



Photo by Nickolai Ivanoff

ICE FLOES — Last week ice floes were sheltered from howling offshore winds off Cape Nome.

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AP Photo/Al Grillo

PINNED — Nome's Chase Madden (top) works against Barrow's Sigmond Patterson during a consolation round in the 130-pound class of the 1, 2, 3A state wrestling championships in Wasilla last Saturday.

Trappers voice opposition to city's proposed ordinance to ban snares and traps

By Tara McCaw

The Citizens Requests and Grievances portion of Monday evening's Nome Common Council meeting heated up when local trappers voiced their disagreements with the proposed ordinance to ban snares and traps within city limits.

Cari Miller referred to the ordinance as a knee-jerk reaction by the common council in response to an emotionally charged story about a dog getting caught in a snare. She and others present discussed how loose pets getting caught in traps can be a good thing when there is no other way to detain the animals. Miller, a wife and mother of local trappers, mentioned that she moved to Alaska to get away from liberal laws that do not let people choose the way that they live. She sees trapping as an important part of the history of Nome that is being threatened by "loud, liberal-minded bullies" like those at the local newspaper. Miller lives outside of the city limits.

According to Matt Culley, a local trapper, without trapping within city limits there will be an increase in the local fox population which could lead to a disease problem.

"Rabies is a density disease," said Culley, who brought a number of fox hides with him to the meeting to show the high number of foxes that he caught since November within city limits. He pointed out that the traps he uses are not intended to break animal legs and will not cause any serious damage to any dogs that accidentally get caught in them.

Mike Quinn discussed three tangible benefits to trapping within city limits: disease control, population monitoring, and the assistance of Animal Control. He sees trapping as a way for the Department of Fish and Game to gauge the size of the fox populations in the Nome area. He considers loose, wild dogs in city limits a greater threat to Nome children than the possibility of getting caught in snares. According to Quinn, the city council's involvement in this issue is a waste of city funds. He believes that since mushers and trappers need to get along without city involvement outside of city limits, the two groups should be able to do the same inside Nome boundaries.

Diana Adams spoke in favor of the passing of the ordinance, saying that she and most Nomeites are not

against trapping in general; they just do not want the practice to be done within city limits.

After all interested parties present discussed their opinion of the trapping ordinance, Doug Nicholson of Alaska Gold gave an update to the Common Council. He spoke about how a long delay in reinstating the Army Corps of Engineers permit could lead to the loss of the new local jobs created at the gold mine.

During the communications portion of the meeting, Council Member Stan Andersen asked about the next steps the city is going to take in response to a letter from NSEDC requesting that the City hold another election for the 2006 NSEDC Nome member representative. City Clerk Leslee Wessel said that she was looking into the issue.

Next, council members tackled the unfinished business of spending the \$100,000 NSEDC Community Benefit Share. The common council voted to use the money to change the Nome public pool filtration system from chlorine to salt.

In new business, three ordinances were passed through second reading, public hearing and final pas-

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Corps suspends permit for Rock Creek mine

By Diana Haecker

The Army Corps of Engineers suspended a permit issued for Alaska Gold Company's Rock Creek mine and imposed an immediate halt to further destruction of wetlands within the Corps jurisdiction.

"I have determined that the public interest requires this suspension in order to revisit, reconsider and clarify the Department of the Army's permit evaluation and decision document (PEDD) for the permit and the PEDD's underlying analysis," wrote District Commander Colonel Kevin Wilson in a notice letter to AGC's Vice

President Douglas Nicholson.

The suspension was effective on December 6 and came as a reaction to a civil lawsuit challenging the public process that led up to the Corps' issuance of the 404 wetlands permit for the Rock Creek mine.

The lawsuit

"This action was taken in response to a lawsuit filed in U.S. District Court by the Trustees for Alaska and the Western Mining Action Project," said a press release issued by the Corps.

Three Nome residents, Jana Varrati, Sue Steinacher and Austin Ahmasuk, and a Nome-based

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Barrick's hostile takeover bid comes to an end

By Diana Haecker

A four-month bitter battle between gold mining giant Barrick Gold Corp. and junior gold producer NovaGold Resources Inc. came to an end last week when Barrick's \$1.71 billion bid expired on December 6.

NovaGold management rejected the offer for the last time and so did their shareholders, not caving in to tender their shares for the bidding price of \$16 apiece. The offer was too low, maintained NovaGold

management throughout the price war; fair and final, was Barrick's response.

Barrick raised its bid once from the initial \$14.50 offer to \$16.

By the end of December 6, Barrick admitted defeat, as it had acquired only 13.6 million shares of NovaGold, instead of the hoped-for majority of shares. A buy out would have put Barrick in control over two major gold prospects currently in NovaGold's development pipeline,

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Photo by Diana Haecker

HAVE YOU BEEN A GOOD BOY?— Upon an affirmative answer, Santa Claus handed out a peppermint candy cane to Bubba McDaniel, 8, during last week's Christmas Extravaganza at Old St. Joe's Hall.



