

## **Ambler Access Project, it's more than a road**

For several years, it has been understood but under-recognized that the Red Dog mine will conclude mine operations in 2031. Let's think about this for a moment.

Red Dog provides nearly 900 shareholder jobs, \$50 million annually in wages, and over \$100 million per year in revenue sharing to other Alaska Native Regional and Village Corporations, many of which have little financial security. And there is no other near-term economic lifeline.

In December 2021, Nathan McCowan, chair of the Alaska Native Village Corporation Association commented on shared revenue from Red Dog Mine to village corporations saying, *"It's the difference between being unprofitable on a steady-state basis versus being able to maintain a certain degree of solvency — without having to consider really difficult decisions like selling your land"*.

What about Donlin? The Donlin Gold project in southwest Alaska has exceptional reserve size and enjoys strong Calista Corporation and community partnerships. In time, it will provide significant revenue sharing to ANCs, yet this is still up to two decades away.

This brings us to the importance of the Ambler Access Project (AAP), also known as Ambler Road, a 211-mile right-of-way promised to Alaskans since 1980 in the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA) for surface transportation purposes from the Ambler Mining District to the Dalton Highway. Much like the Red Dog Road connecting the mine site to the Chukchi Sea, Ambler Road is not only a road but a symbol of responsible development and community vitality.

The AAP will provide private, controlled, and permitted-access through state, Native corporation, and federal lands to some of the highest grade copper, zinc, and critical mineral deposits known in the world. And it could not come at a more critical hour.

President Biden's recent announcement of support to boost domestic production of critical minerals to make electric vehicles, military weapons systems, cell phones, solar panels, lithium-ion batteries, and building future technologies is

encouraging to hear. Every convenience of modern life depends on the production of mineral resources.

Crisis brings clarity and real-world practicality. Today we see our globe reeling under the actions of Russian President Vladimir Putin, a paranoid madman running an autocracy that is terrorizing Europe, brutally attacking a free democratic neighbor, and crippling the international economy. These sobering events require clear-headed policy responses that prioritize securing our future and reducing dependence on the whims of foreign despots to sell us critical minerals without which we cannot survive.

According to the USGS, our country is 100 percent import-dependent for at least 23 critical and strategic minerals, and between 50 and 99 percent dependent for another 30 key minerals. And the USGS has warned us about this for more than two decades.

Is this a problem? Yes. Russia and China are two of the five countries we are most dependent on for critical minerals. No one would accuse them of being a friend of democracy.

As free people whose existence is an affront to autocracies, we must insist on moving beyond deceptive *either-or* fallacies that prevent the development of our lands and resources, imperil the security and self-determination of our people, and trample singular opportunities to move families and communities into the full economic life of our state.

Failure to mine our own resources only ensures the same resources will be mined in other countries, under appalling child labor and environmental conditions. Do we refuse to produce them at home, but then use them at home?

We must find ways to achieve agreement on the safe production of our strategic mineral resources. The AAP remains viable as long as it keeps to a critical timeline to reach a Final Investment Decision in the near term.

In 2022, after receiving a Record of Decision to proceed with the right-of-way, the project was halted by lawsuits and a subsequent federal court injunction. The draft Supplemental EIS is now nearing completion and is anticipated to be released to the public in late September, at which time public testimony will be taken by federal and state agencies.

There is no time left to take a step backward. Let's be certain the community, environmental, and cultural concerns are fairly addressed, and then move forward to secure our future. In so doing, our people and land will flourish.

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