



Ambler Road Environmental Impact Statement

Anaktuvuk Pass Public Scoping Meeting

MEETING NOTES

November 14, 2017

Anaktuvuk Pass Community Center, Anaktuvuk Pass, Alaska

Project Team Participants

Bureau of Land Management (BLM): Laurie Thorpe

HDR: John McPherson, Katherine Wood

Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G): Audra Brase

National Park Service (NPS): Linda Hasselbach

Public Participants

Approximately 17 people attended the meeting.

Meeting Purpose

To share information about the BLM's Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) process, and to gather input from the public.

Meeting Topics

1. Welcome by Laurie Thorpe, (BLM) and Introductions

Laurie Thorpe introduces project team participants.

2. Presentation by Laurie Thorpe (BLM)

Copies of the presentation are available for attendees to take home.

Background

The project is the Ambler Road EIS. Part of that process is public scoping. The purpose of today's meeting is to get input from the local communities. BLM is the lead federal agency. Cooperating Agencies include the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE), Alaska Department of Natural Resources (DNR), Northwest Arctic Borough (NAB), National Park Service (NPS), and the U.S. Coast Guard (USCG).

Project Background

In the 1950s, mineral exploration efforts discovered significant mineral resources on the south side of the Brooks Range. In the 1980s, The Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA) was established. In 2009-2010, the Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (DOT&PF) began evaluating multiple road and rail routes that could provide access to the Ambler Mining District. In 2013, project ownership was transferred from DOT&PF to Alaska Industrial Development and Export Authority (AIDEA). In 2015, AIDEA submitted an SF-299 application requesting right-of-way for the road to access the mineral resources. The application was complete by June 30, 2016, which triggered a timeline for BLM action on the application. BLM filed a Notice of Intent on February 28, 2017, to prepare an EIS, in the federal register, which triggered the public involvement process. Normally that process is two to three months. We knew that would not allow enough time for public scoping through all the affected communities. BLM did not want to impact your subsistence harvest so extended the public scoping period for almost a year. There are also NPS lands involved so the NPS began a separate but parallel Environmental and Economic Impact Analysis (EEA) for the portion of the road on National Park Service land. They are also here to hear input from you about issues you are concerned about. NPA's EEA is directed by ANILCA for the road section across NPS lands.

Question

How was this route selected?

Response

A lot of outreach in the communities has been done both by DOT&PF and AIDEA. They talked with the people in those communities, and that's how we got to where we are today with this proposal.

Proposed Project

The right-of-way application from AIDEA proposing a road across public and private land triggers a timeline to initiate public scoping to produce the EIS.

AIDEA is the project proponent. [AIDEA proposes a road across public and private land to the Ambler Mining District] to increase job opportunities, and otherwise encourage the economic growth of the state, including the development of its natural resources.

Without that access, the mineral assets associated with the Ambler Mining District would remain unused, and AIDEA would not be able to support economic development and increase job opportunities within a region known for high mineral resources.

Question

Have you talked to the villages about historic sites?

Response

There has been a lot of discussion on that, and we will talk about this more later on.

Road Elements

AIDEA's proposed alignment begins at the Dalton Highway Milepost 161 and extends westward to the south bank of the Ambler River.

The type of land crossed by the road includes State lands (61percent), Federal land managed by BLM and NPS (24 percent), and lands associated with two Alaska Native Corporations (15 percent).

The road would be 211 miles long, all-season, gravel two-lane road with industrial access only. It would not be open to the public. It includes bridges, material sites, maintenance stations, airstrips, and related infrastructure and utilities.

The road would be designed to accommodate large semi-trailer trucks.

Proposed Project Area

The project begins at Milepost 161 of the Dalton Highway. It is 211 miles long, and ends at the Ambler River as shown on the Proposed Project Area Map (see handout). A more detailed map is also included that shows the proposed road in relation to Anaktuvuk Pass.

Agency Roles

There are several agencies involved in this project.

BLM is the lead federal agency for preparing the EIS because the start of the road is on BLM land.

USACE is a Cooperating Agency, and would be responsible for the wetlands permits that would be required.

