• Graphite One

continued from page 6

biggest subcontractors. Trucking from mine to port, security on the proposed access road and snow removal, all those would be local jobs. On the operating side, paying for the diesel is biggest cost. He estimated that 20 to 30 percent of revenue goes to communities. Torpy added at one point that it is Graphite One's sincere desire to establish a local workforce. One of the reasons being, that graphite has a small revenue margin and "we cannot afford to fly people from all over the country to work here."

Field seasons past and present

Loren Prosser, former Nomeite and former banker, now Graphite One project manager, said that the project site is located where the Cobblestone River drains out of the northern Kigluaik Mountains and overlooks Windy Cove at the Imuruk Basin, three miles to the north. Having hunted and fished there himself, he said, "I love that area."

He described the deliberate process of Graphite One's preliminary work and drilling. For the past four years drills were collecting core samples, using 600-ft long drills, producing about 8,000 feet of samples last year. In lower grounds, they did geotechnical drilling to determine where and how deep the permafrost is, to inform engineers designing infrastructure and buildings.

He said in total, there were 90 employees working in the field season last year, with 30 repeat hires; 10 were from Nome, nine from Teller, five from Brevig Mission and two from Shishmaref and a couple from the Kobuk area and the YK-Delta. Payroll impact of these 30 regional employees was $550,000 for the seasonal work.

As for the economic impact for last year's season, he said, Graphite One spent $1.2 million, spread out over 54 businesses, ranging from pizza delivery to renting of heavy equipment and trucking.

This summer will see no drill program and no further drilling will be done during the permitting phase. However, they will continue the baseline work of surface and groundwater sampling, fish studies and meteorological studies. In July there will be some helicopter traffic, as they will run a fish survey.

Permitting

With the feasibility study completed, the next step is to begin the permitting process. "This is where the engagement with you starts to happen," Schaffner said. "That is why it's important why we listened to you all along to get those concerns addressed before permitting and if you still have concerns, that's where you can voice them."

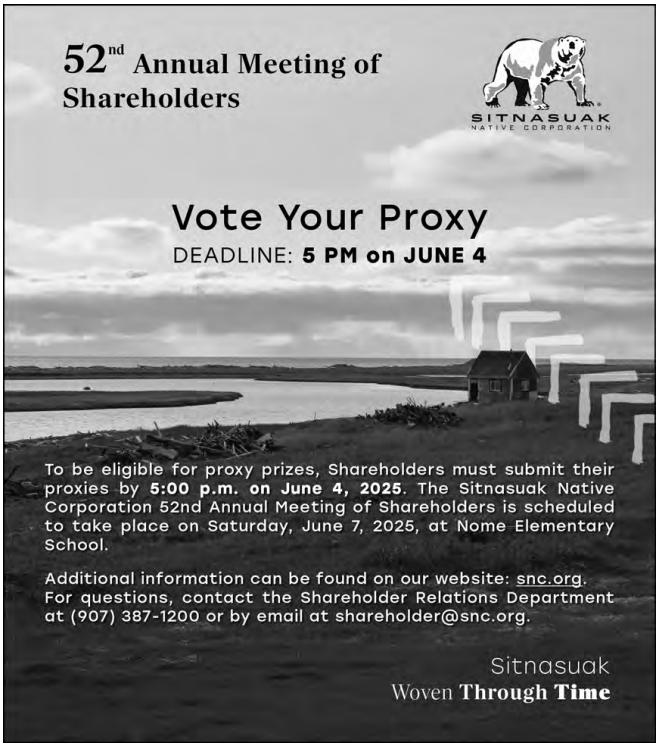
Ed Fogels, former regulator of mines with the Alaska Department of Natural Resources, spoke on the required permits. A slew of federal and state permits is needed, but the most important information that he shared was that Graphite One expects that the application for the federal U.S. Army Corps of Engineers 404 wetlands permit will trigger a full-blown Environmental Impact Statement, not just an Environmental Assessment, as part of the National Environmental Policy Act, or NEPA, process. An EIS analyses environmental impacts of a proposed mine plan and alternatives. The requirements for an EIS are more detailed and rigorous than for an Environmental Assessment. In comparison, the Army Corps required only an Environmental Assessment for the Rock Creek gold mine that was built, started up in 2008 to fail and shutter its operations just a few weeks after startup.

Fogels said, the NEPA review could take two to three years. The EIS has three opportunities for public comment and requires two rounds of public meetings. In addition, several state permits are needed, including a water discharge permit from the Dept. of Environmental Conservation and several DNR permits relating to the mining plan of operations and the reclamation plan. "There's going to be a lot of public involvement process coming up once we apply for our permits," Fogels said. "Essentially, the government takes over the public involvement process. We will no longer be conducting these meetings, the state

continued on page 16

Photo by Cussy Kauer

RARE PHENOMENON— Nomeites were treated to a rare sight in the sky on Sunday, May 25 in afternoon. Asked what this is, climate specialist Rick Thoman explained: "This is a textbook example of multiple optical effects from very specific orientation of ice crystals in the atmosphere above about 20,000 feet. The 'fat circle' around the sun is circumscribed halo encircling a more common 22° halo. The apparent arc that passes through the sun is a parhelic circle with two sun dogs. There is a hint of a 44° halo to the lower left and right of sun, which is very rare. In another picture posted on Facebook it's clear that the parhelic circle is completely closed. That is also very rare."



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