



Ambler Road Environmental Impact Statement

Kotzebue Public Scoping Meeting

MEETING NOTES

December 6, 2017

Kotzebue Assembly Chambers, Kotzebue, Alaska

Project Team Participants

Bureau of Land Management (BLM): Laurie Thorpe

HDR: John McPherson, Katherine Wood

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE): Melissa Riordan

Alaska Department of Natural Resources (DNR): Marie Steele

National Park Service (NPS): Joe Durrenberger

Public Participants

Approximately 14 people attended the meeting.

Meeting Purpose

The purpose of today's meeting is to introduce the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS), and get information from you. Any issues, concerns, opportunities, challenges, anything you can share with us about the project area or the resources involved that we need to address in the EIS. Without your input with this public scoping process, we can't do a good job with the EIS to inform and disclose what the impacts and effects would be of the project. And that's both adverse and beneficial. We want to make sure and clearly analyze the impacts, and describe the positive benefits or the adverse effects. We need information from you.

Meeting Topics

1. Welcome and Introductions by Laurie Thorpe (BLM)

My name is Laurie Thorpe with BLM working with Tim La Marr. He has done a lot of scoping for the Central Yukon Resource Management Plan in a lot of these communities as well. He's the authorized officer for this project.

Cooperating Agencies

Cooperating Agencies for this project include the following:

- U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE). We have a representative from the USACE, Melissa Riordan.
- Alaska Department of Natural Resources (DNR). Marie Steele is in attendance.
- Northwest Arctic Borough (NAB)., Noah Naylor is our primary contact. Patrick Savok is also with that agency.
- National Park Service (NPS). Joe Durrenberger is here as well. NPS is not a Cooperating Agency but a Participating Agency.

Other Introductions

I appreciate Joy, Michelle, and Jeff, from AIDEA. If you have more specific questions about their application, they are here for that.

2. Presentation by Laurie Thorpe (BLM)

This is meeting number eight of a series of public scoping meetings for this EIS. We have been to Allakaket, Anaktuvuk Pass, Alatna, Fairbanks, Wiseman, and Anchorage. Yesterday we were in Ambler. We're here in Kotzebue, and you can see we've got a few other communities to get to as well. Shungnak was changed from Thursday to Friday this week. We will also do Kobuk [on] Friday, and later on next week, Hughes, Huslia, Evansville, and Bettles. If there are any other communities that you think we should be at, let us know.

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. Congress passed the law recognizing the mineral potential in the Ambler Mining District, and specifically provided for surface transportation through Gates of the Arctic National Park and Preserve, but did not address access across BLM lands. That's why we are doing this EIS. In 2009-2010, the Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (DOT&PF) did a lot of public meetings, and 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 that would provide the surface transportation. The SF-299 is just an application to the land managers and the federal and state agencies that includes the bridges over navigable waterways, the permits required for filling waters of the United States, and other authorizations that are necessary to construct and operate and maintain a 211-mile road from the Dalton Highway to the Ambler Mining District. In 2016, AIDEA had to provide us with some supplemental information in order for the package to be complete. In June of 2016, the agencies determined that the right-of-way application was complete. Then we were on a timeline. BLM filed a Notice of Intent on February 28, 2017, to prepare an EIS, initiating a 90-day public scoping period for

this project. We extended that to go through January 31, 2018, so we have about a month and a half left of public involvement. The reason we extended it is because we didn't want to adversely impact the rural communities with scoping meetings during the summer, fall, and early winter subsistence harvest seasons. Folks are so busy that time of year with life. We thought it was better to extend it. Tim LaMar who is the deciding officer on this project had gotten that feedback from his public involvement meetings with a lot of the communities when he was doing the Central Yukon Resource Management Plan. So based on that feedback, we thought it was best to extend the scoping period. At the same time, the NPS began a separate but parallel Environmental and Economic Impact Analysis (EEA). It's the first time we have gone through this type of a process so we're learning as we're going. Theirs [NPA] is specifically directed in ANILCA for this project. They will make a decision, one way or the other on the different routes across the park that are in this proposal.

Proposed Project

The project was proposed by AIDEA. They requested right-of-way for 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. According to AIDEA, 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 unemployment rates.

Road Elements

Maps are available to see the route. AIDEA's proposed alignment begins at the Dalton Highway (Milepost 161) and extends 211 miles westward along the foothills of the Brooks Range to the south bank of the Ambler River. It would cross a myriad of lands with multiple jurisdictions with State lands (61 percent), 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. Vehicles using the road would be designed to accommodate two-way traffic for large semi-trailer trucks carrying people, supplies, fuel, and all the ore concentrate back out. The handout illustrates a profile of a typical road.

Maps are available that show the multiple land jurisdictions in relation to the Dalton Highway corridor and the Ambler Mineral Belt. We have vicinity maps for all the communities the road goes past. There are large maps of the project area we can leave here as well.

Agency Roles and Responsibilities

BLM is the lead federal agency. Cooperating Agencies include the USACE, U.S. Coast Guard (USCG), NAB, and the State of Alaska. We also have requests from Allakaket and Alatna to be Cooperating Agencies. Later on this winter we will move forward with Memorandums of Understanding to bring those two communities on as Cooperating Agencies.

Participating Agencies include the NPS, US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). The Participating Agencies are involved but to a lesser degree than the Cooperating Agencies. The Cooperating Agencies have decision making and permitting needs involved with the project.

