

Testimony
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Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations

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Chairman Gosar, Ranking Member Dexter and Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today on “Unleashing Alaska’s Extraordinary Resource Potential.” My name is Deantha Skibinski and I am the Executive Director of the Alaska Miners Association.

The Alaska Miners Association (AMA) is a professional membership trade organization established in 1939 to represent the mining industry in Alaska. The Association represents more than 1,400 individuals and companies that hail from communities across Alaska’s 365 million acres, from above the Arctic Circle to the southernmost coastal rainforest.

AMA has seven large-scale mining operation members producing coal, copper, gold, germanium, lead, silver, and zinc. In addition, dozens of member companies are exploring for new mineral projects that could produce antimony, barite, cobalt, graphite, molybdenum, nickel, platinum, rare earth elements, rhenium, and more.

Unique to Alaska is the roughly 300 active placer mining operations across the state. Placer mines produce gold, are relatively small in footprint, and average four employees, however, in aggregate, their production and economic benefits are similar to a large scale mine. The majority of Alaska’s placer mines are multi-generational family owned and operated.

Finally, AMA members come from a vibrant contracting sector that supports Alaska’s mining industry with goods and services as well as the industrial mineral sector that provides the sand, gravel and other materials to build Alaska’s infrastructure.

Mining Activity and Potential in Alaska

Seven large mines are currently in production in Alaska, as well as dozens of placer gold operations. Two projects are in permitting stages that could near development in the future. Nearly 40 other sites are in either early stage or advanced exploration status, with activity underway to support potential future permitting.

This mining activity, in aggregate, results in tremendous economic benefits to Alaskans and Alaska communities. In 2024:

- \$1.8 billion was spent on goods and services to support Alaska's mines, \$1.1 billion directly at local Alaska businesses.
- \$145 million was paid in local and state government revenues. Mines are the largest property and sales taxpayers in several Alaska communities, funding essential services.
- \$240 million in royalty payments went to Alaska Native Corporations. Since 1989, a cumulative total of \$3.6 billion has been paid, and per provisions in the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act, 70% of these payments are distributed to other Alaska Regional and Village Corporations across the state.
- Mining accounted for 12,400 total direct, indirect, and induced jobs, paying an average wage of \$123,000. This is twice the state average for all other employment sectors.
- 75% of Alaska's miners are residents and the industry employed workers in over 80 communities, many of which are in rural areas with limited employment opportunities.

The mining industry is a foundation of the State of Alaska and its communities, and it brings immense economic and social benefits through operations that exemplify safety and environmental stewardship.

Of note, AMA wishes to thank the full U.S. House Committee on Natural Resources for visiting one of Alaska's large operations, Hecla's Greens Creek Mine, in August, and also for meeting with several industry representatives for a discussion on meaningful policy initiatives to ensure Alaska can be a key provider of the minerals America needs.

Alaska: a common focus for groups opposed to natural resource development

Alaska's lands are constantly targeted by outside opposition groups that spend millions of dollars, often using misinformation to abuse our nation's permitting processes, to delay and ultimately stop or resource development projects. The organizations fund efforts like large form-letter writing campaigns to solicit millions of non-substantive comments during public participation periods, fund citizens' initiatives that seek to stop mining and raise regulatory hurdles for all via the ballot box, and serial litigation against agencies for permit decisions. These nefarious activities generate fear among the general public and overburdens regulatory agencies tasked with upholding the nation's permitting process.

Federal actions from Administrations in 2009-2017 and 2021-2025 further eroded and slowed the process by which a mine can be permitted in the United States and Alaska. During the Administration of President Biden, the Office of Senator Dan Sullivan maintained a document titled [*Last Frontier Lockup*](#) which tracked the 70 adverse actions specific to Alaska only, that delayed, reversed, or stopped economic opportunities in the state. Specific actions against Alaska's mining industry included the repeal of the Roadless Rule exemption for the Tongass National Forest, hampering exploration and

access to known expansive mineral deposits across its lands; a preemptive Clean Water Act Section 404c veto at the Pebble Project; multiple actions to block the Ambler Road project; and much more.

