Alaska Resource & Tribal Infrastructure Coordination (ARTIC) Project

Policy Report:

Advancing Alaska Native and Rural Energy and Resource Development

Community-Informed Recommendations and Implementation Opportunities

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Executive Summary

The Administration issued Executive Orders 14153, “Unleashing Alaska’s Extraordinary Resource Potential,” and 14154, “Unleashing American Energy,” and the Department of the Interior Secretary’s Order 3422, “Unleashing Alaska’s Extraordinary Resource Potential,” directing expanded federal energy and resource development in Alaska. These directives create the potential for increased activity on and near federal, state, and Alaska Native Corporation-owned lands, along with associated project reviews, infrastructure coordination, and investment across multiple sectors in Alaska. Whether that potential results in completed projects and lasting benefits depends on implementation, and implementation in Alaska faces conditions found nowhere else in the country.

This Policy Report identifies what successful implementation requires. It is the product of the Alaska Resource & Tribal Infrastructure Coordination (ARTIC) Project, led by the Alaska Federation of Natives, funded by the Denali Commission, and conducted in partnership with the Alaska Native Village Corporation Association, the ANCSA Regional Association, the Alaska Tribal Administrators Association, and the Alaska Municipal League, co-authors of this report. The recommendations in this report stem from 11 statewide and regional listening sessions convened between October 2025 and January 2026 with Alaska Native, Tribal, municipal, industry, nonprofit, and community leaders. These recommendations are community-informed and were reviewed and validated through the project's Alaska Native and Rural Community Leadership Working Group process.

Alaska's Operating Environment

Most federal programs and permitting systems are generally designed assuming conditions such as year-round construction, road connectivity, county-based governance, and well-staffed and resourced applicants. Alaska is a unique operating environment with challenging conditions: short construction seasons (roughly 120 days in some regions), communities only served by seasonal barge and small aircraft, a legal framework shaped by the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act and the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act that exists nowhere else in the country, 229 federally recognized Tribes alongside village and regional Alaska Native Corporations and municipal governments, and small local organizations managing federal processes designed for entities many times their size. For example, in rural Alaska, a permitting decision delayed by six weeks can delay a project a full year. Appropriately accounting for these conditions and coordinating with local stakeholders are what successful project implementation in Alaska requires.

What Community Leaders Reported

Participants across all 11 sessions delivered a consistent message. Alaska Native and rural communities are prepared to engage with responsible resource development, and participants emphasized that federal implementation works best when development aligns with local priorities, protects subsistence resources and cultural values, and provides clear community benefit. Participants described six conditions that determine positive project outcomes: capacity and navigation support for local entities, environmental review and permitting alignment, strong workforce systems including housing, clear and meaningful consultation standards, transportation and logistics constraints recognition and planning, and adequate safety and emergency infrastructure. Conversely, the same misalignments that frustrate communities also delay projects,

raise costs, and slow the Administration's objectives. What communities need and what federal implementation needs are largely the same reforms.

Participants were equally clear that appropriate planning and accounting for the conditions identified above do not guarantee local support for every project; some projects may face community opposition where impacts to subsistence resources, fisheries, cultural sites, lands, or waters are unacceptable to the affected community.

What Successful Implementation Requires

The central message of this report is practical: in Alaska, faster implementation of federal resource development goals and stronger community benefit are not competing goals. They are mutually reinforcing. Permitting timelines that account for Alaska's short construction season help projects move sooner and deliver needed infrastructure faster. Consultation that is timely, informed, and meaningful reduces the risk of delays, disputes, and costly project changes while honoring federal obligations and community priorities, including protection of subsistence resources. Because small communities cannot maintain staff for multiple federal processes simultaneously, coordinated federal engagement and local and regional collaboration are essential to meaningful participation and timely project delivery.

Investment in local and regional capacity enables participation that federal processes require and helps communities engage from a position of strength. One finding emerged consistently across every session: limited village-level capacity constrains communities and projects alike. Expanding local capacity strengthens local decision-making and delivers lasting benefits for future projects.

Participants and partners highlighted that responsible development works best and most efficiently when community leadership, long-term partnership, local benefit, and coordinated implementation are built into projects from the beginning. The case studies in this report illustrate how those principles of success apply across different regions, sectors, and project scales.

Community-Informed Recommendations

The report presents seven recommendation areas, each pairing community perspectives with the implementation opportunities available to federal decision-makers:

A. Modernize environmental review for Alaska conditions, including expanded categorical exclusions for essential rural infrastructure and expedited review tracks for community-critical projects, while maintaining environmental health that protects subsistence resources.

B. Align permitting timelines with Alaska construction realities, including firm decision timelines that account for procurement and mobilization requirements and allow projects to proceed within short seasonal construction windows, as well as coordinated permitting schedules across agencies and levels of government.