BLM is the lead federal agency with the authority to grant right-of-way (ROW) across BLM-managed lands. BLM must also comply with ANILCA Section 810 for subsistence analysis as well as the Nation Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) Section 106 to address historic and cultural resources.

USACE is involved because they will be relying on this EIS for their decision making involving the Clean Water Act as well as Section 10 of the Rivers and Harbors Act.

USCG is a Cooperating Agency, and would be responsible for bridge permits over navigable waters and would also use the EIS as a basis for its decisions.

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

NAB is a Cooperating Agency. NAB will provide traditional knowledge and input on subsistence, cultural resources, and coordination with Tribal members and affected communities. The NAB would also enforce local permitting requirements and advise the BLM on NAB's responsibilities under State law and Northwest Arctic Borough regulations.

What is an EIS?

The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) requires federal agencies to assess the environmental consequences of their decisions. An EIS is required under NEPA for actions that significantly impact the quality of human environment. An EIS includes the following:

- Project Purpose and Need
- Issues raised during scoping (internal/external)
- Project alternatives
- Description of potentially affected environment, which would be impacted by this project
- Environmental consequences of all the alternatives
- Proposed mitigation

(Laurie showed a diagram of the EIS process) It starts with a Notice of Intent, and moves into the Scoping Phase. That's where we are now. BLM will develop a Draft EIS with more public involvement after the draft is issued. Then a Final EIS would come out. Subsequent to that there would be a Record of Decision (ROD) whether or not to issue the ROW grant.

Draft Purpose and Need for the BLM

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

The project purpose of the BLM action is to provide the applicant AIDEA with: (1) technically and economically practical and feasible surface transportation 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.

The BLM decision to be made is whether or not to issue a right-of-way permit and, if so, what terms and conditions would be involved with it and included in the right-of-way grant.

What is Scoping?

Scoping is the process used to get input from the public and affected communities on the issues and impacts of any of the potential alternatives that we would address in the EIS. Usually when people bring up an issue. For example, this road goes through a culturally sensitive area where there may be some burial grounds. So if that's an issue, then an alternative of that would be possibly to put the road in a different location. So that's how the issues drive the development of alternatives in an EIS.

What is the intent of scoping?

- Informing agencies and public about the application and the proposed project.
- Identify resources, impacts, and issues of concern to be addressed in the EIS.
- Obtain input to help refine the purpose and need for the project and the alternatives to study.
- Identify potential mitigation measures that may be needed to avoid, minimize, or mitigate any of the project impacts.
- Obtain information to help evaluate the project with applicable laws so if there are laws or policies, local laws, regional laws, national laws that we're not aware of, please share with us how you think they would apply to this project.

In the Notice of Intent that we published in the Federal Register, we identified 21 issues and items that should be addressed. They are listed in the handout. We also want to hear from you if there is anything else that we should be addressing in this EIS. That's why we're here, asking you "Is there something we're missing here that we need to also address in addition to these?" We developed these from our internal scoping with our subject matter experts and folks that typically work on large planning projects like this.

ANILCA Section 810

We also are required to comply with ANILCA Section 810 to analyze the subsistence impacts. Under Section 810 of ANILCA, the BLM must determine whether the project "may significantly restrict subsistence uses." This analysis will be included in the EIS. It's typically an appendix to the EIS. So based on what the subsistence analysis is in the EIS, we have a separate ANILCA subsistence analysis that is very similar to the analysis in the EIS, but it is separate. It uses a little bit different criteria to describe and analyze the impacts.

If alternatives may significantly restrict subsistence uses (either abundance, access, or availability), then this will be identified in the analysis, and ANILCA Section 810 hearings will be held at the same

time that we have the meetings for the Draft EIS. So when we get to that stage of the project, we will have a public meeting similar to this about the Draft EIS, the different alternatives that we are looking at, the effects analysis, and the subsistence analysis. Then when we conclude that meeting, we immediately open up the ANILCA 810 hearings where people can give testimony on how they think this project may impact their subsistence availability, access, and abundance.

National Historic Preservation Act Section 106

At the same time we're also going through the Section 106 process of the NHPA. Section 106 of the NHPA requires Federal agencies to take into account the effects of their undertakings on historic properties and places of religious and cultural significance.

Tribal governments, Tribal entities, and the State Historic Preservation Officer (Judy Bittner), and other interested parties are consulted to identify significant places and ways to reduce or mitigate potential effects of the proposed project as well as the alternatives. (Laurie shared a diagram of the Section 106 process that included a website address for the *Protecting Historic Properties: A Citizen's Guide to Section 106 Citizen Guide Review*. The Section 106 Process happens concurrently with the NEPA process with the EIS development.)

We determine the undertaking, which is responding to the right-of-way application. We look at what historic properties are identified. Their significance is also evaluated. It discusses what historic properties could be affected, and what any of the adverse effects may be. The group consults to resolve the adverse effects and may develop mitigation or avoidance.

At the end of that we develop a Memorandum of Agreement or a Programmatic Agreement with those consulting parties that says "Here's how we're going to address impacts to historical or cultural resources." Everybody has to get into agreement on how that would be done. It's quite involved. It's a great process to be involved with. All the way from making sure the historic and cultural properties are inventoried up front before there is any groundbreaking done.

So if there is a crew out there doing construction, if they came across something that had previously been not identified the agreement tells how to deal with it at that time, but also even how do we deal with the known resources that are out there. It really is good to have a comprehensive Programmatic Agreement to address cultural and historic resources.

