

Donlin Gold Mine

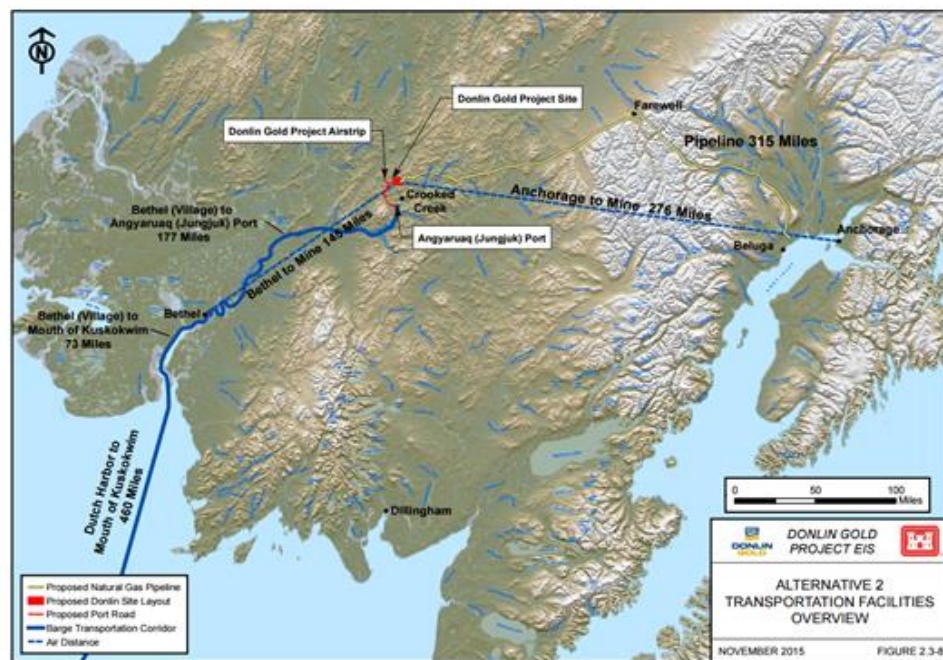
The Kuskokwim watershed in southwest Alaska is home to numerous Alaska Native villages that depend on the safe harvest of fish and wildlife to sustain their families, their culture, and their way of life.

Nova Gold Resources and Barrick Gold Corporation propose to develop a massive open pit, hard-rock gold mine in the area, 10 miles north of the village of Crooked Creek.

The project would involve:

- a two square mile pit that would eventually fill with water and require water treatment in perpetuity
- a 2,240 acre waste rock pile
- a 2,351 acre tailings impoundment
- 122 barge trips on the Kuskokwim River every summer during the mine's operations
- a 315-mile-long natural gas pipeline that would cross the Cook Inlet Basin, requiring nine new air strips and numerous roads during construction.

The site is predominantly drained by tributaries to Crooked Creek, which flows into the Kuskokwim River. The proposed Donlin Gold project would require three to four years to construct and have an active mine life of approximately 27.5 years.





Mercury and other contamination

Donlin Creek mine could potentially contaminate the Kuskokwim River and its delta with toxic chemicals including mercury and arsenic. Contamination would threaten subsistence food sources, commercial salmon fisheries, wildlife, and public health. Donlin Gold has estimated that the mine would remove approximately 34,600 pounds of mercury per year, which would be shipped off site by barges down the Kuskokwim River to a mercury storage facility. However, even with protective measures in place, it is estimated that the mine would emit hundreds of pounds of mercury per year into the atmosphere and watershed during the processing of the ore.

Mercury is of particular concern because it accumulates in aquatic organisms and is already a significant problem in the Arctic. Mercury from different areas of the world builds up in the Arctic and accumulates in the tissues of fish and marine mammals used as traditional food sources. Moreover, mercury levels in certain fish in the Kuskokwim River are already elevated due to contamination from abandoned mines in the region, and further contamination could prove significant, if not devastating, for the health of the region's people, environment and economy. Mercury emissions would especially threaten the health of Alaska Natives in the area who rely on subsistence fishing for approximately 60 percent of their diet.

Permitting process

The Draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) of the Donlin Project was released in 2015 by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Corps), which set April 30, 2016 as the deadline for the public to submit comments. On April 26th, we were notified of an extension until May 31st. This process is intended to fully disclose known or anticipated impacts and to offer the public, tribes, and governmental agencies a chance to comment on draft conclusions. The Final EIS, estimated to be released in mid-2017, will provide agency decision makers with the scientific basis for their permitting decisions. The Draft EIS is more than 7,000 pages long.

Communities in the area, such as Native Village of Napaimute and the City of Bethel, and organizations including Northern Alaska Environmental Center, Earthjustice and Alaska Community Action on Toxics have submitted requests for a six-month extension on the public comment period for the DEIS. We believe that this is warranted in order to ensure full and meaningful public involvement, especially in light of the magnitude of the proposed project as well as the length and complexity of the DEIS. The proposed project will have significant effects on the environment and public health. Therefore, it is crucial to provide the public sufficient time to thoroughly review and develop informed opinions concerning the project.

Iditarod Sled Dog Race

Furthermore, several issues have hindered meaningful engagement during the existing comment period. Of great concern are the restrictions placed on the mushing community during the Iditarod Trail Sled Dog Race this year by race organizers, limiting mushers' ability to express their viewpoints on the Donlin Gold Project, which was a primary sponsor of the 2016 race.

The proposed natural gas pipeline would lie in the vicinity of the Iditarod National Historic Trail for about 60 miles, crossing it 13 times. While several mushers have spoken up against the pipeline in the past, the new rule prohibits mushers from making public statements "injurious to" the race, including comments "disparaging to any of the sponsors," until 45 days after the race is complete. The race ended on March 19, 2016, so the rule constrains mushers from expressing views that may be deemed critical of the proposal until May 3, 2016. The new deadline has been set for May 31st, giving mushers less than a month to express their opinions. The mushing community deserves the time and opportunity to submit comments on this proposed mine which is salient to their interests. The purpose of this process is to provide a full and fair opportunity for public involvement, which is clearly violated if a whole community is purposefully excluded.