Photo by Diana Haecker

ROCK CREEK MINE— The Army Corps suspended a permit for the Rock Creek mine, ordering Alaska Gold Company to cease the destruction of more wetlands.

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watchdog group called "Bering Strait Citizens for Responsible Resource Development" filed the lawsuit on November 8.

The lawsuit alleges that the Corps illegally issued a Clean Water Act Section 404 wetlands permit by violating the National Environmental Policy Act and the National Historic Preservation Act.

The plaintiffs claim that the Corps should have prepared an Environmental Impact Statement to independently determine the effects of the open pit mines proposed for Rock Creek and Big Hurrah on human health and the environment. They also claim that the Corps did not consult with local tribes to satisfy National Historic Preservation Act requirements.

The permit was issued on August 21 and authorized AGC to place 13.7 million cubic yards of fill on 414.5 acres of wetlands.

The suspension of the permit did not come as a court order, but as a result of the issues raised in the lawsuit.

In a determination and finding document, Wilson wrote, “A review of the permit evaluation and decision document has revealed that the permit application merits further review and that the District should revisit the PEDD and its underlying analysis.”

According to the Corps, the review result will be to either reinstate, modify or revoke the permit.

The plaintiffs' lawyer, Victoria Clark with the public interest law firm Trustees for Alaska, told *The Nome Nugget*, "It is unfortunate that it took the filing of a lawsuit for the Corps of Engineers to realize that the permitting process was illegal."

Alaska Gold Company, a wholly owned subsidiary of NovaGold Resources Inc., had not been named a defendant in the original filing of the lawsuit, but achieved intervenor status on December 1. U.S. District Court Judge Ralph Beistline granted Alaska Gold the status after AGC cited vital interests in the outcome of the lawsuit.

Rick Van Nieuwenhuysse, president and CEO of NovaGold, said that his company is fully committed to work with the Corps as a reaction to the permit suspension.

"If the Corps' review indicates that the public process was sufficient, which NovaGold believes to be the case, the permit can be reissued with only minor disruption to the project's timetable," Van Nieuwenhuyse said.

NovaGold, a publicly traded company, informed its shareholders that the first gold to pour out of the Rock Creek project is expected for the second quarter of 2007. Forward-looking statements estimate an annual output of 100,000 ounces of gold over the four or five year life of the mine.

"NovaGold is committed to building a showcase mine that will operate with the utmost respect for the environment and the communi-

ty of Nome," said Van Nieuwenhuyse.

Work continues

In a press release, NovaGold maintained that it could continue to work at the site in uplands and areas previously disturbed.

"All activities or work subject to the Department of the Army jurisdiction that were previously authorized by the suspended permit must immediately cease," wrote Wilson in the notice to AGC.

"AGC is authorized to place fill into waters of the U.S. only as necessary to stabilize existing fill material and prevent any further impacts to waters of the U.S.," Wilson wrote. AGC is also permitted to work in upland areas.

Wilson instructed AGC to provide a report, including photographs, detailing measures taken to stabilize existing fill material within 10 days of the permit suspension. Wilson also specified, "if AGC constructs any facilities on previously authorized fill material, such construction or work shall be at AGC's own risk. The Corps may determine, as a result of our review, that such facilities must be removed or remediated."