NPS EEA Process

The NPS is going through their EEA process at the same time. They are required to select one of the routes that has been proposed, the North route or the South route. Those are identified on these maps per the application from AIDEA.

There are the two alternative routes. The Southern route minimizes the number of miles that the road would go across the NPS lands.

Under ANILCA NPS is legally required to permit access across NPS lands. They are required to prepare an EEA that would evaluate which route is preferable based on environmental, social, and economic effects. They would also develop permit terms and conditions. The reason we are working closely with them is so any of those permit terms and conditions that would be required under their permit would be consistent with the permit terms and conditions for the BLM authorization. We wouldn't want it to be so vastly different that it would be difficult to administer the road permits.

The NPS is looking for public input on their EEA process as well on that route selection, and what types of terms and conditions should be in their permit.

Their comment period conveniently ends at the same time as ours does, January 31, 2018. Visit <https://parkplanning.nps.gov/Ambler>. We have handouts of this entire presentation that include all the website addresses.

Schedule

This is the same flowchart for the project schedule with a little more information on it with the dates. The Notice of Intent was published February 28, 2017. We are in the scoping process, which concludes at the end of January about a month and a half from now. We plan to have a Draft EIS out by the end of March 2019. We will do more public review of that. That will be the same time we do the ANILCA 810 hearings. The end of December 2019, we would have a Final EIS, and at least 30 days later, we would issue a Record of Decision whether or not to issue the right-of-way and with what conditions would be involved.

What's Next?

BLM is collecting scoping comments and feedback from you. We would like input from you so we can further refine the Purpose and Need for the project, determine issues and impacts to be studied, any alternative to the project that we should be studying, and identify any mitigation measures that would be applied to the project.

When you're commenting we try to ask that folks to be as specific as possible. Refer to a section or a page or anything specific that you're commenting on. Present new information to us that we may not have. Share issues relevant to the environmental analysis.

Suggest alternatives to the proposed project. Could the need be better met on different routes? Different modes of transportation? Any ideas you have and why they should be considered.

Saying that you do like this or don't like it isn't that helpful to us. You've got to explain why, and that way we can better incorporate your comment into our analysis and be responsive to them. Just saying "I don't like it" is very difficult to apply that into an environmental analysis. It's not a voting process.

There are many different ways to submit comments. You can verbally share them tonight. Again, this presentation is being recorded.

- Submit them on the comment forms at the front table.
- We have a website at <http://www.blm.gov/AmblerRoadEIS>
- You can fax them to my office at (907) 271-5479.
- You can email them to a special email address at blm_ak_akso_amblerroad_comments@blm.gov
- You can mail them my office in Anchorage at 222 West 7th Avenue, Stop #13, Anchorage, Alaska 99513.

Your input is really important for us. We need the public to be involved so we can do our job at best managing our public resources for everyone.

3. Comments

Below are verbal comments received after the presentation,

Comment from Laurie Thorpe, BLM

We would like to take the time now to answer any questions you have. Mostly we want to hear from you, what your issues and concerns are. We probably won't be able to answer all your questions, but it's important that you ask those questions so that we can address them in the EIS. That's what we want to hear from you. What are you concerned about? What do you think the issues, opportunities, challenges to get over?

Question from Seth Kantner

Are you just talking about the effects of the road? My analogy would be if you're building this road to come drop a bomb in the Ambler area, which you basically are would you say that's not my concern? We are only concerned about the effects of the road, the dust, crossing this country. What the mines do when they get here is not BLM's concern?

Response by Laurie Thorpe, BLM

Seth, that's a great question. We're going to try to address all of your concerns in the EIS, and any connected actions we're going to address those as well. For example, we have to address to some degree the trucking activities on this proposed road, but then, what are the connected actions there? To some degree, we have to address impacts to the Dalton Highway. They're going to truck down there. Where is the ore going to go after that?

Question from Seth Kantner

I'm talking about if you build a mine at the headwaters of a whole bunch of rivers up the Kobuk River. You guys are allowing that to happen. But once that happens, those effects will all come downriver. So are you saying we are just talking about the actual road? All your culpability ends with whatever that road causes not what is built because of the road? Are you talking about that or not?

Response by Laurie Thorpe, BLM

We do not have an application for mining development. We are responding to an application for a right-of-way for a road. We are going to look at reasonably foreseeable actions in the EIS. But because we don't know what a lot of those are going to be, and we don't have an application. The BLM doesn't own the land. The public doesn't own the land where those mining mineral developments are and the potential mining development is. We have no authority over that.

Comment from Seth Kantner

So basically the answer is this whole thing is you deciding whether the road is bad for animals, bad for subsistence, good for jobs, but not including what happens at the end of the road.

Response by Laurie Thorpe, BLM

Correct. We have no authority over the Native Corporation lands where the mineral occurrences are. It is outside of our jurisdiction.

Comment and Question from Seth Kantner

And you are aware that the last time something of this size was encouraged in this region, it was to come drop bombs up north of here, and make the world a better place with a bunch of hydrogen bombs? And there's endless studies to convince people of it, and luckily it was stopped. You're saying right now in this pamphlet that you can say "No" right?

Response by Laurie Thorpe, BLM

That is correct. The BLM is not required to select an action alternative. We are required according to the National Environmental Policy Act, we have to analyze the no-action alternative and use that to compare with any of the action alternatives. That would include this proposed route, and the alternative route that is being proposed or any other route or means of access.

Comment and Question from Seth Kantner

Okay, and then there is a section in here where you mention how this road may affect subsistence. That is the same way you're just talking about how the road would affect subsistence not what the road would bring?