NAB is a Cooperating Agency. NAB will provide traditional knowledge and input on subsistence, cultural resources, and coordination with Tribal members and affected communities.

USCG is a Cooperating Agency, and would be responsible for bridge permits over navigable waters.

DNR is a Cooperating Agency, and would be responsible for state permits. DNR would make land management decisions for ROW access across state-managed lands.

NPS, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), and Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) are all Participating Agencies.

What is an EIS?

An EIS is an environmental analysis required under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), which requires federal agencies to assess the environmental consequences of their decisions, both positive and negative.

This EIS will include the following:

- Project Purpose and Need analysis.
- Issues raised during scoping (internal/external).

- Develop project alternatives (we need your input).
- Description of potentially affected environment, covering resources like wildlife, vegetation, hydrology, cultural resources, and subsistence resources. We determine what we know about those resources now, and look at how they would be impacted by this project.
- Environmental consequences of all the alternatives.
- Proposed mitigation, which can involve the design of the route, or best management practices that may be applied to minimize impacts.

So where are we now?

We published the Notice of Intent to produce an EIS in February 2017, and are now in the Scoping Process requesting public participation and community outreach to hear your issues and concerns. The Scoping Period ends January 31, 2018. We will produce a Draft EIS by March 2019, and then we will come out to the communities again to share what we found, and what you shared with us. We will share what we think the environmental consequences will be. We get more public review, and we would issue a Final EIS by December 2019. After that, the BLM would issue a Record of Decision on whether or not we would issue a right-of-way for the road.

Draft Purpose and Need

Project need is based on the requirement for the BLM to respond to a right-of-way application from AIDEA for surface transportation access to currently inaccessible, economically valuable mineral deposits in the Ambler Mining District.

Project purpose of the BLM action is to provide AIDEA with: (1) technically and economically practical and feasible surface transportation access across BLM-managed lands for mining exploration and development in the Ambler Mining District, and (2) authorization to construct, operate, and maintain associated facilities for that access. BLM will also include a no-action alternative which will be analyzed as well.

BLM Decisions to be made

The BLM must decide whether or not a right-of-way should be granted. We can also issue a Record of Decision for a no-action alternative.

What is Scoping?

Scoping is the process used to get input on the issues, impacts, and potential alternatives that will be addressed in the EIS. The intent of scoping is to:

- Inform agencies and the public about AIDEA's application for right-of-way and the proposed project.
- Identify resources, impacts, and issues of concern to be addressed in the EIS. Your input is very important for our analysis.
- Obtain input to help refine the purpose and need and the alternatives to study.

- Identify potential mitigation measures that may be needed to avoid, minimize, or mitigate for project impacts.

Along with the environmental analysis, BLM is required to conduct ANILCA Section 810 analysis. ANILCA requires us to conduct subsistence hearings as well. When we have public meetings for the draft EIS, we will also open subsistence hearings. They are a separate but concurrent process. That is a good opportunity for you to share your concerns about subsistence.

Question

Who will be policing this road?

Response

Right now, it is proposed to be operated by AIDEA. All federal, state, and local laws apply, including the Clean Water Act. There would be significant oversight by the federal government and state government.

Question

What about local oversight? Will any of our community leaders be involved? People come into our communities without local oversight.

Response

I don't have answers for that, but that is why we are here so we can gather your questions and insight and respond.

Comment

We are the "specialists" for this land.

Question

So has the mine decision already been made?

Response

No, I'm not aware of any site-specific analysis that has been done on the mineral resources that are there. There has been exploration, which has identified mineral potential.

Comment

Yet the road is planned. Mineral runoff can impact the streams where the Kobuk runs into the Yukon so it could have impacts on the villages below, not just the road.

Response

This analysis is only for the road corridor. To the best of my knowledge there has not been an environmental analysis done on the potential impacts of mineral development. To make the mineral development viable surface transportation is needed.

Comment

What about the environmental impacts that industry has left on our lands—out of town, drums in a lake? Will anything be done about the stuff that was left here before?

Response

It isn't part of this project, but it could be potential mitigation

Comment

People come into our communities, and leave behind these things. We're the ones who have to live with them. We can't fish or hunt in those areas.

