

From: [Sattler, Mary](#)
To: comments@DonlinGoldEIS.com
Subject: Donlin Gold EIS Scoping Comments from Mary Sattler, Bethel resident
Date: Friday, March 29, 2013 3:58:43 PM
Attachments: [image001.png](#)
[Mary Sattler Donlin Gold EIS Scoping Comments 2013.docx](#)

From: Mary Akalleq Sattler
P.O. Box 1129
Bethel, AK 99559

Date: March 29, 2013

To: Mr. Don Kuhle
Regulatory Division
US Army Corps of Engineers
P.O. Box 6898
Joint Base Elmendorf Richardson, AK 99506-0898

Dear Mr. Kuhle,

I am writing in regard to the Donlin Gold EIS scoping process for consideration by the US Army Corps of Engineers (USACE).

By way of introduction, I am a lifelong resident of the Yukon- Kuskokwim region. My mother was born and raised in Kwethluk, Alaska and she currently resides in Bethel, Alaska. I was raised in three villages in the Kuskokwim River watershed; Kwethluk, Tuntutuliak and Platinum, Alaska where my father was a high school teacher and principal. I am currently raising my children and step-children (ages 15, 14, 13, 12, 9, 6 and 5) in Bethel where I work for Donlin Gold in the Community Relations Department.

I began working for the Donlin Gold project in June of 2008. Prior to working for Donlin Gold, I served as a State Representative in the Alaska Legislature from 1998-2008. I represented Bethel and about 30 Kuskokwim River villages.

To say that the Yukon-Kuskokwim region of Alaska is economically depressed is an understatement. This is the only region in the state that has no real economic engine. I held a Limited Entry Commercial Fishing Permit from 1986-1989, which was purchased for me by my father. Back in the 1980's, when the Kuskokwim River had a viable commercial fishing industry, commercial fishermen would on average net \$6,000-15,000 a summer. This is a modest income for an Alaskan fishing captain. The Kuskokwim commercial fishermen today rarely break even on their fishing ventures. Even during its heyday, Kuskokwim commercial fishing revenues were a distant second to the economy of Federal and State transfer payments. For the Lower Kuskokwim School District, 67% of students' families receive public assistance. Most people work temporary or seasonal jobs with no retirement or health benefits.

While in the legislature, my primary focus was raising the standard of living in western Alaska. My colleagues and I were very successful in securing funding for school construction and major maintenance, water and sewer projects, harbors, power plants, court houses, training centers, and other needed infrastructure. There remain pressing needs in this regard as we are an undeveloped and growing region. However, it has become apparent to me that while our standard of living has risen, our quality of life is not rising. All of the social indicators of health for Southwest Alaska are shockingly dismal. From total mouth restorations in baby teeth, pre-teen, teen and young adult suicide, unintentional death from risky behavior, child abuse and neglect, domestic violence, inhalant abuse, substance abuse, obesity, lifelong tobacco use, and sexual abuse- our overall health seems to be getting worse. The ability for people to develop a strong sense of individual responsibility and productivity has been diminishing. Our students drop out of school and do not

pursue continuing education at much higher rates than our state and national counterparts. Southwestern Alaska is in desperate need of real and meaningful employment that can provide livable wages. We need salaries that can keep up with the astronomical cost of gas and stove oil. Our hunters and gatherers, referred to as “nukalpiaq” (providers) need an economic means to pursue the wild resources for our healthy subsistence diet. With gas currently over \$7.00 a gallon in Bethel, harvesting salmon and other fish, moose, caribou, beaver, waterfowl, berries and greens is exorbitantly expensive. The variety of food in our freezers is diminishing as traveling to out-of-the-way places to pursue food is beyond our household budgets. Very few people have discretionary income to provide anything beyond the bare essentials and many people are now choosing between making basic purchases like coffee and pilot bread or stove oil to heat their homes.

While there is sincere concern about the protection of the environment and watershed for the continued health of our wild food, Donlin Gold has seen great attendance of residents during the outreach meetings in all of the villages in the Yukon Kuskokwim Region. Many attendees have come to express their concern about mining. Fortunately for the project, local residents have been respectful and open minded during our outreach efforts. Participants listen carefully and with the recently added Yup'ik language presentations, the comprehension of high standards and safeguards now intrinsic in modern mining have allayed much of the concern about the proposed industrial project. When residents recognize the commitment the project has (from the land owners, parent companies and employees) to protecting our environment, the conversation inevitably turns to the dire need for economic stability and security in our communities. Many people who attend the project description meetings and tours (of the Donlin Gold project site and operating open pit gold mines) convey their interest in pursuing work with the project once the construction and operations are underway.

Donlin Gold has indeed proven itself as a healthy and rewarding place to work. I was first introduced to the Donlin Creek exploration project in 1999. As a freshman legislator I was invited to tour the camp site. I met and visited with many local residents working on a rotational basis and was impressed with the high level of local hire. A few years later, my father's wife (a lifelong resident of Stony River) began working at Donlin Camp, where she worked for more than 10 years. Prior to working at Donlin she had not had wage employment of any kind. Donlin Gold staff mentored and developed her job skills and until she was furloughed in the fall of 2012, Maria was the supervisor/ head of housekeeping. Many people who have worked at Donlin testify that the camp culture is one of universal respect, team work, safety, and balance. Because there is zero tolerance for alcohol or drug use, those of us who come from a village background have found that it is the safest and most welcoming environment we have ever experienced. Lifelong friendships have been established with our co-workers. This environment is not the result of dumb luck. There has been concerted effort and detail directed at training the workforce and creating an environment in which the employees can excel. Everything from placing round dining tables in the Gray Wolf dining hall to hanging photographs of Donlin Gold employees in the common area are designed to replicate Native household layout. Having an onsite Camp counselor (who is also of service to employee's families upon request), free unlimited long distance and internet access to employees, family day at Camp, a multi-use building available for basketball and other physical fitness activities, a traditional steam bath, and mentoring have been critical to the success of local hire. The benefits of stable income are immeasurable to the families Donlin Gold's employees' support. While the exploration phase of this project has successfully employed about 300 people, I look forward to the possibility of employing up to 1400 people during the operations of the Donlin Gold Mine. Having hundreds of people from the Yukon Kuskokwim region participating in

productive, secure, year round employment will be a tremendous boost to our region's quality of life.

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