Response by Laurie Thorpe, BLM

That is part of the social environment that we need to analyze. So yes, we would be analyzing the potential impacts to subsistence access, abundance, and availability that the proposed road may bring impacts to the subsistence resources.

Question from Seth Kantner

So if I understand you correctly in this category of subsistence you are including the effects of a copper mine on subsistence?

Response by Laurie Thorpe, BLM

Not of the mine, just the proposed road corridor.

Comment from Seth Kantner

You mentioned specifics. I have traveled that country in the winter. It's deep snow. Its trees. It's hard to get around. There's steep mountains directly to the north so the animals are lined up kind of where your road is if they are there. It's not a super popular place for animals in the winter, but that depends on each winter. As soon as you build a road, all of us animals, people on snowshoes, whatever we like the best trails. So that is going to affect everything that is there. Every animal is going to know the road is there as far as their own access. I guess the changing, I'll just use the word promise of whether that road is open to the public or not, is there any, it doesn't matter what you say, it's changed later. We see that with ANWR [Arctic National Wildlife Refuge]. We see it with, we see it with everything. That road, if you say you're concerned about the effects of subsistence and then are not including the actual mine, just the road, not including the potential to open up that road to the public, then you're just pretending.

Response by Laurie Thorpe, BLM

We are responding to the application, and the application at this time says that the road would only be open for industrial use and not open to the public. That's why we're here doing our public involvement and hearing issues and concerns from you. I expect, based on this type of input we're getting from concerned people like you, that there probably will be an alternative that analyzes what if the road was open to the public. Now I can't say there is going to be that alternative, but based on my experience and working with EISs and public involvement and how alternatives are developed that would be a likely alternative that may be analyzed. And I wanted to go back a little bit, Seth to your comment and concern about the mining development likely proposed there. We don't have any applications for that, but it is a reasonably foreseeable future action. That is legal terminology that we have to work with. We have to analyze to some degree as best as the information can provide us, some analysis on that. So we're not ignoring the mineral potential and mining opportunities there. But we don't know what those all are yet. So we will address them to some degree to the best we can. But there is no application that we can respond to. But it is a reasonably foreseeable future action that we will be analyzing in the EIS.

Question and Comment from Seth Kantner

Does it affect subsistence? The word "May" if you're worried about "May" there's no way you can do something like that. You can't build a road, drop a bomb, and say I didn't know that was going to affect subsistence. If you care about subsistence affecting it, you shouldn't build the road.

Response by Katherine Wood, HDR

That's definitely another comment that we've heard in a lot of communities so thank you for that.

Question and Comment from Marie Greene

I have a number of questions. First of all, I want to thank you for having community meetings. Getting to this point it wouldn't have gone forward if it wasn't for the support of the communities, including the upper Kobuk villages, including the routes. In looking at the different routes, working with traditional knowledge holders and experts, some of the things the previous person commented about,

those were the kind of concerns that were brought up when they were looking at different routes. What satisfied me at the time was receiving indigenous knowledge of the local hunters and subsistence users in selecting even the current route. I'm glad all that was done so thank you for having community meetings especially in the upper Kobuk area in our region. The question I had when you came to page 9 [of the slide show] about the assessments that are being done, analyzing the environmental economic impact analysis. And I realize on another page you had also social and economic impacts. What about health impact assessment? At some stage will something like this also be required to be done?

Response by Laurie Thorpe, BLM

Yes, that would be included as part of this EIS, and typically the State fulfills that role. But it is part of the EIS, and that's why the State is a Cooperating Agency on this project.

Comment and Question from Marie Greene

One more comment. I noticed that when you listed the Cooperating Agencies or cooperating partners, it has NAB to work with the Tribal governments. Could you just tell me what's the plan there with regards to the Borough as it works with our municipalities? I just want to have an understanding of what's expected from the Borough so that the tribes can be consulted as the process moves forward.

Response by Laurie Thorpe, BLM

We are still in the process of getting Cooperating Agency Memorandums of Understanding completed, but we do have one completed for the NAB and their role and responsibility. Because so much of the project is in the NAB, that they could provide traditional knowledge and input on subsistence, cultural resources, and coordination with Tribal members and affected communities. So that's what they said they could lend to this project as a Cooperating Agency, and the BLM said yes, that sounds very reasonable and valuable to this process.

Comment from John Lincoln, NANA

Just want to point out that NANA did inquire about becoming a Cooperating Agency, but we were denied that. I guess every Tribe that will be potentially impacted can apply to become that so we're still working through that with our communities and our Tribes.

Response by Laurie Thorpe, BLM

We legally can't have a non...in order to be a Cooperating Agency, you've got to be involved with having to issue a decision or a permit with project. Like the USACE, the USCG, and the State. With a Native corporation it's a private entity, and our regulations don't allow us to have them as a Cooperating Agency, but we're still trying to coordinate as closely as we can and maintain legal operations.

Question from John Lincoln

So any Tribal government can apply, and it's a relatively straightforward application to become one?

Response by Laurie Thorpe, BLM

Yes, and we sent letters out inviting Tribal government involvement. That letter was sent out last April, and that's how we got some responses and involvement initiated with many of the Tribal entities.

Question from Hannah Atkinson

Tribes can respond to that at any time, right? They can respond saying they're interested in being a Cooperating Agency even though you've already sent out the letters?