Response

That is why we are here, to hear about these issues and concerns so we can look at them. Cleaning those sites up could be a great mitigation.

National Historic Preservation Act Section 106

Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) requires federal agencies to take into account the effects of their undertakings on historic properties and places of religious and cultural significance. We will be holding Section 106 meetings to develop a programmatic agreement related to cultural resources, and to discuss what we can do to protect them. It's a very important process for you to be involved in, because you know more than we do about these resources.

Question

Will people in my community be able to earn a living through helping to build these roads? We are the ones who know about this area. I want decisions made by people who live here.

Response

That's what this Section 106 process is all about, because you have that historic knowledge and values.

NPS EEA Process

NPS EEA Process is going on at the same time as the BLM EIS process. AIDEA's proposal includes two alternative routes across NPS lands (North and South). Under ANILCA, NPS is legally required to permit access across NPS lands, and prepare an EEA to evaluate which route is preferable based on environmental, social, and economic effects, and develop permit terms and conditions.

EEA Public Input

NPS seeks comments on route selection and permit terms and conditions. The comment Period is open through January 31, 2018. To comment go to <https://parkplanning.nps.gov/Ambler>.

Question from Stanley Riley

Will this be a public access road?

Response

Right now, it is proposed as industrial access only. The application for right-of-way says it would only be allowed to have commercial drivers on the road, but you might be able to get permits to have commercial shipments brought in to the villages.

Question from Stanley Riley

So you are asking for traditional knowledge about where to put this road, but once it's built, we're not even allowed on the road? How can we regulate what you guys are doing on this road if we're not even out there?

What's Next?

BLM is collecting comments and feedback. They will consider input received to potentially refine the Purpose and Need, determine issues and impacts to be studied, determine alternatives to be studied, and potentially identify mitigation measures to apply to the project.

Substantive Comments

Writing substantive comments that assists BLM make good decisions. This isn't really a voting process about whether you are for or against the road. We need to know why you are for or against, and what your specific concerns are. What ideas do you have to make it better?

- Be as specific as possible about what you are concerned about.
- Suggest alternatives to the proposed project, and the reason(s) why they should be considered.

You are welcome to comment on the proposed project. You can submit comments in the following ways:

- We have a recorder tonight to record your comments.
- Submit a comment form in the box
- Submit comments via the website: <http://www.blm.gov/AmblerRoadEIS>
- Fax to: (907) 271-5479
- Email to: blm_ak_akso_amblerroad_comments@blm.gov
- Mail to: 222 West 7th Avenue, Stop #13, Anchorage, Alaska 99513

3. Comments

Below are a compilation of verbal comments received at this meeting.

Comment from Raymond Paneak

Any development will hurt our subsistence area because we live off the land. We travel. We don't just stay in Anaktuvuk Pass. Animals travel where they can find more food.

Comment from Just Jensen:

You say the road is only for industrial use. The Haul Road used to be only for industrial use, but the pressure from the public opened it up to people from Anchorage and Fairbanks. Now you have so many hunters coming up. Our friends in Wiseman don't even bother to hunt, because there are too many hunters on that road. I'm concerned about these villages because so many people will be coming up. People on the Kobuk River depend on those animals. For people from Anchorage and Wasilla, it's just sport hunting. My concern is the impact to wildlife for people in those villages.

Comment from Raymond Paneak

The [National] Park Service manages our land. We can't go in the Wilderness Area now. I don't agree with that part. We are in the middle of the park.

Comment and Question from Jimmy Jack

They even have cameras. Twenty years ago I was out hunting south. A cube of glass 18 inches square with a camera installed by the [National] Park Service. What did they do with those cameras? They saw me.

Comment and Question from Clyde Morry

You are looking for monetary gain, we look at subsistence gain. How do you get access to land 20 miles south, 15 miles east? How would we get access to the old-time hunting grounds? What's the difference to your monetary gain and our subsistence gain? Our subsistence gain would be more than the monetary gain that you would get.

Response from Laurie Thorpe, BLM

To clarify, the only monetary gain BLM would receive is the right-of-way permit fee.