C. Establish federal interagency coordination mechanisms, including a senior federal point of contact for Alaska resource, energy, and infrastructure projects, reconstituted interagency working groups, and a centralized permitting and funding portal.

D. Reduce jurisdictional and regulatory fragmentation, through consistent agency guidance and programmatic permits for recurring project types such as broadband, docks, and airports.

E. Reform consultation requirements to support project delivery and meaningful engagement, including by implementing minimum consultation timelines that account for subsistence seasons, advance technical materials, and documented follow-through on how community input shaped decisions.

F. Align funding and program design with rural Alaska realities, including match flexibility, consolidated application systems, funding for implementation rather than planning alone, and formula-based, block grant, or other non-competitive funding pathways that account for small communities, remoteness, and higher delivery costs.

G. Improve access to low-cost capital for energy and infrastructure projects, including reform of the Department of Energy Tribal Energy Loan Program and support for alternative financing and delivery models.

The report also provides implementation guidance for the Department of the Interior (DOI) Secretary's Order (S.O.) 3422, addressed primarily to the DOI: an implementation framework that addresses Alaska's unique needs and conditions, institutionalized consultation practices, local and regional capacity investment, community partnership and local hire mechanisms, flexible Tribal and local delivery models, and standing coordination and transparency structures.

Where Implementation Can Begin

Most of the report's recommendations can begin within existing legal authorities. Five proposed administrative actions stand out because each advances several recommendation areas at once: reconstituting Alaska interagency coordination mechanisms; establishing a senior federal point of contact for Alaska resource, energy, and infrastructure projects; issuing consultation guidance with minimum timelines and advance materials; expanding categorical exclusion use for essential rural infrastructure; and directing development of an Implementation Plan for Secretary's Order 3422. Recommendations involving increased federal funding levels or statutory changes are identified descriptively and mapped to their pathways in Appendix A.

Scope

This report identifies challenges and opportunities, presents stakeholder-informed recommendations, and supports implementation of existing federal directives. It does not advocate for specific legislation or particular legislative outcomes, and it does not advocate for or against any specific development project. Decisions about individual projects belong to the processes, and the communities, that govern them.

The Administration's Alaska objectives and the priorities of Alaska Native and rural communities converge on the need for the same practical reforms. Federal implementation that acts on that convergence will move faster, face less risk, and deliver more in terms of advancing federal objectives and supporting the communities most directly affected by development decisions.

Summary of Recommendations

Recommendation Area	Headline Actions	Primary Implementation Opportunity	Relevant Federal Actors
A. Environmental Review	Expand categorical exclusions for essential rural infrastructure; establish expedited review tracks	Agency guidance and administrative actions under existing authority	DOI and other relevant federal agencies
B. Permitting Timelines	Adopt decision timelines tied to short seasonal construction windows; issue coordinated permitting schedules	Agency action consistent with the E.O. 14153 expedited permitting direction	Federal agencies
C. Interagency Coordination	Senior federal point of contact; reconstituted working groups; centralized permitting and funding portal	Executive Order; agency administrative action; existing coordination authorities	DOI and other relevant federal agencies
D. Regulatory Consistency	Uniform review guidance; programmatic permits for recurring project types	Agency guidance and administrative pilots	Federal agencies
E. Consultation	Minimum timelines reflecting subsistence seasons; advance materials; documented follow-through	Government-wide consultation guidance under existing authority	Federal agencies; DOI
F. Funding and Program Design	Match flexibility; consolidated applications; implementation funding; non-competitive pathways for small communities	Existing waiver and formula authorities; appropriations could support expansion	Federal agencies; OMB; Congress
G. Access to Capital	Federal loan, loan guarantee, and financing program reform; alternative financing and delivery models[1]	Coordinated program guidance, a cross-agency financing inventory, and a dedicated Alaska point of contact	DOE; DOI; USDA; HUD; Commerce; SBA; and other federal agencies
S.O. 3422 Guidance	Implementation Plan; institutionalized consultation; capacity investment; benefit and local hire mechanisms; Tribal and local delivery; standing coordination	Departmental action under existing S.O. 3422 mandate	DOI

Full recommendations appear in Sections 4 and 5. The complete mapping of recommendations to implementation pathways appears in Appendix A.

[1] Federal financing options include loan, loan guarantee, grant, and revolving loan programs administered across multiple agencies. See the White House Council on Native American Affairs, Listing of All Federal Loan and Financing Programs: https://www.bia.gov/sites/default/files/dup/inline-files/listing_of_all_federal_capital_access_programs.pdf.

