



Ambler Road Environmental Impact Statement

Additional Public Outreach Teleconference Meeting

MEETING NOTES

January 16, 2018, 5:00-7:00 pm

HDR, 2525 C Street, Suite 500, 4th Floor, South Multipurpose Room, Anchorage, Alaska

Teleconference Number 844.844.0414, Passcode 973468

Presentation materials at www.blm.gov/amblerroadeis

Project Team Participants

Bureau of Land Management: Tina McMaster-Goering, Tim LaMarr, Tom Sparks (via phone)

HDR: John McPherson (via phone), Leslie Robbins, Katherine Wood

Attendees via Phone

Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation: Gary Mendivil

Alaska Department of Natural Resources: Marie Steele

Alaska Industrial Development and Export Authority: Jeff San Juan (Project Applicant)

City of Koyuk: Tracy Kimoktoak, three additional public attendees

City of Nome: Tom Gray, Bryant Hammond, Cheryl Thompson

City of Nuiqsut: David Arnold

Kawerak Inc.: Brandon Ahmasuk, three additional public attendees

Native Village of White Mountain: Dorothy Barr, four additional public attendees

Nulato: Peter Demoski, Michael Stickman, five additional public attendees

Shaktoolik: Isabelle Jackson

Shishmaref: Fred Enintowk, Edward Weyiouanna, two additional public attendees

Meeting Purpose

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

Meeting Topics

- 1. Introduction and Welcome by Katherine Wood, HDR**
- 2. Presentation by Tina McMaster-Goering, BLM**

In November and December 2017, we held scoping meetings in 10 communities for the Ambler Road EIS. At the December meeting of the Western Arctic Caribou Herd (WACH) Working Group it was suggested that additional communities may have suggestions and comments to share with the BLM. This is the first of two identical teleconferences to collect that input. The following [meeting] being Thursday, January 18, from 5:00 to 7:00 pm.

Background

The purpose of today's meeting is to share information about the BLM's EIS process, and to get input from the local communities. Without that input, the EIS process will not be effective. Public input about issues and concerns is very important.

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 that law recognizing the mineral potential in the Ambler Mining District and the need for transportation access. Section 201(4)(b) provides for surface transportation access through Gates of the Arctic National Park and Preserve, but did not address access across BLM lands. That's why we are here today to address it with you as we respond to the application for the right-of-way.

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. In 2016, AIDEA spent the first half of the year responding to requests for additional information from the application recipients (BLM, National Park Service [NPS], U.S. Coast Guard [USCG], and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers [USACE]).

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 initiating a 90-day public scoping period. BLM did not want to impact subsistence activities during the summer months so extended the public scoping period through January 31, 2018.

In 2017, NPS began a separate but parallel Environmental and Economic Impact Analysis (EEA) for the portion of the road on National Park Service land as directed by ANILCA. The road must connect to other lands managed by BLM, the State, and other Native corporations to reach the Ambler Mining District.

Proposed Project

The right-of-way application from 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.

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 in the [PowerPoint] presentation and on the website to see the route.

AIDEA's proposed alignment begins at the Dalton Highway (Milepost 161), and extends westward along the south side of the Brooks Range to the south bank of the Ambler River.

The type of land crossed by the road includes 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. AIDEA would manage the access, and has indicated they would remove the road after mining was completed.

Vehicles using the road would include trucks hauling mineral exploration and development equipment, supplies, fuel, and ore concentrate. 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 mineral belt area as shown on the Proposed Project Area Map (see handout). The proposed alternative is shown in red with an alternate route in green that reduces the number of miles that must cross the Gates of the Arctic National Park [and Preserve] land. The two routes shown are proposed by AIDEA, and the routes through the National Park land will be analyzed by the NPS EEA.

Agency Roles

BLM is the lead federal agency for preparing the EIS. BLM is coordinating with all the other agencies. BLM has authority to grant a right-of-way across BLM-managed lands. BLM must also comply with ANILCA Section 810 and the National Historic Preservation Act, Section 106.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) is a Cooperating Agency, and would be responsible for the wetlands permits that would be required. The USACE would evaluate the project application under Section 10 of the Rivers and Harbors Act and Section 404 of the Clean Water Act, and use the EIS as the basis for its permit decisions.