Unleashing Alaska's Extraordinary Resource Potential

Thankfully the assault on resource development in Alaska has stopped this past year.

President Trump's Executive Order 14153, *Unleashing Alaska's Extraordinary Resource Potential*, was signed January 20 and recognizes *"the State of Alaska holds an abundant and largely untapped supply of natural resources including, among others, energy, mineral, timber, and seafood. Unlocking this bounty of natural wealth will raise the prosperity of our citizens while helping to enhance our Nation's economic and national security for generations to come."*

The Executive Order (EO) background statement goes on to reference the aforementioned federal adverse actions: *"Unleashing this opportunity, however, requires an immediate end to the assault on Alaska's sovereignty and its ability to responsibly develop these resources for the benefit of the Nation. It is, therefore, imperative to immediately reverse the punitive restrictions implemented by the previous administration that specifically target resource development on both State and Federal lands in Alaska."*

The Alaska-specific EO contained a number of provisions beneficial to Alaska's resource industries and land users. For the mining industry specifically, key provisions include:

- Overall directives to federal agencies to efficiently and effectively maximize the development and production of the natural resources located on both Federal and State lands within Alaska;
- Requirements of executive departments and agencies to rescind, revoke, revise, etc. from any and all regulations, orders, policies, actions, etc. that are inconsistent with new economic policy from January 20, 2021, and January 20, 2025
- A temporary moratorium on the 2024 Record of Decision (ROD) entitled "Ambler Road Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement Record of Decision" and directive to conduct a new, comprehensive analysis of such deficiencies, interests, and environmental impacts; and reinstate the ROD signed on July 23, 2020, by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and United States Army Corps of Engineers
- Directive to the Secretary of Agriculture to place a temporary moratorium on all activities and privileges authorized by the final rule and record of decision entitled "Special Areas; Roadless Area Conservation; National Forest System Lands in Alaska" and conduct a new, comprehensive analysis of such

deficiencies, interests, and environmental impacts, and reinstate the final rule with the same title passed October 29, 2020

- Order to rescind the BLM ROD for the Central Yukon Resource Management Plan
- Order to evaluate changes to Public Land Order (PLO) 5150, signed by the Assistant Secretary of the Interior on December 28, 1971, and any subsequent amendments, modifications, or corrections to it; as well as the reinstatement of Public Land Orders in 7899, 7900, 7901, 7902, 7903, and any other such Public Land Order that the Department of the Interior (DOI) Secretary determines would further the policy interests outlined in the EO.
- Directive to review all DOI guidance regarding Alaska Native lands into trust and all PLOs withdrawing lands for selection by Alaska Native Corporations to determine if any such agency action should be revoked to ensure the actions are consistent with the Alaska Statehood Act, Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA), Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA), the Alaska Land Transfer Acceleration Act, and the Alaska Native Vietnam-era Veterans Land Allotment Program
- Requirement to conduct review of state waterways and direct the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and State of Alaska to provide recommendations of navigable waterways subject to the equal footing doctrine and the Submerged Lands Act of 1953
- Directive to the Assistant Secretary of the Army for Civil Works to render all assistance requested by the Governor of Alaska to facilitate the clearing and maintenance of transportation infrastructure and require, under the Secretary to immediately review, revise, or rescind any agency action that may in any way hinder, slow or otherwise delay any critical project in the State of Alaska
- Requirement of the Secretary of Commerce, in coordination with the Secretary of DOI, to immediately review, revise or rescind any agency action that may in any way hinder, slow or otherwise delay any critical project in the State of Alaska.

In addition to the Alaska-specific EO, several other EOs have been signed that outline improved permitting processes for mining in Alaska, including:

An “*Unleashing American Energy*” [Order](#) that declares that it is in the "national interest to unleash America's affordable and reliable energy and natural resources" and establishes a plan to revitalize the energy sector through expansion of fossil fuel and hardrock mineral exploration and various deregulatory actions. The EO enumerates several policies related to mining, including: leading the production and processing of "non-fuel minerals, including rare earth minerals."

