

## Smith, Neal

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**From:** Stan Hooley <shooley@iditarod.com>  
**Sent:** Monday, April 25, 2016 1:56 PM  
**To:** donlingoldeis, POA  
**Subject:** [EXTERNAL] iditarod trail committee position on donlin gold pipeline project  
**Attachments:** iditarod trail committee position on donlin gold.docx

Dear Mr. Gordon,

On behalf of the board of directors of the Iditarod Trail Committee, I am pleased to submit the attached in support of the Donlin Gold pipeline project.

Sincerely,

Stan Hooley  
CEO

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**Iditarod Trail Committee Thoughts on the Donlin Gold  
Natural Gas Pipeline Project**

Submitted by: Andy Baker, President, Danny Seavey, Vice President, Mike Jonrowe, Secretary, Aaron Burmeister, Paul Gebhardt, John Handeland, Mike Owens, Rick Swenson

In the February 17, 2016 edition of the Alaska Dispatch News, Dan Seavey expressed his views on the Donlin Gold Natural Gas Pipeline Project. In Dan's usual folksy manner, he likely caused many readers to believe the sky is falling. While everyone is certainly entitled to have an opinion, we don't share his. Rather, we, the Iditarod Trail Committee Board of Directors, believe that the proposed pipeline, as defined as Alternative 2 in the draft EIS, can be built and operated without negatively impacting the Iditarod Trail.

Mr. Seavey's comments contained a number of factual errors that we will address later. Given the differences in some of the numbers he used, we can only surmise that he wrote his piece some time ago using outdated information, and waited to push the send button at a time of year when the Iditarod Trail Sled Dog Race will again begin to be a bigger part of the news cycle.

Very early on in this process, Donlin Gold asked us as an organization for input on their project plans, and to listen to any concerns we might have relative to their plans to build a pipeline. We learned a lot about what the proposed pipeline is, and also, perhaps equally importantly, what it is not.

One outcome of that dialogue was a change from the original plan to route the pipeline through the infamous Dalzell Gorge. We appreciate Donlin Gold relocating

alignment to the Alternative 2 route as identified in the draft EIS as it has the least amount of overlap with the trail. Contrary to what Mr. Seavey claims, only 4 miles of the 315 mile pipeline are co-located with the Iditarod Trail. And only another 10 1/2 miles of the pipeline will even be within three lengths of a football field of the trail. Other than 4 miles of trail, it seems that it will be a bit difficult for anyone to see any footprint of the pipeline from the Iditarod Trail right-of-way because of dense vegetation along much of the route. And in treeless areas, visual impacts will be negligible because of snow cover.

We are confident that the pipeline will be designed for minimum impact as it has a relatively narrow footprint and will be buried to reduce visual impact. We believe it is important for readers to know and understand that the proposed pipeline consists of a 14" buried pipe which makes this project much different than the 800 miles of 48" above the ground pipe that runs from Prudhoe Bay to Valdez.

All things considered, this doesn't seem like much of an impact when you consider that nearly the entire Iditarod National Historic Trail right of way between Seward and Portage, a distance of 60 miles, is co-located with the Alaska Railroad.

Mr. Seavey also made the statement that "... will result in complete irreversible destruction..." Surely he knows how quickly alders and willows and other types of vegetation grow. We wonder if he would have much luck navigating, much less even finding, the old Rabbit Creek section of the Iditarod Trail which we haven't used since 1988. The point? A trail that was commonly used 28 years ago would be difficult to identify today.

Readers might be surprised to learn that the Iditarod Trail Committee undertook a massive effort in the fall of

2014 to make dramatic and necessary improvements to a nearly impassable 30 mile section of the trail between Rohn and the Farewell burn. This project involved more than chainsaws, pick axes, shovels and tree trimmers. It was a project that included us having heavy equipment flown from Anchorage to Farewell in a C-130 and a skilled 5 man crew of operators who worked for nearly a month to eliminate many hazards deemed by many mushers as unsuitable for a dog race. Funding from the State of Alaska, a sizeable in-kind contribution from Cruz Construction, as well as funding from the Iditarod Historic Trail Alliance and the BLM, made it possible. All users are benefitting from this.

Why do we take the time to detail this? Simply to make sure everyone understands that year in and year out, the Iditarod Trail requires real work that makes real changes to what many might otherwise believe to be pristine and untouched wilderness.

We would be remiss to not point out that Donlin Gold has been a terrific supporter of the Iditarod. It is also important that everyone understands that they played an important role in helping make the trail passable in the aftermath of the Turquoise Lake Fire by dedicating a work crew and resources to supplement funds made available to us by the BLM and the Iditarod Historic Trail Alliance. Real work got done which made it possible for the Iditarod to travel that portion of the traditional trail that year, and in all likelihood was also a difference maker to some of the other events, as well as hunters and others who use the trail recreationally.

To summarize, we believe that the proposed pipeline, as defined as Alternative 2 in the draft EIS, can be built and operated without negatively impacting the Iditarod Trail.

We also understand and very much appreciate that the construction season for the pipeline will be scheduled to

limit impacts to sport and subsistence hunting which is an important consideration for many of our friends and supporters in various communities along the trail.

Lastly, as we are talking about a mining project, a gold mining project at that, we find it interesting and perhaps even a bit nostalgic and ironic, that the Iditarod Trail itself was created to service the gold fields near the town of Iditarod many, many years ago.