The U.S. Coast Guard (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.

The State of Alaska Department of Natural Resources (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.

The Northwest Arctic Borough (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.

Allakaket Tribal Council has requested to be a Cooperating Agency, and the BLM is currently working on a memorandum with them.

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

What is an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS)?

This EIS is a site-specific EIS for the proposed Ambler Road. An EIS is a document required under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) which requires federal agencies to assess the environmental consequences of their decisions. An EIS is required for actions by federal agencies that significantly affect the quality of the human environment. Without your input, we cannot do a good EIS. An EIS includes the following:

- Project Purpose and Need.
- Issues raised during scoping (internal/external).
- Project alternatives.
- Description of potentially affected environment (resources like wildlife, vegetation, hydrology, fisheries, cultural resources, and the human environment). 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 currently in the Scoping Process requesting public participation. The Scoping Period ends January 31, 2018. Then a Draft EIS will be developed with draft alternatives by March 2019. Public review would be held on that Draft EIS.

Based on that feedback, we would revise and issue a Final EIS. After that, BLM would issue a Record of Decision. The estimated completion date for the Final EIS would be end of December 2019.

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 the currently inaccessible, economically valuable mineral deposits in the Ambler Mining District.

The project purpose of the BLM action is to provide AIDEA with:

- Technically and economically practical and feasible surface transportation access across BLM-managed lands for mining exploration and development in the Ambler Mining District.
- Authorization to construct, operate, and maintain associated facilities for that access.

BLM Decisions to be made

The BLM must decide whether a right-of-way shall be granted, and if so, the terms and conditions that will be included in the right-of-way.

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 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 and the alternatives to study.
- Identify potential mitigation measures that may be needed to avoid, minimize, or mitigate for project impacts.
- Obtain information to help evaluate the project under the applicable laws.

EIS Document

The EIS document will cover these kinds of issues:

- Air quality
- Special status species
- Subsistence use and access
- Climate change effects
- Fish and aquatic species
- Critical minerals
- Invasive species
- Water
- Travel management
- Mining
- Wetlands and riparian

- Demand for gravel resources
- Recreational activities
- Wilderness characteristics
- Public access
- Social and economic impacts
- Cultural resources
- Wildlife and biological resources
- Impacts to rural and traditional lifestyles
- Geology and soils
- Reasonably foreseeable future activities

ANILCA Section 810

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.

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 as public meetings upon release of the Draft EIS. They are a separate but concurrent process.

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.

Tribal entities, 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.

NPS EEA Process

AIDEA's proposal includes two alternative routes across NPS lands (North and South). If there's another alternative suggested during the process, we might look at that too.

Under ANILCA, NPS is legally required to permit access across NPS lands, and requires that they 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>

Schedule

Scoping concludes January 31, 2018. A Draft EIS will be developed by March 29, 2019, followed by public review and the ANILCA 810 hearings. A Final EIS based on public and agency review of the draft will be produced by December 30, 2019, and the Record of Decision is targeted to be completed by January 30, 2020.

What's Next?

BLM is collecting comments and feedback. We 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.

Writing substantive comments assists BLM to make good decisions.

When you provide comments:

- Be as specific as possible about what you are concerned about.
- Refer to a section or page number of a particular referenced document.
- Present new information.
- Share issues relevant to the environmental analysis.
- Suggest alternatives to the proposed project and the reason(s) why they should be considered.
- "I don't like this" or "I do like this" is not useful. Explain why.

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

- Submit a comment form in the box today
- Submit comments via the Ambler Road EIS 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. Public Comment and Questions

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

Comment from Brandon Ahmasuk, City of Nome, Kawerak Subsistence Resources Program Director
Kawerak is pro-economic development as long as it is done with utmost respect to subsistence resources and subsistence users. Nome is at the tail end of the Western Arctic Caribou Herd range, and there is concern that the new road will have negative impacts on that end of the caribou migration. This is the largest concern.

