

URANIUM MINING *in* Alaska

In Elim, Alaska, Native village residents are the overwhelming majority of the Rural Seward Peninsula located on the western coast in the Bering Strait region. Its nearest city is Nome, Alaska, the commercial hub for the area. Native subsistence use includes fishing, hunting, berry and plant gathering, wood gathering, and many other activities. These practices have been conducted since time immemorial. The Native Village of Elim and Elim IRA* Council retain sovereignty over a reserve covering more than 500,000 acres. This land status is very different than those of most other Alaskan native communities, in that it is similar to that of status of tribes with reservation status in the U.S.

unprecedented response by state and federal regulatory agencies. For the first time, both the Alaska Department of Natural Resources (ADNR) and U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA) participated in a meeting convened by the Elim Native Council. The meeting was held on July 11, 2008, and attracted more than 40 participants from Elim Village and more than a dozen from the nearby villages of White Mountain, Koyuk, and Golovin. The meeting provided officials with the opportunity to hear from residents directly, and for the officials to provide presentations on the impacts of uranium development and discuss uranium-related activities. Bruce



Elim residents protest uranium mining at the start of the 2008 Iditarod Dog Sled Race.


In 2005 Elim residents became concerned about their land, water, and subsistence rights when Triex Minerals, based out of Canada, began uranium exploration drilling in the Tubutulik River watershed. They hosted a uranium impact presentation in 2007, bringing in Manuel Pino, PhD, a professor at Scottsdale Community College, who is active in the Laguna Acoma Committee for a Safe Environment and is a Southwest Research and Information Center Board Member. As a result, Elim school students created a blog (<http://blog.bssd.org/2007/09/20/elim-uranium-mine-student-blog/>) highlighting their concerns about uranium development and its impacts.

In February 2008, the Elim IRA Council invited Center for Water Advocacy's Harold Shepherd, Esq. and Southwest Research and Information Center's Paul Robinson to provide legal and technical support to the community. The goal was to aid them as they prepare for uranium exploration applications. They also discussed taking advantage of the passage of the Iditarod Dog Sled Race through Elim later in March 2008. They garnered press coverage in Anchorage at the start of the race, and held a demonstration by sign-holding children, seniors and other residents as the racers went through the community.

The strong and visible native voices trumpeting concern about uranium helped get the word out statewide and led to an

Frederickson (Mining Sector Chief, ADNR), described the history of uranium exploration in Alaska and introduced an informal working policy on uranium exploration — the first time any Alaskan official had identified the need for a uranium policy. Part of the policy stated:

Proper safeguards must be provided to ensure that the health and safety of the people are not endangered and that upon completion of a uranium exploration operation the affected land is usable and productive to the extent possible for subsistence or recreational pursuits or future resource development; that both during and after a uranium exploration operation, water and other natural resources are not endangered; and that esthetics and a tax base are maintained, all for the health, safety, and general welfare of the people of the state of Alaska.

While no decisions were made at this meeting, the Elim IRA Council and community residents plan on continuing their efforts to communicate to decision-makers their concerns while working to obtain commitments from ADNR for baseline and impact assessment studies. They also plan on continuing their community uranium education work for concerned citizens in the area. 

*The IRA by some Alaskan Native villages means the village has organized itself (self-governance) under the 1934 Indian Reorganization Act, with a constitution, elections and so on as prescribed there.

Native Village of Elim

RESOLUTION #2008-01 | ELIM INDIAN REORGANIZATION ACT COUNCIL A Resolution of the Native Village of Elim, City of Elim, Aniguin School

WHEREAS, the Tubutulik River watershed from its headwaters to its mouth in Norton Bay and nearby areas are primary sources of subsistence foods for the people of Elim and its neighboring native communities, and

WHEREAS, the Tubutulik River watershed from its headwaters to its mouth in Norton Bay and nearby areas include traditional living places, birthplaces and burial grounds and other areas of cultural significance, and

WHEREAS, the Tubutulik River watershed from its headwaters to its mouth in Norton Bay is home to a rich and diverse fishery including King Salmon, Pink Salmon, Chum Salmon, Silver Salmon, Dolly Varden as well as whitefish and other valuable subsistence species, and

WHEREAS, uranium exploration and development activities in the Tubutulik River watershed permitted by the State of Alaska have been allowed to occur during the summer season that is critical importance to the subsistence harvesting of fish and wildlife, berries, roots, plant leaves, and a wide range of mammal and birds, and

WHEREAS, the uranium exploration activities in the Tubutulik watershed permitted by the State of Alaska have resulted in discharges of waters encountered during drilling as well as potential contaminants associated with drilling activity into streams in the watershed that have not been quantified, evaluated for their water quality impacts or their impacts on the streams and fishery in the Tubutulik watershed or its estuary by Alaska Department of Natural Resources, the Bureau of Land Management or the exploration permittees, and

WHEREAS, the noise and vibrations from transportation equipment and drilling equipment has disturbed the diverse mammal and bird populations of the Tubutulik watershed, and the impacts of that disturbance has not been quantified or evaluated by the Alaska Department of Natural Resource, the Bureau of Land Management or the exploration permittees, and

WHEREAS, neither the State of Alaska DNR, the BLM or the exploration permittees have consulted with or requested permission from the Native Village of Elim and its neighboring communities regarding the use of their traditional subsistence use areas in the Tubutulik watershed from its headwaters to its estuary prior to conducting uranium exploration activities, and

WHEREAS, continued uranium exploration activities would continue the disturbance of the subsistence and cultural resources of the Tubutulik watershed and estuary and result in continued releases of water and potential contaminants from uranium exploration activity, and

WHEREAS, neither the exploration permittees or the State of Alaska have compiled baseline environmental data regarding water quantity, water quality, fish mammal bird, and plant distribution and habitat and areas of cultural or additional significance, and
THEREFORE, be it resolved that the Native Village of Elim (IRA):

1. Strongly object to the consideration or approval of uranium exploration activities in the Tubutulik River watershed from its headwaters to its estuary and any further mining activity in this area.

2. Demand that the State of Alaska and the Department of the Interior conduct or require the conduct of comprehensive investigation of baseline environmental conditions including water quantity, water quality, soil, sediment, subsistence sources including but not limited to fish, mammal, bird, and plants in the Tubutulik River watershed from its headwaters to its estuary.

3. Demand that the State of Alaska and the Department of the Interior conduct or require the conduct of investigations of the extent of water releases to the stream of the Tubutulik watershed from uranium exploration activities including investigation of releases from drill sites and camp sites of hydrocarbons, oil and grease, and other chemicals associated with drilling activity.

4. Demand that the State of Alaska and the Department of the Interior fully remediate or require the uranium exploration permittees for whom it approved the activities in the Tubutulik River watershed to fully remediate any identifiable contamination resulting from uranium exploration activities.

CERTIFICATION

We the undersigned officers and members of the Board of Directors for the Elim IRA Council hereby certify that the Board which is made up of (7) members, of whom (4) constitutes a quorum, were present at the meeting held March 5, 2008, that this Resolution has passed by the affirmative vote of 7 members and that this Resolution has not been rescinded or amended in any way.

Robert A. Keith, IRA President

Wallace J. Amaktoolik, IRA Secretary Treasurer

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