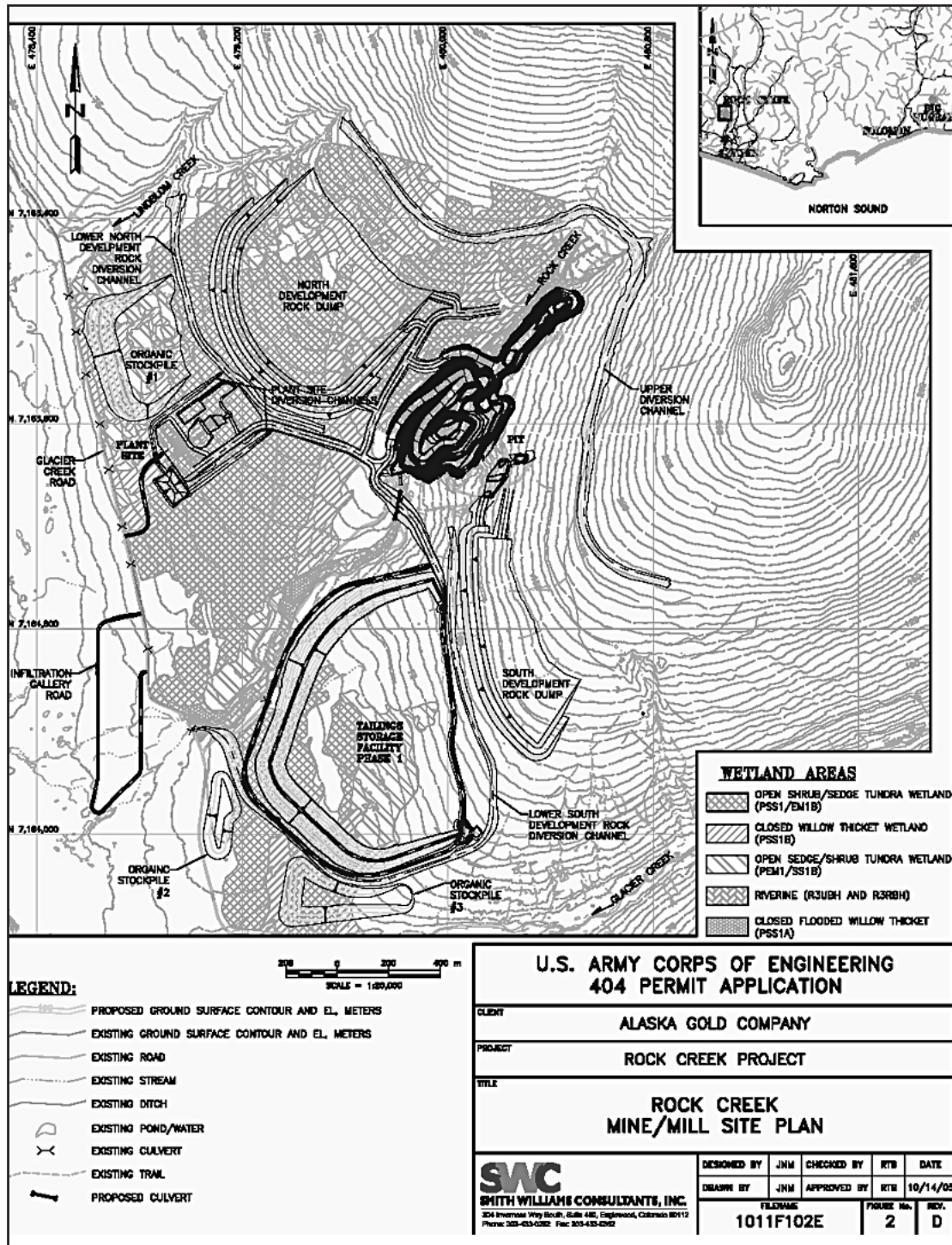
Asked about the oversight and enforcement to comply with the Corps' suspension, Tom Findtner, the Corps chief of public affairs, answered, "The Corps of Engineers is responsible for ensuring ongoing work is in accordance with the details of the permit suspension. To ensure compliance, we communicate on a regular basis with representatives of the Alaska Gold Company and conduct site visits as workload and budget allow."

Alaska Gold Vice President and General Manager Doug Nicholson told *The Nome Nugget* that approximately three quarters of the wetland areas at issue have been disturbed already and that the Corps allowed AGC to continue working certain areas. "We understand it's at our own risk," Nicholson said. "Parts of the plant area were wetlands, but now it's all stripped down to bedrock."

He said that AGC fully complies with the Corps decision. "Right now, our work out there is not hindered at the plant site, but it will soon have an affect on construction and it will begin to affect the lives of families in Nome. We already had to lay off people, several Nome residents, who worked for us," Nicholson said.

Nicholson said that AGC's workforce is between 30 and 40 persons strong and that a number of others have hired on at Alaska Mechanical, AGC's contractor construction company. He added that the hiring process would considerably slow down as a result of the permit suspension.

Nicholson said that one quarter of the wetlands, which have not yet been disturbed, are located at the proposed tailings storage facility site and the north waste rock dump site. He said that within a month,



- Corps

the dirt work at the plant site should be finished and then crews will be ready to move out to work on the pit and the tailings storage facility.

Nicholson added, "We believe that the Corps followed NEPA procedures and made the decision to issue the permit and we agreed with that decision. What's going on right now isn't adding to the process."

The plaintiff's view

The lawsuit's plaintiffs don't see it that way. A press release issued by Vicki Clark states that the notice of suspension "is a key victory for local residents who oppose the per-

mitting decision due to flaws in the substantive analysis and process.”

Austin Ahmasuk expressed relief at the Corps' decision, saying, "The Corps' suspension of the permit means there will be an opportunity to properly evaluate the risks this mine poses to our small community. While we all have a stake in clean water and healthy wildlife, Alaska's Native communities are particularly dependent on the resources that this mine threatens to pollute, so we are pleased by the Corps' promise to fully evaluate the risk."

Co-plaintiff Sue Steinacher hopes

this may be the start of a meaningful public process and said, "It's unfortunate that this determination has come so late, disrupted lives and impacted the land."

Jana Varrati commented, saying, "I'm pleased they're finally conducting the environmental review they should've done before."

Nome residents have asked on numerous occasions for an Environmental Impact Statement to be done.

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