Comment and Question from David Arnold, City of Nuiqsut, Nuiqsut City Administrator

I spoke to the City Council about this project, and their feedback was that the City promotes economic development, and is entirely dependent on it as long it is done responsibly with respect to subsistence activities. The City Council is concerned about the heavy traffic on the Dalton Highway should the road be built. We understand that with mining needs it would put not only a burden on the road itself but on the other people that are using it for transportation. The people of the City of Nuiqsut use the Dalton Highway quite a bit to get down to Fairbanks, and there is difficulty at times with heavy trucking on the road. There is concern on how an increase in heavy traffic as a result of the road to Ambler would impact the Dalton Highway. The City Council wants to know why is AIDEA a Cooperating Agency?

Answer from Tim LaMarr, BLM

AIDEA is not a Cooperating Agency for the project. They are the proponent for the project. Members of AIDEA are not going to be sitting at the table through the Environmental Impact Statement process. They will not be hands-on with regard to the content of the Environmental Impact Statement because they are the proponent, not a Cooperating Agency. The State of Alaska Department of Natural Resources is a Cooperating Agency, and they are playing an overarching role in coordinating with a variety of state agencies who are going to be involved with the project, and provide input as well.

Comment from Dorothy Barr, Native Village of White Mountain, Tribal Coordinator

(Four additional members listening)

With the new road construction, we are concerned about the negative impact on the caribou migration since we rely on caribou for meat. We have about 86 percent of our population that is low and moderate income so we rely on our subsistence lifestyle.

Comment from Fred Enintowk, Shishmaref, Secretary of the City of Shishmaref

(Two additional council members listening)

Our concern would be with the Western Arctic Caribou Herd. We are at the tail end of the migration. In a newsletter called "Caribou Trails," there was an article some years back on the caribou that were collared and tracked. One article had a map of them, and a majority of them did not cross the Nome-Taylor road. We are worried about the same impact with the Ambler Road.

Comment and Question from Tracey Kimoktoak, City of Koyuk City Clerk

(Two additional councilmen and one public member listening)

The concern we also have is the migration of the caribou, and will the road affect the migration? Our community relies on meat every winter to support our families. There is concern whether the caribou will migrate to a different area if they are unable to pass a road. We want to continue to hunt caribou during the winter.

Comment from Isabelle Jackson, Shaktoolik City Clerk

Agree with Dorothy Barr's comments from White Mountain.

Comment and Question from Peter Demoski, Nulato, Nulato Tribal Council

(Four additional attendees in the room)

I've been a tribal administrator for 17 years. I'm pretty familiar with the subsistence needs for people in our area. I know that you're aware of those with a standing resolution opposing the Ambler Road. Nulato Tribal Council also has a standing resolution opposing the Ambler Road. Has AIDEA considered a shorter road? It's half the distance from Ambler to Kotzebue. Kotzebue has a deep sea port they can ship out all the ore from the Ambler District.

Comment from Tom Sparks, BLM (Nome)

There were two city employees, four total at the meeting as well as Brandon who was representing the public.

Comment From Michael Stickman, Nulato, First Chief of the Nulato Tribe

Consider the renewable natural resources because the proposed road will cross three rivers, and one of them is a spawning creek for the fall chum run. At the last count, 500,000 fall chum spawned on the river. When we cannot fish for King Salmon the fall chum is what we rely on, and it is very important for us. One of our biggest concerns is the spawning areas the road is going to cross.

Question from Edward Weyiouanna, Shishmaref Council Member

I'm wondering, will it affect other caribou through our area besides the Western Arctic Caribou Herd? Because we rely on them for subsistence every year.

Question from Fred Enintowk, Shishmaref

In the slides it was stated that the road will be removed after mining is done. How long is the road going to be there?

Response from Tim LaMarr, BLM

AIDEA's application for the right-of-way was for a 50-year right-of-way.

Comment from John McPherson, HDR

Please send in a list of names of participants that attended in your communities for our records.

Comment from Katherine Wood, HDR

Please send a list of names of who was listening in to the teleconference to the BLM e-mail or to Tina McMaster-Goering so we can have it for record keeping.

4. Closing by Tim LaMarr, BLM

The end of the scoping period is at the end of this month. If you have additional comments, please e-mail or mail a hard copy or fax any additional comments.