1. Introduction: Building on the Administration's Alaska Policy Foundation

The Federal Policy Context

In 2025, the Administration issued Executive Orders 14153 and 14154 and Secretary's Order 3422 addressing energy and resource development in Alaska. Executive Order 14153, "Unleashing Alaska's Extraordinary Resource Potential," directs federal agencies to expand access to Alaska's energy, mineral, timber, and seafood resources and to advance specific projects and land management actions across the state. Executive Order 14154, "Unleashing American Energy," directs federal agencies to review actions nationwide that burden domestic energy development. Executive Order 14276, "Restoring American Seafood Competitiveness," directs reforms relevant to Alaska's fisheries. On February 3, 2025, the Secretary of the Interior issued Secretary's Order 3422, "Unleashing Alaska's Extraordinary Resource Potential," directing the Department's bureaus to implement Executive Order 14153 through action plans on defined timelines.

Together, these directives create the potential for increased activity on and near federal lands, project review, infrastructure coordination, and investment across multiple sectors in Alaska. Whether that potential results in completed projects and lasting benefits depends on implementation, which in Alaska occurs under conditions found nowhere else in the country. A summary of the relevant Executive Order and Secretary's Order provisions, organized by sector, appears in Appendix B.

The ARTIC Project

The Alaska Resource & Tribal Infrastructure Coordination (ARTIC) Project, led by the Alaska Federation of Natives (AFN) and funded by the Denali Commission, was established to support successful implementation of these directives. Its purpose is to identify pathways for Alaska Native Tribes, Alaska Native Corporations (ANCs), Native nonprofits, and local governments to benefit from potential development through sustainable community, economic, and infrastructure initiatives, while balancing the other critical needs and priorities of their communities.

AFN conducted the project in partnership with Key Strategic Partners representing a broad cross-section of Alaska Native, Tribal, and municipal leadership: the Alaska Native Village Corporation Association (ANVCA), ANCSA Regional Association (ARA), Alaska Tribal Administrators Association (ATAA), and Alaska Municipal League (AML). Between October 2025 and January 2026, the project convened 11 statewide and regional listening sessions with Tribal, ANC, nonprofit, municipal, industry, and community leaders across the state, in which the recommendations presented in this report were generated. An Alaska Native and Rural Community Leadership Working Group reviewed and validated the findings. The engagement methodology appears in Appendix C.

This Policy Report is the culmination of that work. It consolidates the priorities identified through statewide engagement into practical recommendations and implementation guidance for federal decision-makers.

Scope and Approach

This report identifies common regulatory and permitting challenges affecting energy and resource development in Alaska, presents community-informed recommendations to address them, provides implementation guidance for Secretary's Order 3422, and identifies the implementation pathways available to federal decision-makers. It approaches its subject as an implementation companion to the Administration's Alaska-related directives: its recommendations are designed to help those directives succeed on the ground while ensuring Alaska Native and rural communities realize lasting benefits from that development.

Two boundaries define the report's approach. First, the report does not advocate for specific legislation. Where recommendations could be advanced through appropriations or authorizing legislation, those pathways are identified descriptively, for completeness, alongside the administrative actions that can begin under existing authority. Second, the report does not advocate for or against any specific development project. Decisions about individual projects belong to the processes that govern them and to the affected communities whose lands, waters, resources, and priorities are at issue.

Within those boundaries, the report is direct. The recommendations are specific, the implementation opportunities are concrete, and the guidance for the Department of the Interior and other federal agencies is actionable under existing mandates.

A Central Theme: Project Streamlining and Lasting Local Benefits Are Mutually Reinforcing

One conclusion runs through every section of this report: the reforms that accelerate project delivery are the same reforms that improve outcomes for affected communities. Permitting aligned with Alaska's construction season completes projects sooner and delivers community infrastructure faster. Meaningful Tribal consultation reduces litigation risk and redesign while honoring federal obligations to Alaska Native people, including subsistence protections. Investment in local capacity enables communities to participate effectively in federal processes. Streamlining project delivery and producing lasting local benefits are mutually reinforcing objectives, and the evidence for that conclusion, from statewide listening sessions and from decades of Alaska Native-led development profiled in this report, appears throughout this report.

2. Alaska's Operating Environment

Federal programs, permitting systems, and funding structures are generally designed for conditions common across the contiguous United States: nearly year-round construction, road and rail connectivity, county-based governance, and applicants with dedicated administrative staff. Alaska presents a unique operating environment. The conditions described in this section are facts of Alaska's geography, climate, law, and demography. These conditions shape project delivery, industry activity, community life, and public service delivery in Alaska and provide the practical basis for the recommendations included in this report.

Geography, Climate, and the Construction Season

Alaska spans an area more than twice the size of Texas, with communities distributed across distances that would cross multiple states elsewhere in the country. Most rural communities are not connected to a road system, and the practical construction season can be as short as approximately 120 days in some regions due to Alaska's harsh winter climate. Materials, equipment, and crews must arrive, work must be completed, and sites must be secured within that window.

