



### **Donlin Gold Project EIS**

Western Interior Subsistence Regional Advisory Council (RAC)

Donlin EIS Presentation

Wednesday, October 29, 2014

McGrath, Alaska

### **Project Team Attendees:**

Jessica Evans, URS

Donne Fleagle, URS

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

Jack L. Reakoff, Chair, Wiseman

Ray Collins, VChair, McGrath

Don Honea Jr., Ruby

Eleanor Yatlin, Huslia

Jenny Pelkola, Galena

Tim Gervais, Ruby, on Telephone

### **WIRAC Absent:**

James Walker, Holy Cross

Robert Walker, Anvik

Pollock Simon Sr., Allakaket

Carl Morgan, Aniak

### **Overview:**

The Donlin Gold Project EIS presentation was given on Wednesday, October 29, 2014, in McGrath, Alaska. Jack Reakoff, RAC Chair moderated the session.

The presentation included a summary of the project components, an overview of the EIS process, a synthesis of the scoping comments, and the process for developing alternatives, the TEK workshops, the fish studies this summer and a means of contact at the USACE.

## Issues Raised:

*Comment:* Ray Collins attended March meetings in Anchorage and Nikolai about the Donlin project. His main concern is that the pipeline route along the base of the hills is critical game habitat. If the pipeline route was moved to the northeast into the black spruce it might have less impact on it (wildlife). When construction is over there will be a 4-wheel trail in that area, and that will have an impact on sheep and caribou if hunters begin to use it. If the pipeline were in the black spruce there wouldn't be as much interest in hunting there, because it is not good game habitat. He has heard that the black spruce area is wetlands, but knows from experience that it is not true wetland, and has low wildlife value.

*Comment:* Jack Reakoff wanted to reiterate that concern—the transition between shrub and boreal forest is a major transition zone. He has concern about the gas pipeline route, mainly the creation of a 4-wheeler trail to the Kuskokwim River (and Big River), and is concerned that mine crews would be recreating on that trail and the river when they are off duty. He is concerned that hundreds of people moving into the area would impact the moose resource in the area. He is also concerned about the post-mining period—in the (reference to some Canadian mine)\$900,000,000 Canadian dollars were spent for monitoring. Who is doing the monitoring at Donlin, and is it bonded? Will contaminants be running into the drainages and on into the Kuskokwim River, and into where sockeye and coho salmon run? The scoping for the EIS was too focused on the main channel, and did not take into account the entire watershed and the extent of impacts. He is concerned about the ROW easement over ANCSA land. He is concerned about barge traffic impacting the people living along the river from wake action and erosion, and the possibility of swamping boats. He suggests the pipeline should run both diesel and natural gas with pigs to separate LNG and diesel. He does not think the resource inventory for juvenile stocks of salmon was effective because the impact zone is not where main release into the Kuskokwim River would be. The Donlin mine has the capacity to highly affect the sockeye and whitefish stocks.

*Comment:* Ray Collins noted that there is a major fault line along the pipeline route by Farewell, and Donlin should take a good look at how to avoid it. Moving pipeline as suggested previously would help.

*Comment:* Jenny Pelkola attended a meeting in Canada. At one time that area didn't have any mines, and now they have a lot. Now the people that live there call their waters "dead waters." They see stuff coming out of the ground that wasn't there before.

*Comment:* Eleanor Yatlin brought up a point about the effect of barges on fish. One time at camp, she heard a barge on the main river, and when they checked the fish net, there were 11 kings there. She has never seen that before! Something is going on there, and she wanted to make that comment.

*Response:* Donne answered that she has heard that before, that when barges go by it seems more fish are captured in the nets. In fact Margaret Murphy Bobby had mentioned that when Donne visited Sleetmute this summer.

*Response:* Jenny Pelkoa added that when the water gets moved around from the barges, fish don't know where they are going and just go into the nets.

*Question:* Jack Reakoff asked what were some of the main comments from the scoping meetings.

*Response:* Donne answered that main concerns included the amount of barges in a 110 day window which has the potential to disrupt subsistence fishing and impact life on the river, fish, cyanide, mercury, and the lake that will be left behind that will be treated in perpetuity.

*Comment:* Jack Reakoff asked if there is a process of drilling deep into the ground and reinjecting material to avoid impacts to migrating waterfowl. He said it seems like you should be able to reinject water and seep it into the ground to get rid of toxic water and harmful substances much like is done on the north slope. The company should be paying for the monitoring and long term funding, and post bonding after the mine is closed.

*Comment:* Jack Reakoff wanted to know what the recreational hunting constraints would be for crews that are working at the mine.

*Response:* Donne answered that according to Donlin's policies, workers will not be able to practice subsistence or sports hunting and neither will any crews be able to use any roads for hunting when they are at the mine. All roads are closed to the public.

*Comment:* Jack Reakoff stated that it makes sense that some guiding and outfitter operations would use the pipeline ROW for access to hunting resources for private use.

*Comment:* Ray Collins noted that it already happens, at the airstrip out of Farewell, as well as hunters floating down river past Nikolai.

*Response:* Donne stated that she can relate to Ray Collins's concerns about the pipeline and understands that the ROW could be accessed by hunters.

*Comment:* Ray Collins stated that in deference to Donlin, they seem to be doing it right, in terms of talking to people and getting input. An example is conducting the smelt study as a result of concerns that were brought up. But as was discussed, Donlin is not going to be there forever to take care of long term concerns.

*Question:* Don Honea asked if there are any fears in the surrounding villages, if the economics opportunity overrides the idea of the impacts.

*Response:* Donne answered that people in the Donlin mine area seem to be in favor of the mine for economic opportunity. It might only last one generation, but it's the only development project for that area. They are generally positive about the mine, but have some reservations about impacts. It would be an economic boom to their communities.

*Comment:* Jack Reakoff called for a letter from the Council to URS that would put comments into a form for analysis. The Council agreed. He would like to continue to have presentations on this issue.

*Closing Comment:* Jack Reakoff said that URS can get a verbatim transcript in two weeks and that a letter will be written by the Western Interior Regional Advisory Council addressing these concerns. He also invited URS to present at the next Western Interior Regional Advisory Council Meeting.