

The Honorable Deb Haaland
1849 C Street, N.W.
Washington DC 20240

March 29, 2022

RE: Support for the Ambler Access Project Joint Record of Decision

Dear Secretary Haaland:

The Northwest Arctic Leadership Team (“NWALT”) writes today to express our support for the Ambler Access Project (“AAP”) Joint Record of Decision (“JROD”). We are extremely concerned that the Department of the Interior (“DOI”) may significantly delay this project, which is of vital importance to advancing the quality of life for the people of Northwest Alaska. We urge you to move forward with the AAP without delay.

NWALT is comprised of the top executive and chairperson of the following organizations which serve communities across an area of 38,000 square miles (about the size of Indiana): Maniilaq Association, a consortium of 12 federally recognized Tribes which provides health, social, and tribal government services through compacts with the Indian Health Service and Bureau of Indian Affairs; NANA Regional Corporation, an Alaska Native corporation formed pursuant to the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act; Northwest Arctic Borough, a home rule regional government formed under the laws of the State of Alaska; and the Northwest Arctic Borough School District, a public school system educating about 2,000 students in 11 villages. Together, our organizations are entrusted with the responsibility of ensuring the people of our region have every opportunity to live a quality life and achieve the American Dream right here in our home communities along the Arctic Circle.

The JROD represents over a decade of work by federal career professionals, with village and regional leaders dedicating countless hours and resources to providing input into the administrative review process despite limited capacity. When it comes to what is best for our region, we listen to our villages and their leadership and to our Elders, who consistent with the Iñupiat Iitqusiat (Iñupiaq for “those things which make us who we are”) provide us guidance and wisdom. Our Regional Elders Council and the Tribes in our region that are closest to the AAP – the Native Villages of Ambler, Kobuk, and Shungak – support the JROD. We are pleased to come alongside them and offer our support. We are confident in the JROD and the

processes it outlines for considering impacts to subsistence, the environment, and the cultural and historical patrimony of our people.

Advancing the AAP aligns with the Biden Administration's priorities of Racial Equity, Climate, Economy, and Health Care, as well as Executive Orders on supply chains and catalyzing America's clean energy. Iñupiat people are 80 percent of our region's population and have served as stewards of our homelands since time immemorial. Our physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual health and our identities are interwoven with our natural environment in a relationship of reciprocity that can only develop over thousands of years. Our people have a fundamental human right to remain in our homelands and to thrive through a mixed subsistence and cash economy. Vast health, social, educational, and economic disparities exist between Alaska Native people and non-Natives that our organizations are combatting. Per the 2020 census, the poverty rate in the Northwest Arctic Borough was 18.5 percent compared to the national rate of 11.4 percent. The residents of our region pay large sums of money for goods given the lack of transportation infrastructure. The villages nearest the AAP receive goods flown in at exorbitant costs due to climate change no longer making river barge service a reliable option. For example, gas costs around \$10/gallon, which is also the cost of a gallon of milk if and when it is available. These costs are only growing higher because of inflation.

The village and regional leadership of Northwest Alaska is committed to moving forward with the AAP, and the danger of delay or failure to move forward sits like a timebomb. The Red Dog Mine, which is our region's largest private employer and which funds about 85 percent of the Northwest Arctic Borough's annual budget, is scheduled to close in 2032. This closure will significantly impact the national supply of critical minerals, as it comprises 80 percent of U.S. zinc production. The Red Dog Mine is situated on land owned by NANA, and through its 33 years of operation our region has developed great expertise in responsible resource development that protects our Iñupiat way of life and culture, and the environment. Drawing from over three decades of Red Dog Mine experience, the AAP is modeled after the Red Dog Mine's DeLong Mountain Transportation System, a public-private partnership with the Alaska Industrial Development and Export Authority ("AIDEA"), the permit applicant for the AAP. It confounds us that the Biden Administration has committed to moving toward a green economy that requires copper, zinc, silver, cobalt and other metals that would be accessible through the AAP and has identified mineral supply chain issues as a national security issue, yet the Administration is allowing the AAP to be thrown off course.


We do not support the JROD being remanded to the DOI for additional work. However, if the JROD is going to be remanded, DOI's additional tasks must be clearly identified, with a specific, reasonable timeline for completion of each task, and there must be status reports along

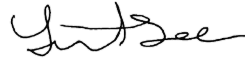



Northwest Arctic Leadership Team


the way to the public and through Tribal and Alaska Native Corporation consultations. We believe in the Biden Administration's commitment to a green future in which the United States is a leader, and we believe the AAP is a critical component of working toward that future.

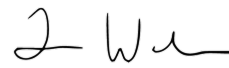
Sincerely,



Eva Kinneevauk, Co-Chair
Maniilaq Association


Linda Lee, Co-Chair
NANA Regional Corporation



Tim Gilbert
Maniilaq Association


John Lincoln
NANA Regional Corporation


Terri Walker
Northwest Arctic Borough District


Margaret Hansen
Northwest Arctic Borough District


Dickie Moto
Northwest Arctic Borough


Nathan Hadley, Jr.
Northwest Arctic Borough

CC:

The Honorable Lisa Murkowski

The Honorable Dan Sullivan

The Honorable Don Young / Office of the At Large Congressional
District of Alaska

Susan E. Rice, Domestic Policy Advisor

Libby Washburn, Special Assistant to the President for Native Affairs

David J. Hayes, Special Assistant to the President for Climate Policy