A “*Declaring a National Energy Emergency*” [order](#) which defines fossil fuels in the definition of energy. It also contains seven sections on authorizing emergency approvals, expedition of emergency infrastructure, emergency Clean Water Act regulations related to

energy, emergency ESA consultations related to energy, and coordinated infrastructure assistance within DoD to acquire and transport energy.

“Reinvigorating America’s Beautiful Clean Coal Industry” [Order](#) that aims to remove federal regulatory barriers that undermine coal production, encourage the utilization of coal to meet growing domestic energy demands, increase American coal exports, and ensure that Federal policy does not discriminate against coal production or coal-fired electricity generation.

In addition to the EOs outlined above, a significant EO signed on March 20, 2025 opened doors for addressing additional federal challenges and barriers not previously covered or addressed. *“Immediate Measures to Increase American Mineral Production”* directs the Secretaries of the Departments of Defense, Interior, Agriculture, and Energy to identify as many sites as possible on Federal land that may be suitable for mineral development. Alaska has approximately 222 million acres of federal land within its borders, and a myriad of areas in which to look for further mineral development opportunities.

EO 14241 directed the Departments to submit within 10 days a list of projects with plans of operation or other applications had been submitted for consideration that could be immediately improved and permits issued or expedited. It also directed within 30 days to *“identify as many sites as possible on Federal land managed by their respective agencies that may be suitable for leasing or development pursuant to 10 U.S.C. 2667, 42 U.S.C. 7256, or other applicable authorities, for the construction and operation of private commercial mineral production enterprises.”*

AMA provided a lengthy technical document to the DOI submittal portal identifying federal sites in Alaska to prioritize for mineral activity, and describing federal policy and management changes needed to increase the number of federal sites on which mineral development could be pursued. We outlined that much of Alaska’s federal acreages, approximately 109 million acres, or 53% of Alaska’s federal land total, are designated or managed as Conservation System Units. However, other federal lands not closed to development have high mineral potential, provided sound policy exists that incentivizes the mining industry to pursue their development.

Making Alaska Mining Great Again

The Trump Administration and Congress are to be commended on implementing regulatory and process improvements in the last eight months. In addition to the Executive Orders and various agency actions following directives contained in the Orders, the Administration has demonstrated its commitment to growing Alaska’s mineral production.

Federal Permitting Improvement Steering Council and FAST-41

In April and May, two exploration projects in Alaska, the Greens Creek Surface Exploration and Aqqaluk Pit Exploration and Expansion projects were designated as FAST-41 Transparency Projects by the Federal Permitting Improvement Steering Council (FPISC). By being added to this list, the timelines for completion of their permitting was made clear to all stakeholders and assured agency resources would be allocated to the effort in a timely fashion.

In June, Graphite One's Graphite Creek deposit was designated as a covered project and placed on the FAST-41 permitting dashboard. This means that FPISC will now implement a coordinated permitting timeline for the largest known graphite deposit in North America ensuring all agencies work together to permit this mine.

FPISC recently entered into a Memorandum of Understanding with the State of Alaska to enhance collaboration between the State and federal government agencies in the permitting process for select Alaska infrastructure projects.

Waters of the United States (WOTUS)