Response by Laurie Thorpe, BLM

Yes, it's best early so we can get them involved early on in the process to the best extent possible, because it's very difficult near the end of a project. So the sooner the better. The tribal entities could let us know if they would like to be a Cooperating Agency, and what they can give to the project in the environmental analysis so it can be as good as it can be.

Comment and Question from Susan Georgette

I'm here speaking about my concerns for myself and my family. We have a camp up on the Upper Kobuk on the Maniilaq River that's not that far from where this would be. We've spent 30 years up there so this area is very dear to my heart, and that's where part of my interest comes up. I had a few comments about the issues and concerns, things I thought you should be sure to address. One of them, I thought when you looked at subsistence it would really be worth looking at subsistence harvest data that Fish and Game and other agencies have about how roads affect subsistence harvest. I'm not sure exactly what all is available, but I worked a lot over decades on subsistence harvests statewide, and it really struck me when I moved to Kotzebue years ago how much more harvest went on here than went on in the roaded areas of Alaska where I worked. And I worked quite a bit in the Copper River area and Denali Highway and all, and my own observation of the villages in the Cooper River area was that they benefited very little economically from the road and bore most of the hardship in terms of getting subsistence harvest. So I think looking at doing an economic or social analysis of that.

I think it would be worth looking at the effect of a road on caribou migration. So the Western Arctic Herd is in decline. It's a critical subsistence resource. Its main migratory route is north to south, and this road goes east to west. So I think looking at that would be important. I think looking at the effect on subsistence on potential road access to our region by recreational hunters and fishermen. I worked for 30 years in land and resources in this region, and the most controversial and intractable issue has been the impact of recreational hunters and fishermen on subsistence people. And we spend a huge amount of time for many years with little resolution I would say dealing with that. I think the EIS should assume that the road will be open to the public. I just can't believe that that might not be how it ends, and so I think looking at who wouldn't want to flock to the Brooks Range in the Northwest Arctic.

Comment from Susan Georgette, continued

The Upper Kobuk is one of the most stunning areas in our state, is what I would say. People just need, as we know on the Yukon Highway Bridge, they need one point of access and hunters can go everywhere. They can take their boats and all.

So I think it's really important to look at the reality of what it would be like if it was not only an industrial road. I saw the airstrips on the map, and I think "Who has access to these airstrips?" and "Do they stay after the road is built?" There are plenty of recreational hunters and fishermen that would love more airstrips out there. I think looking at what the long-term plan is for maintenance of the road, what happens? Is there a restoration plan for the road? What happens years from now? Alaska is full of roads. The Wrangell Mountains is full of roads. They're kind of abandoned. They're used by whoever. So I think looking at that I'd love to see an economic analysis of the impact of a road on the local communities in the Upper Kobuk.

So I feel like the project's been sold as an economic gain to the Upper Kobuk villages, but the road as far as I can tell does not connect to any of the villages. What is the plan for connecting them? Or would they be connected? Or who would pay for that? And even if there were roads to the villages, how much would fuel cost if that was the case? We all need cheaper fuel, but are we willing to have a road if it saves us fifty cents a gallon? We're probably not talking about \$2 a gallon gas, but I think really looking at what that would be. And then I know you might say this is out of it, but it seems to me like there needs to be an economic analysis of what's the likelihood a mine would ever be developed?

So I feel like as a region what we're thinking about is the economic gain worth the price of a road, the bad impacts of a road? Like you say, it's just a road. So why would we want a road if we don't have a mine? What is the chance that a mine would really be developed? It seems quite possible to me that we could get the road and never get a mine, and then we have the worst of both worlds, in my mind. We have a road that probably would be open to the public with all the headaches of a road, and no economic gain from jobs for communities along the way.

I've asked AIDEA this, and they told me that it's really a road to a mining district and not to a mine. I mean there's not really, that's not true. I know Trilogy Metals has this mine project, but I just have a hard time believing, have a hard time even assessing, like are they just talking? Or what's the economic reality of this road or of this mine? And part of it for me is that Trilogy Metals is the descendant of the company Nova Gold that operates the Rock Creek Mine in Nome. And I know people from Shungnak who moved down to Nome to work at that Rock Creek Mine, and I think that mine operated for less than a year and then it got shut down, and Sitnasuak bought it, and there's nothing there now. So part of me is really skeptical that we could be sold a road for economic development that the road gets built, but Trilogy Mine kind of vanishes. It's had three different incarnations in the last few years and so I'd be really interested in economic assessment of what really is the chance that we would have a mine. Because maybe the road is worth it if we really had a lot of jobs, but I have a hard time believing it.

Comment from Susan Georgette, continued

So I don't know if you can do an analysis of Trilogy Metals operational history? Or like what they're bringing to it? Or how they would fit into the road project? Because I think what Seth is saying is right. Like why does the road project not include an aspect of the mining side of it, both positive and negative? And I kind of know the answer, but it seems not right I guess that it shouldn't be that. And so I feel like it's really hard to separate the pros and cons of a road without including the pros and cons of a mine. I don't really get that. So I'm not against economic development. I know our region has a lot of need for it, and we have a lot of cost of living challenges, but I also know that the one thing we are rich in is the land and the subsistence resources we have. They really are worth protecting. When I'm on the Upper Kobuk, even with the recreational hunters and fishermen we have, I'm still really struck by it being kind of the domain of the Upper Kobuk residents. I mean, mostly those up there are Upper Kobuk people. They have these wonderful camps and travel all over, and they know the land. In my mind that's a good thing. And it seems like the road has the potential to really take that away without providing anything in return, ultimately. So those are my comments.