Comment from Stanley Riley

I can see people from the villages hunting in areas where they have hunted for thousands of years, and being regulated by all these federal agencies by people who don't even know where they are. We can't even regulate our own wildlife up here. Hunters can be thrown in jail for taking food for their families.

Comment from Clyde Morry

Another thing to look at is the historic migration routes of years past of the caribou for the southern people.

Comment from Stanley Riley

My family comes from Wiseman. We don't go to Wiseman any more. Other people are hunting there now. That's my family place where my mom grew. Now that the road goes through there, there isn't a single one of us there anymore. That's what I'm afraid of. There are only so many of us left. There

used to be 10,000, now there's less than 1,000. I'm concerned about what this road will bring and what it will take away.

Comment from Raymond Paneak

We're looking south, the National Petroleum Reserve-Alaska (NPR) is north of us. Six other villages to help out with subsistence. Not everybody works. Problem is we have to live with all the rules. Our northern villages, Barrow, Wainwright, get impact funds. If we get some of that impact financing it would help our village, our hunters, whoever needs, our subsistence hunting way of life.

Comment from Just Jensen

People who lived near Alpine and Kuparuk went through the same thing, and now they wish they hadn't had a road come in with all the impacts they have especially the caribou and hunting. We should hear from people who have already gone through it. They would probably have a lot to say about it. We should have representatives from these villages go talk to Nuiqsut to see what they have to say about it. They got a lot of monetary things, but now it's not worth it to them.

Comment and Question from Steven Bridwel

This road has been an idea a long time. Is it going to get built now?

Response from Laurie Thorpe, BLM

We don't know. We're gathering input now. There were years of studies done by DOT&PF and AIDEA. The federal land managers had not done any environmental analysis. That's what we're starting now. There is nothing saying the road is absolutely going to be built. BLM can select the no-action alternative. That alternative gives us the baseline to compare all the other alternatives. The other alternatives are developed based on the input from you.

Comment from Stanley Riley

I haven't heard anything about the road that would benefit our community. We can't use the road. Not getting any money. We will have federal regulators up here. I don't see the benefit. The road is on land we used to be able to hunt on. I haven't heard anything about job opportunities. There's only 40 jobs in this town. There's 400 of us living here. There are people who don't eat before they go to sleep.

Response from Laurie Thorp, BLM

We do look at the socioeconomic impacts, both positive and negative. We have to include that in the analysis.

Comment and Question from Steven Bridwell

Isn't the company that is interested in extracting the minerals from Asia? An international corporation. Only 100 million dollars going to the state. The push should be to have Alaskan companies develop the mine.

Response from Laurie Thorpe, BLM

I don't know a lot about the companies that are looking to develop the mine area.

Comment from Stanley Riley

So even our country isn't benefiting from this mine being there. So the environmental impact to the land that we have been hunting for thousands of years is going to be put on by another country, and all the benefit will be going out of the country.

Response from Joy Huntington, AIDEA

There are resources to learn more about the proposed project: www.ambleraccess.org website.

Comment from John Lincoln

I'm with the Lands Department of NANA, because the road crosses NANA land. The people in those villages express a lot of the same concerns you have. It's important to our board that we come and listen to your concerns. We have our Board Chair Linda Lee here. She lives in Shungnak, and Alex Sheldon a Board Member who lives in Kobuk. We appreciate being invited here today to listen to what you have to say.

Comment from Alex Sheldon from Kobuk translated by Linda Lee

He is Alex from Kobuk. He is Inupiat. He did not get much education because there was no school establishment when he was growing up. These are his relatives here. When he was a little boy, he remembers them visiting from Anaktuvuk Pass by dog team, visiting relatives in the upper Kobuk. As they were going up that way they trapped, hunted, and fished on their way up there. It's time for us, as Inupiat people to speak up because outsiders come, and they talk about our land. Our land that provides us food. It brings us sustenance. It sustains us. We have to work together. Our grandkids are going to school. They are smart people. We have Inupiat lawyers and engineers. Outsiders come in, and they regulate us. Our land is our gift from God because He loved us.

Comment from Raymond Paneak

I like that one word he say in Eskimo. I understand it. If we work together we can do it.

4. Closing

The meeting was adjourned.