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and Department of the Army have issued joint memoranda and guidance documents outlining the intent to implement policy consistent with the U.S. Supreme Court *Sackett* decision. New definitions of "continuous surface connection" put the onus on the agencies, and not the landowner or developer, to demonstrate jurisdiction and determine whether a waterbody is a "Water of the United States." AMA is encouraged to see these steps and intends to remain engaged as new policies following a WOTUS definition are released. Particularly, AMA wishes to see a positive framework for the management of Alaska's wetlands, and the mitigation programs that have long been a challenge to developers. AMA has long advocated for agencies to review and update [The Alaska Wetlands Initiative](#) (May 13, 1994), which resulted from concern that a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) signed by the EPA and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) in February 1990 clarifying the "no net loss of wetlands" was not realistic or practicable in Alaska. Since over 43% of the surface area of the state is designated as wetlands, there is little justification for implementing a mitigation program designed for the Lower-48 states. At the time, EPA and USACE assembled a panel of stakeholders and solicited public input in Alaska to determine how the Clean Water Act Section 404 was to be implemented in Alaska. As a result of the outreach efforts, EPA, USACE, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and National Marine Fisheries Service issued the Initiative, which serves as a commitment by the Federal agencies to "work more effectively with all stakeholders and the public to improve the Section 404 regulatory program in (a) manner that makes this program more fair, flexible, and effective."

Alaska is a special case in which local flexibility is needed because there are limited opportunities to create or restore wetlands because 43% of Alaska's land base is considered wetlands. USACE regulations must provide flexibility and discretion to district engineers to determine Alaska compensatory mitigation and other requirements for USACE

permits. In addition, district engineers should be encouraged to use that discretion and that their careers will not be adversely impacted by doing so.

U.S. Department of Agriculture Roadless Rule; Tongass National Forest

Per the Alaska specific EO, USDA Secretary Rollins recently announced that the U.S. Forest Service would begin rulemaking to repeal the Roadless Rule across the nation. We are encouraged by this positive step; however, the nation's largest National Forest is often the subject of political whims, and it is our hope that Congress may consider legislative remedies to permanently exempt the Tongass National Forest from the Roadless Rule.

The 16.9 million acre Tongass contains a premier copper-zinc-silver-gold-barite mineral belt as well as a significant gold belt which includes three existing mining operations and 148 identified mineral deposits in a 1991 United States Geological Survey (USGS) report. The study estimated a value for discovered minerals of \$37.1 billion and a value for undiscovered minerals of \$28.3 billion (expressed as 1988 dollars). This report was revised in 1996 in USGS Report 96-716. The escalation in metals prices that has taken place since 1991 and 2008 has dramatically increased these numbers.

While "access" to mineral claims is authorized by the Mining Act of 1872 **road** access is not - it depends upon the acquiescence of Forest Service officials. There are examples of Forest Service officials limiting access to extremely expensive and inadequate helicopter access. However, larger core and underground drilling cannot occur without roads, nor can extraction of large tonnage metallurgical test mill 'bulk' samples. Exploration requires the drilling of multiple exploration holes to determine the subsurface characteristics and extent of the mineral resource. This ever-increasing level of investigation is needed to add certainty regarding resource/reserve information to support financing in public markets.

Exemption by rulemaking (as USDA is currently advancing) is welcomed policy, but the risk of rescission by future counter rulemaking remains, maintaining a barrier to investment. President Trump specifically exempted the Tongass from the Roadless Rule in his first Administration only to have his exemption rescinded on the first day of the Biden Administration.

Repeal of BLM's Conservation Landscape Rule

In 2023, the Biden administration proposed a sweeping overhaul of the way the BLM manages federal lands under the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA). Specifically, the proposal prioritized the health and climate resilience of ecosystems across those federal lands by "clarifying" that conservation is a use on par with other uses of public lands under FLPMA's multiple-use and sustained-yield framework. Just last week, DOI announced the proposed rescission of the rule, citing it is unnecessary and violates existing statutory requirements. This mirrors arguments made from land users across the country, and we applaud this action.

