be.

**Statement by BLM Seppi:** The BLM expressed concern over several topics, including the tailings pit being treated in perpetuity, barge traffic when there is low water levels in the Kuskokwim River,

The Section 810 Subsistence Hearings conducted by the BLM will be separate from the Draft EIS meetings, and will include all villages on the Kuskokwim River plus Skwentna, Tyonek, McGrath, Takotna and Nikolai.

**Statement:** I am concerned about the bonding. There should be in perpetuity bonding. Someone will have to pay for it forever. Mines bring jobs, but then the community will have to foot the bill and provide long-term mitigation. Canada spent \$920 Million trying to mitigate these mining companies toxic water. How is it economic to southcentral? Donlin will be taking gas away from Anchorage and driving up electric costs. Southcentral is not ready to pay 100% more on their bills! There are huge ramifications. Concerned about the project in huge degrees.

I am concerned about the ROW access and the influx of people using the area. It is not worth it to subsistence and subsistence users.

The barging scenario is not realistic. There is critical habitat and the huge wake action from the hung up stuck barges will cause phenomenal impacts. I suggested they pump the water into the ground, get rid of the water.

It is not acceptable to leave a huge toxic lake behind. There is not enough assurance to protect the Kuskokwim River, people, resources, or culture and this outweighs short

term finite benefits. It should be required to bond in the billions. The people of the Lower Kuskokwim are not ready for the hundreds of years of impacts.

WIRAC wants no action. It is too detrimental to resources. Long term versus short term benefits isn't worth it to the people of the Western Interior Region. There will be an inevitable spill and it's in an area of seismic activity. The 1964 earthquake was felt all the way into the Interior and if that happens again, all that toxic water will go down the river.

**Statement:** I am concerned about what's left behind, and is there a plan to take care of the area after the mine is gone? There was a problem in Huslia with drums being left with chemicals in them.

**Response by BLM Seppi:** Bonding would be in a trust fund—likely in the billions, and Donlin would in perpetuity treat and bond the project. The BLM urges the Council to look at the Draft EIS and provide comments.

**Question:** How did you choose where to have the scoping meetings? Why are there public meetings on the Yukon such as Emmonak? Is there a reason? Is there a propensity to bleed over into the Yukon River? Why isn't Nikolai and every community close to that mine having a public hearing?

**Response:** Scoping meetings were held throughout the impacted Calista/AVCP region. There was concern [from the public] about the possibility of a mercury dust cloud that could extend to that area. During scoping, people travelled from neighboring villages to the meetings. Nikolai is being considered as a meeting site. These are preliminary sites, based on where the scoping meetings were held. The actual sites have not been entirely decided upon.

**Statement:** Four justifications to oppose this mine development and request the Corps take NO ACTION.

- 1) Toxic effluent lake
- 2) Potential of a fuel spill
- 3) Disruption of river corridor of fish (Chinook, coho fry) and wildlife and their habitat.
- 4) Pipeline: Disruption by providing access to areas not open at this time

**VOTE: All in favor      Absent: Collings, Morgan, Pelkola, Walker, Walker**

Note: This meeting was recorded by USFWS, and transcripts are available for download, here: <https://www.doi.gov/subsistence/library/transcripts/6-western-interior-alaska>.

