Donlin Gold Project EIS

McGrath Scoping Meeting
McGrath Tribal Council Community Center
Friday, February 15, 2013, 4:30 pm

Attendance:
Over a dozen residents attended the scoping meeting held in McGrath. Don Kuhle of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers made a presentation about the Donlin Gold Project EIS. Cooperating agencies in attendance included the BLM, EPA (via phone), Alaska Department of Natural Resources, and Alaska Department of Health & Human Services.

Issues Raised:

This is a brief summary of issues and comments. A complete Scoping Report with meeting transcripts and detailed analysis of all comments will be issued in May 2013.

- The Kuskokwim River is the last major river in the United States not bisected by roads. This is an important characteristic. The Kuskokwim River is a very important wildlife corridor. I am glad to hear that the pipeline corridor will not contain a road.
- How much wake will the barges make? The EIS must estimate wave impacts to the shore. Look at the Kenai River for examples for boat wave restrictions.
- We are concerned about impacts to all fish in the Kuskokwim River, particularly salmon and sheefish.
- We are concerned about impacts of increased barge traffic on the salmon migration.
- How many river miles will the barges go up the Kuskokwim River?
- How many barges would there really be on the river at given time? You explain three at a time (two up, one down, etc.), but that would not be accurate if it takes more than one day to get up the river.
- The river is only open for six months of the year. Would they have to stockpile supplies or materials the other months until the river is open?
- If this is a 27 year project, a railroad or ice road may be a better solution to get from Bethel to the mine than barging on the river. The community is very concerned about impacts to the river and fishing industry; alternatives should consider avoiding the river when necessary. The cost of a rail may be more expensive, but the life of the project is very long and would warrant this alternative.
- How is water in the pits managed? There could be an unusually rainy season that fills or overfills the pits more than the company is expecting. What is their back-up plan for this water?
- What if the tailings dam fails? What does in perpetuity mean? How is that possible? How long will the liner last?

- We would like Donlin to visit again. They may be able to talk more about the details of their projects and come up with good alternatives.
- I toured mining operations in Nevada. People in the community were very happy to have the jobs because it gave options for their young people, rather than having to leave. It seemed similar to communities in Alaska that are losing their young people.
- I toured mining operations in Nevada, but I didn't see every part of the mine, such as the waste rock facility and the waste treatment facility.
- McGrath and the region should consider planning for spur lines off the gas line. We need to plan in order to make it happen. Will Donlin allow a spur line of the gas pipeline? Would a spur line require an EIS?
- Are any other communities proposing spur lines besides McGrath?
- Are you looking at the other development in the area? I heard about a Doyon project at Vinesale. If the Doyon project or other projects go forward, they would need power too.
- The only spawning grounds for Bering Sea cisco occur 20 miles upriver from Nikolai. I would be concerned about that area being impacted. Also, sheefish spawn in the headwaters of the North Fork of the Telida River.
- There is a history of placer mining plugging-up spawning beds. Since these "Mom & Pop" operations have ended there is improved water quality and the fish populations are building up again.
- Climate change is noticeable here: lakes are drying up, permafrost is melting, and sediment is covering the gravel beds necessary for spawning. Water temperature is changing. It may actually be lower because of the extra snow melt.
- How close is the pipeline corridor to the Iditarod Trail?
- Who owns Donlin Gold?