Comment and Question from Stacey Glaser

I'm here on my own behalf and also with Seth Kantner. We have a lease holding in Kobuk Valley National Park where Seth was born and raised in the early 60s. So I have concerns about this massive project going in on this amazing spot on our planet. So my question is about the road and this process. We're going through this process for you guys to determine whether we're going to have this road. So if you decide that maybe this road isn't so great and decide not to put in the road, or not to allow your portion of the road to be built, what happens then? And then, has that ever happened in the history of the BLM where you go through this process, and decide this road is in the public interest?

Response by Laurie Thorpe, BLM

I have seen it happen where we will initiate this public involvement process for an EIS, and for any number of reasons, the applicant determines that they would not want to pursue it further at the time. That would be a more likely scenario that could happen. The applicant may determine, "We've heard so much from this public scoping we may not feel that they want to pursue it further at this time." They may determine that they do want to continue pursuing it. And we will go through the continued phases of the EIS process, and look at the alternatives, and do our best. That's why we're getting this input from you, and I thank you for it, to do the best we can with the environmental analysis. To inform and disclose [what] the potential impacts, [and] opportunities, both positive and negative, would be for the proposed road.

Comment from Stacey Glaser

Well, that didn't really answer my question. My question was so you're going through this process to decide whether or not the road will go through BLM land. Is that what you're deciding? Just your piece of BLM land on this road?

Response by Laurie Thorpe, BLM

The BLM's role [is] as lead agency for the EIS bringing in the Cooperating Agencies that we mentioned. We only have jurisdiction over the BLM-managed lands. So yes, our decision would be only affecting BLM land.

Response by Katherine Wood, HDR

But the EIS, there are these other Cooperating Agencies that are going to use this document to make their land decisions as well for the entire thing.

Question from Stacey Glaser

So one entity along this road decides "It's not in our best interest to have this road on our piece of the proposed road," what happens then? Has that ever happened?

Response by Laurie Thorpe, BLM

I've never been involved in a situation where that has happened, but a lot of my coworkers, we've talked about this scenario just as you're describing it. If this agency—and it's not just one entity that decides that's why we have Cooperating Agencies—but the BLM is the entity deciding for the BLM lands. If we were to decide "No" that we're not going to grant an authorization for the right-of-way across BLM as proposed, or any of the alternatives that may be developed, that's our decision. All decisions are subject to appeal. That's the extent of our authorization.

Question from Stacey Glaser

Has it ever happened, that BLM has ever...?

Response from Laurie Thorpe, BLM

Selected the no action?

Question from Stacey Glaser

Yeah.

Response by Laurie Thorpe, BLM

I have never been involved in an EIS like that. I believe it has happened. But what has happened more often is we just never get further along in the process. For whatever reason, the initiative doesn't continue further in the process that happens more often in my experience. Does that better answer your question?

Comment from Stacey Glaser

Yeah, it gives me an idea how this is going to come out.

Response by Joe Durrenberger, NPS

I want to build on the question and the answer as well. You have the EIS and permitting agencies BLM, USACE, and USCG that are using the information for their respective areas of authority. The USACE has permitting responsibility for all wetlands regardless of land ownership over the entire length of that. The NPS has a permitting responsibility for the NPS lands alone.

And the NPS we're not part of the EIS, because when Congress passed ANILCA and created Gates they said that upon receipt of an application for overland access across the preserve portion of Gates then the Secretary of Interior and Secretary of Transportation will allow such access. So NPS responsibility is to permit that access, but to make a decision about where it goes across NPS lands and what are appropriate terms and conditions for that. And then the other things that ANILCA said about NPS responsibilities was that they would do an environmental and economic analysis, and evaluate the project with respect to a variety of things that were listed there, impacts to resources, impacts to subsistence, social and economic, and whatnot. And that this would not be a NEPA process so it is not an EIS. And that's why we are not a part of the EIS. We have a parallel process, with a decision that we make, but in our decision process "No Action," or saying "No" is not on the table for us.

Response by Laurie Thorpe, BLM

So if I can expand on that a little further. Thank you, Joe. If an alternative from this public involvement process is identified that is different than what the applicant has submitted, i.e., one of these two routes that completely avoids NPS lands...

Comment from Joe Durrenberger, NPS

We kind of drop out.

Question from Hannah Atkinson

I have a follow-up question. I was wondering if the Cooperating Agencies... so the EEA might provide information that is not in the EIS. So will the Cooperating Agencies be using the EEA at all? They don't have an obligation to do that, but it seems like it would make sense to use that document decision as well.

Comment from Response by Laurie Thorpe, BLM

We are trying to work closely sharing information between the NPS and the BLM so that we all have the same information to use in our analyses.

Comment from Melisa Riordan, USACE

In working closely with the Corps, we don't really care what the [ownership] boundaries are. We want to make sure that the same methodology is used through the entire alignment for the portion where our jurisdiction is so we're trying to coordinate that so it's going to be consistent. But we're going to be using the information in the EIS. Does that make sense? We're trying to make sure that there isn't something separate so when you look at it, it doesn't make sense. You know it's got to be consistent across ownerships represented in the EIS for the entire alignment even through the Park to make the decision.

Comment from Joe Durrenberger, NPS

We're also looking for input from the State about what factors are they going to consider in their permitting process. So that if there are things that are important to consider such as any time the project crosses a stream that has fish in it there's a crossing that allows for fish-friendly passage.