Looking forward: maximizing Alaska's mineral development opportunities

The Trump Administration is off to a running start toward lifting the harmful policies of the past and creating a regulatory environment that attracts investors to America. Congress is as well. The introduction of key legislation focusing on meaningful permitting and litigation reforms is highly welcomed and is already generating attention from global mining companies who are a key part of our efforts toward mineral independence. Specifically:

Standardizing Permitting and Expediting Economic Development (SPEED) Act

The full U.S. House Committee on Natural Resources has held hours of hearings on the bipartisan permitting reform legislation sponsored by Chairman Westerman and Congressman Golden. AMA members strongly agree with the bill provisions and echo the significant challenges in permitting mining projects and expansions of existing operations that have been shared by other affected stakeholders. As referenced in a recent study, U.S. mine development timelines are second to last in the world. A 29-year process to open a mine, at a time when our nation desperately needs mineral independence is unacceptable and we applaud the Committee's efforts to address this flawed process. The Act contains important provisions that address many of AMA's concerns, including, but not limited to:

- Prevents duplicative reviews at both the state and federal levels.
- Prohibits agencies from interjecting political preferences into NEPA reviews by clarifying that alternatives included in environmental documents must meet the purpose and need of the proposed action.
- Limits comments from cooperating agencies to their specific areas of jurisdiction and gives agencies discretion in considering new scientific research. This ensures that only pertinent information is considered, improving timelines, maintaining integrity, and bring more certainty to the process.
- Limits the scope of environmental review with specifics that environmental reviews for EAs and EISs must focus only on effects that are proximately caused by the project itself and may not include effects that are speculative or separate in place and time. This reform provides clarity to agencies and the public, reduces page counts so that stakeholders can meaningfully engage, and limits litigation.
- Establishes timelines and sideboards for judicial review under NEPA, codifying key pieces of the Supreme Court's decision in *Seven County Infrastructure Coalition v. Eagle County, Colorado* (Seven County).
- Establishes sideboards so that plaintiffs have no more than 150 days to file a civil action against a final agency action. In addition, the judicial review provisions require plaintiffs to have standing, requiring that one must have submitted a comment on an action, and the comment must be "unique and substantive," and not a form letter. Plaintiffs must prove that they would suffer direct harm if their comments were not addressed. These provisions ensure that agencies have the opportunity to correct NEPA deficiencies

before litigation and that claims are filed by those truly impacted by the underlying action and deserve special considerations.

- Requires courts to resolve NEPA-related cases within 180 days and NEPA-related appeals within 60 days. This provision reduces the time spent in litigation, thereby reducing delays and cost overruns.

This legislation that will bring meaningful and effective permitting and litigation reform that will establish efficient permitting processes and predictable timelines to bring new mineral production online in America and we fully support it.

Promoting Efficient Review for Modern Infrastructure Today (PERMIT) Act and Reducing Permitting Uncertainty Acts

While not within the jurisdiction of the House Committee on Natural Resources, it is worth noting in the context of needed permitting reforms that key provisions in the acts are needed to advance domestic mining projects. Specifically:

- H.R. 3898, the Promoting Efficient Review for Modern Infrastructure Today (PERMIT) Act codifies long-standing exclusions from the definition of “waters of the United States,” including waste treatment systems, ephemeral features, groundwater and prior converted cropland. These exclusions—recognized under both Republican and Democratic administrations—provide regulatory certainty for landowners, miners, energy developers and infrastructure projects nationwide, and are consistent with ongoing rulemaking efforts.
- H.R. 3935, the Reducing Permitting Uncertainty Act, provides long-needed clarity on the EPA’s authority under Section 404(c) of the CWA. Specifically, it ensures the EPA may only veto a permit while an application is actively under review—not before it is filed and not after it is issued. These clarifications will help promote investment in U.S. energy, infrastructure and mining operations by restoring predictability to the permitting process. Uncertainty surrounding the EPA’s ability to retroactively or preemptively veto a project chills investment and pushes development to foreign countries, demonstrating the necessary correction to restore confidence in the U.S. permitting system.

Conclusion

Unleashing Alaska’s extraordinary resource potential is critical to our nation’s future. Alaska is an extraordinary state with the ability to significantly contribute to our country’s prosperity. With its impressive mineral endowment, superb environmental performance, a workforce with remarkable labor and safety standards, and significant economic benefits, Alaska is the place to start to make our nation a mineral production powerhouse. Mined in America starts with Mined in Alaska and the entire AMA stands ready to work with this Committee to make that a reality.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today and I look forward to any questions you might have.