

## State and DNR committed to safely developing Donlin Gold project

By Corri A. Feige

As Commissioner of the Alaska Department of Natural Resources (DNR), I take very seriously my department's responsibility to "develop, conserve and maximize the use of Alaska's natural resources consistent with the public interest."

Calista Corporation and The Kuskokwim Corporation (TKC) have similar responsibilities to their shareholders to develop their land responsibly. We share the same goal of reviewing project plans to ensure the Donlin Gold project meets the state's strict regulations and can operate safely.

DNR coordinates the State of Alaska's environmental and engineering oversight as Donlin Gold, one of the world's largest known gold deposits, finishes permitting and moves toward mine construction, operation, and ultimately reclamation and closure. Through the Large Mine Permitting Process, experienced state agency staff work together and with local and federal counterparts on the key issues, conducting a thorough environmental review. The State actively contributed to development of the Donlin Gold Environmental Impact Statement led by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and commented on subsistence, water quality, tailings and fisheries issues. State regulators brought significant expertise, permitting responsibilities and accountability to that federal review process.

Does this approach work for Alaska? We have five major metal mining projects that have operated safely and in an environmentally-sound manner for decades. Certainly, much of this is due to responsible ownership – backed by the experience, knowledge and dedication of our mining program staff, who provide thorough and independent oversight. Residents of the Yukon-Kuskokwim region wondering how well the state program works can consider Northwest Alaska's experience with Red Dog, Interior's experience with Fort Knox and Pogo, and Southeast's experience with Kensington and Greens Creek.

These mines have benefited their regions' economic and environmental well-being alike. Fort Knox, at the headwaters of Yukon River tributaries, has received awards for its reclamation efforts. While pre-mine studies documented the absence of Arctic grayling in local waters, reclamation efforts achieved their goal of seeing 800-1,400 grayling over eight inches long at Fort Knox's Water Supply Reservoir in just a few years. Eagles, moose, mink, otters, loons and many other types of wildlife share the ecology of this area.

Alaskans often ask how we can protect the environment throughout a mine's life cycle, and especially about long-term, post-closure water management. Our understanding of and commitment to addressing these requirements has grown significantly in recent decades. We fully recognize the State must be able to mitigate risks and guarantee mines like Donlin will be taken care of, regardless of any ownership changes. We take this responsibility very seriously. The Reclamation and Closure Plan (Plan) prepared by Donlin Gold (<http://dnr.alaska.gov/mlw/mining/largemine/donlin/archive/>) describes long-term water management and treatment. In coordination with the Alaska Department of Environmental

Conservation, DNR conducted a thorough review to ensure the proposal meets Alaska's stringent water quality standards to protect fish and human health.

A major part of the plan includes Donlin Gold's financial assurance plan, required before operations can begin, describing specific components underlying the estimate of hundreds of millions of dollars in financial assurance needs. It relies on conservative estimates of the costs for reclamation, closure, care and maintenance. As the mine progressed through development and operations the plan would be subject to continuous state review and updates by Donlin Gold when warranted, with substantial changes subject to public review and comment, including concurrence from both TKC and Calista.

Overall, I've been very impressed by the rigor of the baseline data collection and analyses conducted for this project. From tailings management to mercury and cyanide risks, to potential impacts on fish and subsistence resources, the project has undergone a high level of scrutiny. Donlin Gold has never shied away from tackling difficult questions, often going beyond legal and regulatory requirements. I've also seen the extensive and meaningful public outreach throughout the Y-K region by Donlin Gold and the agencies.

The permitting process creates a solid foundation that can reassure the public, Calista and TKC the project will be constructed, operated, and closed as promised.

DNR is committed to fulfilling its responsibility to develop Alaska's natural resources with integrity for the good of Alaska, and we have high expectations of Donlin Gold. The State will fulfill its regulatory responsibilities to review and evaluate permit applications and enforce the terms and conditions of issued authorizations. With continued input from the local communities, TKC, Calista and others -- and continued oversight by DNR and other agencies -- I believe Donlin Gold can develop this world-class resource safely and for the benefit of the people of the region for years to come.

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