Things like that. Whatever factors that the State is going to allow for we want to make sure we understand that as well so we're not at cross-purposes. If they have particular mandates we want to look at those as well. We're looking at a coordinated process among all the different agencies that have permitting responsibilities.

Comment and Question from Brittany Sweeney, USFWS

I'm wondering if you will be looking at the maintenance plan for the road in addition to simply the road corridor? The reason I was wondering is it seems like the maintenance will have a lot to do with the possible impacts to sedimentation or dust. You know the Upper Kobuk is a spawning area for a lot of different, really important fish. So sedimentation is a concern. And I'm assuming you're considering asbestos. Marie asked about human health, but that's definitely a factor. It's in material sites all along the mapped route, including the one that says Asbestos Mountain. So that's I think worthy of concern.

Comment and Question from Chuck Greene, NAB

I know the study will include impacts to social and traditional lifestyles and a number of other issues. Is that isolated just to the Upper Kobuk district? Or is it regional, borough-wide, statewide, or a combination?

Question by Laurie Thorpe, BLM

How wide do you think it should be?

Response from Chuck Greene, NAB

I think because we're in Kotzebue, and I'm also curious because you've been to Ambler what the Ambler residents said and what their comments were. If they're pro-road and they are the ones that are going to be impacted seems to me it would be supportive. But I'm sure people have concerns as well. I would hope that the EIS would include statewide impacts as well.

Response by Katherine Wood, HDR

We are taking notes at all the meetings, and our plan is that when we have those all put together that we will be publishing those so you can see what was said in all the communities.

Comment from Seth Kantner

Can I say something that won't hold up in a court of law? Basically, around here there is a... the people around here that live closest to subsistence tend to avoid meetings the most. It was really hard for me to come to this meeting. I don't go to meetings, but the people I talked to by and large have the feeling that you people, "Outsiders," have already made up your mind, and going to a meeting is a waste of time. And I asked people in Homer, which is not part of this region, and Fairbanks "Should I go to this meeting?" And they were like, "Well, you know you could, but you're right. They have made up their mind." That was me casting about on the internet. Like I said this isn't a valid argument in a court of law, but I do know I've spent my whole life in the region here that my friends in Ambler didn't go to the meeting. And some of them are in favor of the road. They like the job potential. But by and large people who are living subsistence, or close to it, or more [of a] percentage of it, avoid these things and strongly believe that you guys have already made up your mind.

And I have to be honest, I walked in here with that same feeling. That's a really standard feeling in this region. And we've had it with lots and lots of meetings not just the road meetings.

Comment and Question from Hannah Atkinson

I had some thoughts and comments that follow what Seth said. I've lived here since I was 14, and then went to college and came back. And I've been working in subsistence since I graduated from college. Trying to figure out... so I'm not really from the world of agencies, and I'm not from the world of subsistence either so I'm kind of between the two, and trying to figure out how to communicate between them. I had some thoughts about that aspect and questions too. I think that a lot of the public meetings that happen in our community regularly. The subsistence public meetings are the ones that I'm familiar with. The road comes up all the time, because it's something that is going to impact everybody and not just people who live in Ambler or upriver. It's going to impact everybody, being that the Western Arctic Caribou herd is the center of the Western Arctic Caribou herd migration. I was wondering if it is possible for you to use or site public record of subsistence meetings or other types of meetings that go on all the time in our communities where people might be representing opinions that they are not going to put out into public comment, and if that is maybe something that you're already planning on doing for the EIS?

Response by Laurie Thorpe, BLM

We're here to hear what we should be addressing, and thank you for sharing that as another area that we should include in our analysis [and] other discussions. We want to consider everything we can. And thank you for bringing that up as another resource to look at subsistence advisory committees and the discussions of those records. It's good information to include.

Comment from Hannah Atkinson

Yeah, because I know from working in it that the subsistence committees they all have the ability to submit a public comment from their board, but they don't always decide to do that. But there is always discussion of the road going on at those meetings. Seth's point is really good that people who do subsistence and are really living subsistence, they don't like to go to meetings. So the people who are on the subsistence advisory committees and the commissions they are people who like meetings and subsistence so it's not really representative of, in some ways it's representative and in some ways it's not.

Comment and Question from Susan Georgette

If you could address in the EIS what happens to the road while we're waiting for the mine to be developed. So I really am kind of hung up on this road/mine interaction, and so I can imagine that we could say the road is built, but we could have some beautiful industrial grade road, but there's no industry to drive on it. So is there road maintenance going on then? What keeps that situation from being open to the public then? If we actually built a road that's done, but Trilogy goes away or the economics of zinc go down or any other scenario out there... Like Red Dog, I think the road, and maybe I'm wrong, Marie or Jeff would know, but like the road was built with the mine. It was more in sync. It wasn't like a road was built, but someone else is doing the mine. It was a package deal really.

But this one is really not that. This one is a road and maybe or maybe not a mine. So I think really lining that out in the EIS about what is likelihood [of] that really? Like what are these scenarios of a road with sort of the promise of a mine, but they're not really the same? It's not an EIS on all of that.

Comment from Brittany Sweeney, USFWS

I have a follow-up comment. Earlier in your reply to Mr. Greene when he was wondering how far would you look in your economic and social analysis, I think that it would depend on the wildlife resource that could potentially be impacted. And then you should look at all the people that utilize that resource. So for example, with the Western Arctic Caribou herd it would go to certain communities and beyond. If it was the Kobuk River spawning Sheefish population it would go to Kotzebue Sound, Noatak, etc., so I would suggest to follow along with the wildlife species.

