

Tribes request federal consultation over Graphite One

By Megan Gannon

The tribes of Teller, Brevig Mission and Mary's Igloo say the U.S. Department of Defense should have consulted with them before awarding Graphite One a \$37.5 million grant last year.

The tribes wrote letters to the department this fall to express concern over the "premature funding decision" for a project that has the potential to greatly impact their communities and subsistence activities.

They also asked the Pentagon to engage in consultation with them in accordance with the federal government's own policies about tribal consultation.

Graphite One has been developing plans for a potential mine on state-

managed land the northern slopes of the Kigluaik Mountains. The region is home to a vast deposit of graphite, a key component of electric vehicle batteries. The federal government is making a push for more domestic production of minerals like graphite, and the company received the \$37.5 million grant in July to fast-track a feasibility study for the project.

The grant, which used funds from the Inflation Reduction Act, was praised by Sen. Lisa Murkowski, Sen. Dan Sullivan, Rep. Mary Peltola and Gov. Mike Dunleavy.

Hal Shepherd of Water Policy Consulting has been working with Teller, Mary's Igloo and Brevig Mission to monitor water in the region. He recently shared the news that the tribes sent these letters in October.

Shepherd said the tribes were especially concerned by the news that Graphite One, which is based in Vancouver, will need to make a much bigger mine than initially proposed to make their graphite products marketable to automakers like Tesla.

Gilbert Tocktoo, the president of the Traditional Council for the Native Village of Brevig Mission, said in a statement: "If we can make the some of these products available through recycling and conservation, why do we need to destroy some of the most biologically rich areas in Alaska so that one foreign company can make a profit?"

The Nugget viewed the letter Mary's Igloo sent to the Department of Defense. In it, the tribe noted that Graphite One's proposed mine site

drains into the Imuruk Basin.

"The unique combination of geology, freshwater, and saltwater in the center of the Seward Peninsula makes the Imuruk one of the most biologically diverse ecosystems in North America, and the abundant subsistence resources are equal to many locations along the Alaska coastline making it critical to the Tribe for subsistence uses," the letter says.

The tribes cited several federal regulations that suggest the Department of Defense should have engaged in consultation before awarding the grant, including Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act.

They also say the funding decisions contradicts the Biden admin-

istration's stated commitment to meaningful consultation. In their letters, the tribes ask the department "to rectify this mistake and engage in consultation with our Tribes on this funding decision and other decisions going forward that will impact our interests."

"We want to hear the concerns, questions and ideas of all the stakeholders in Graphite Creek so we can continue working to put together the best possible project for the region," Graphite One CEO Anthony Huston said in a statement.

The Department of Defense did not respond to a request for comment by press time.

• Pool

continued from page 1

verted into chlorine using a chlorine generator to kill the bacteria, algae and viruses that may contaminate the pool. The piping and pump components of the pool were not designed for the salt disinfection system and corrosion has eaten away at the sanitation and circulation equipment to the point where it's failing. The city in 2022 contracted with Bob Walker of Polar Pools, who is the head contractor for the overhaul and coordinates with other sub-contractors working on retrofitting the chlorine system.

The current overhaul back to a chlorine system will give the pool 20 to 25 more years of life, City Manager Glenn Steckman said.

Switching water systems for 148,000-gallon pool is a complicated process according to City of Nome Director of Parks and Recreation Chip Leeper. City Manager Steckman invited the Nugget for a look in the inner workings of machinery room.

The room is accessed by a squeaky metal ladder leading to a space under the pool deck filled with an elaborate network of piping. Tubes coming down from the ceiling, snake through the air, connect to and pass through multiple machines.

Standing among the newly refurbished operating system, Leeper described how a decision to switch the pool from chlorine to saltwater 15 years ago caused the problems this overhaul is trying to fix.

"Originally it was all iron pipes which is ludicrous that our forefathers thought this would be a great thing to introduce saltwater," Leeper said "Everything corroded until we got to the point where if we kept it

up, we weren't gonna have a pool anymore it would be an empty sink-hole."

The room is shared with Nome Public Schools hot water tanks, air and temperature control system in addition to the pool machinery. NPS recently did an upgrade to their control system, coinciding with the pool upgrade, which impacted the timeline as both entities could not work on their upgrades at the same time.

"It's difficult because they both [pool contractor and NPS control system operators] cannot work in the same space at the same time so that lengthened the project for us," Steckman said.

So, how does the sanitation system work?

To clean the pool, water comes through grates and two drains located in and around the pool and is brought to strainers via circulation pumps. One part of the pump is a boot, or a specialized connector, designed to withstand the high pressure. Of the two boots in Nome's pool system, one has been replaced. The other part is ordered with an expected arrival of early February. This is one hold up in the project but may not impact completion if the existing boot can hold up until its replacement arrives, Leeper said.

The strainers are the first step in the process of cleaning the water, removing large objects like band aids and hair ties. Then the water is pushed through newly installed pipes and into a sand filter which removes medium-sized debris, things like hairs and organic material. The sand filter is the only main component to the pool filtration system that didn't need replacement. The last



Photo by Anna Lionas

PRECARIOUS—City Manager Glenn Steckman descends the shaky ladder to the pool maintenance room.

step of the cleaning process is the ozone which kills any material that wasn't destroyed in the first two straining processes like bacteria and viruses.

Once the water is clean it is pushed through more piping, heating it to 84°F to 86°F. The final steps are adding chlorine and the concentrated muriatic acid which balances the water pH.

A big part of the pool project was switching the maintenance system

from manual to electronic so Leeper can virtually control and modify the pool system from a remote location. Prior to the repairs, Steckman said, "It had reached the point where I no longer felt it was safe for public employees to operate there and it was going to be shut down. You know, we would have had to shut the pool down no matter what, even if the repairs had not been proceed. The chemicals that were being used are quite hazardous."

What needs to be done

The project is all but finalized except for a couple pipe fittings which were damaged in the shipping process and had to be reordered.

"Some people were trying to see if they could locally fabricate the parts, but they're really specialized and the only people who make this stuff is the manufacturer," Leeper said.

continued on page 6



Delivering better behavioral health outcomes through strong partnerships

Carelon Behavioral Health understands the unique behavioral health challenges that Alaskans face. Knowing no two states are alike, we use our more than 40 years of experience to develop customized programs. We partner with state and local governments, providers, and advocacy organizations to serve individuals, families, and tribal communities. Our goal is to raise the quality of life for all the people of Alaska.

To learn more, visit: carelonbehavioralhealth.com/alaska
Carelon Behavioral Health was formerly known as Beacon Health Options.

 **carelon**
Behavioral Health