Comment from John Chase, NAB

Earlier you talked about analyzing reasonably foreseeable impacts of this road. I think just focusing on the road is one thing, but if you think about the land use of that road with these semi-trucks with potential future mining those uses are going to have reasonably foreseeable impacts to subsistence. At the Borough I work in the planning department, and we give subsistence the highest priority of any land use. I'm just listening to the presentation and the focus is only on the road, road, road. And earlier you had talked about analyzing reasonably foreseeable impacts, and I hope that BLM weighs a lot of weight on these reasonably foreseeable impacts such as mining, such as the use of semi-trucks. Because once you grant this right-of-way, you're opening up a potential, like Seth said. You're opening up a bomb. So I hope that the BLM puts weight on the reasonably foreseeable impacts such as mining and the use of the road with semi-trucks.

Comment and Question from Marie Greene

Just listening to the comments that are being said about subsistence, I strongly encourage or urge a process that gets input. Invite subsistence hunters. I can name a number of them that live here in Kotzebue. The reason I am suggesting that is you know the Circumpolar Council? They did that statewide, especially in rural Alaska to learn about the importance of subsistence. One meeting was held here in Kotzebue, and they invited subsistence hunters from each of the communities. And this was really encouraging to see from these hunters themselves, what is important to them, and the comments and suggestions they made, recommendations of what's important to them. So I would encourage that this be done. Get the Borough to help with who all is out there that can be invited to these meetings so we could hear firsthand from subsistence hunters themselves. These kind of comments are being made. Let's take the time if it's so important to you. There's one section here that says "May significantly restrict subsistence uses." So to really have that in-depth input, you know this is where you can get it, right from the hunters themselves. So I strongly encourage that to happen. And the question I had is that next paragraph where it says "If alternatives may significantly restrict subsistence use, either abundance, access, or availability." Is this done just one time or could that be done let's say five years after the usage of the road? Or if the road is going to go forward, could that be done periodically just to learn what the impacts of this road have been, especially to our subsistence? You know the hunting and the harvesting season? I think that's really important.

Not just one time but throughout the life of the road if that's going to go forward. I think that would really help. And the other final comment I have is doing some baseline studies now. So we know that the caribou migration is changing. Every year it's not the same. We now have caribou running through the community of Kotzebue, and I've been living here since 1977 and I very seldom saw that throughout all those years. So I think baseline studies so that we can know what's happening now before a road is built. So we know in advance as impacts are being brought up. Because when I was at NANA we'd hear comments, "That used to never happen before the road to the port was built." Baseline studies weren't done then full extent so that's a lesson learned there. So doing baseline studies before this road is built. Get all the different agencies involved. Have them provide their expertise, including subsistence hunters. I think it would be really beneficial, especially if the road will go forward.

Comment and Question from Hannah Atkinson

I wanted to echo something that Susan already mentioned but you have to consider what the impacts are going to be to subsistence if there's more people coming into the region. I think we have reasonably the documentation of what the impacts to subsistence are looking at the Noatak River and the Noatak National Preserve, as an example. Where sport hunting is permitted and there is a lot of competition of subsistence resources, and what the impacts are. We would see the same situation in the Upper Kobuk, but much, much worse if there is a road that goes through the middle of it. Also, what happens on the Dalton Highway? There's a lot of different resources so I hope that's included in the EIS.

Comment from Seth Kantner

I just noticed you asked Mr. Greene how wide should we include? I just wanted to clarify a little bit, I guess, how this region works. People here are hunters first and subsistence first regardless of what else they do. Or even if they move to Vegas, they still are. It's caught in your mind, and you come back and you want to get caribou and stuff. Where I was raised below Ambler on the Kobuk River, which would be halfway between here and where you're talking about. But in the fall, everybody mobilizes and goes up there. Not everybody but a lot of people go up there, and look for caribou. And so there is already a pretty severe conflict between Kotzebue people and Ambler people at Onion portage, the main crossing point of caribou. Those are all local people. Conflict over caribou and there's more boats at certain times because of the migration, less caribou. And so it's really important that when you do talk about Upper Kobuk resources that you do include Kotzebue people and Noorvik People and Selawik people coming around the horn so to speak that come up to try to get caribou. And people are all related, and they hunt the same area if that's where the caribou are. If you really are serious about talking about subsistence you can't just say Ambler, Kobuk, Shungnak people up here. Obviously, people are saying if you throw more people into the mix from the rest of the world coming in the conflict there is potentially terrible. The river is State land so people can come from Wasilla and hunt at Onion portage. They take advantage of that loophole in the law. So if you're talking about subsistence, I think it's pretty important to include these other villages as closely related to Ambler-Shungnak.

4. Closing

Laurie Thorpe and Katherine Wood reiterated that more comments are welcome in whatever form is easiest for the commenters. It all receives the same weight. If you know people who should be commenting please encourage them to do so. The comment period to determine the scope of the study goes through January 31, 2018. We really do want to hear from as many people as we can to try to figure out what we should be looking at. The plan is once we get to the Draft EIS stage, hopefully we will have a lot of or at least better answers to a lot of the questions that you and other communities have been asking. And at that point we will be coming back around again to say “Alright, this is what you asked us to study. This is what we did. What do you think?” That’s the next real opportunity once scoping is done where we will really need public feedback to make the process complete. That’s kind of the path forward here, and thank you for coming.