This calendar changes the arithmetic of delay. Elsewhere, a permitting decision delayed by six weeks might postpone a project by six weeks. In rural Alaska, the same delay can push a project past the point where materials can be delivered and work completed before freeze-up, delaying the project a full year. Financing carries longer, contractor commitments lapse, and communities wait an additional year for critical infrastructure, emergency response capacity, housing, energy improvements, water and sewer upgrades, and other services that directly affect health, safety, and daily life. Climate conditions add complexity in some regions, where permafrost degradation and coastal erosion affect existing infrastructure and require relocation planning.

Federal timelines and program requirements must be flexible enough to accommodate these seasonal realities, even when conditions elsewhere in the state may allow for longer construction seasons.

Logistics and Transportation

Most rural Alaska communities receive goods by seasonal barge, seasonal roads, or small aircraft, or a combination of these means. Many receive one or two barge deliveries per year, and missing a delivery means waiting months for the next. Airfare between villages and regional hubs can reach thousands of dollars for routine travel, including for health care. With more than 46,600 miles of tidal shoreline, exceeding the shorelines of the lower 48 states combined,[2] and approximately 82 percent of communities not connected to the road system,[3] marine and air transportation are not supplemental in Alaska; they are core infrastructure. Marine-dependent communities rely on port, harbor, and ferry infrastructure that existing transportation funding frameworks do not always recognize.

Air transportation support systems are equally critical. Consistently reporting weather stations in off-road areas fell from 50 to 19 between 2015 and 2023, a 62 percent decline that affects aviation safety, medevac operations, subsistence travel, and supply chain reliability. For project delivery, logistics are a primary driver of cost, schedule, and feasibility, and they reward planning that integrates transportation, staging, and permitting timelines from the outset.

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[2] National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, Office of Response and Restoration, "Alaska ShoreZone: Mapping over 46,000 Miles of Coastal Habitat," accessed July 8, 2026, https://response.restoration.noaa.gov/about/media/alaska-shorezone-mapping-over-46000-miles-coastal-habitat.html.

[3] American Society of Civil Engineers, *2025 Report Card for Alaska's Infrastructure*, Alaska Section, 2025, https://2021.infrastructurereportcard.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/2025-alaska-report-card-brochure.pdf.

Energy Costs and Isolated Systems

Rural Alaska faces some of the highest energy costs in the nation. Roughly 250 remote Alaska communities operate isolated diesel microgrids, with fuel delivered by barge or air.[4] Recent State of Alaska fuel price surveys show gasoline prices reaching $11.50 per gallon in some communities and heating fuel prices of $15.00 per gallon.[5] Rural electricity costs are also among the highest in the country, reaching $1.00 per kilowatt-hour.[6] High energy costs raise the price of everything else, including construction, water treatment, and housing. Alaska's energy landscape is therefore both a constraint on development and one of its most significant opportunities, a subject the recommendations in this report address directly.

Land Ownership and Legal Framework

Land status in Alaska results from a unique legal framework that exists nowhere else in the United States. Still a relatively young state, Alaska's statehood land conveyances were delayed by unresolved claims of Alaska Native aboriginal title and efforts to set aside conservation land from development. The State has yet to receive all of the land it was granted when it became a state in 1959. The Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act of 1971 (ANCSA) established Alaska Native regional and village corporations (ANCs) and conveyed land entitlements to them, creating a pattern of ANC-owned surface and subsurface estates alongside federal, state, and private lands. ANCs are the largest private landowners in the state. The Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA) established conservation units and a statutory priority for rural subsistence users on federal lands. Some ANCSA conveyances remain incomplete, and unresolved land status complicates project location decisions, planning, and permitting. Public Land Orders, navigability determinations, and land-into-trust questions add further layers, many of which are referenced in Executive Order 14153 itself.

Two features of this framework are key to successful project implementation. First, a single project may cross lands with different owners and different governing laws, each with its own review requirements. Second, ANCSA created a revenue-sharing structure, through Sections 7(i) and 7(j), under which resource revenues from one region's lands are shared among all twelve regional corporations and more than 200 village corporations. Development on ANC lands can therefore produce Alaska Native benefit statewide, a feature with no analogue elsewhere in the country.

Governance: Tribes, ANCs, and Local Governments

Alaska is home to 229 federally recognized Tribes, approximately 40 percent of all federally recognized Tribes in the United States. These Tribes operate alongside ANCSA regional and village corporations, regional nonprofit consortia that deliver health and social services, and municipal

[4] Alaska Energy Authority, Rural Alaska Microgrid Transformation: Grid Innovation Program Application, May 18, 2023.
[5] State of Alaska, Department of Commerce, Community, and Economic Development, Division of Community and Regional Affairs, *Alaska Fuel Price Report: Winter 2026*, Feb. 17, 2026.
[6] Alaska Energy Authority, Statistical Report of the Power Cost Equalization Program, Fiscal Year 2025, July 1, 2024–June 30, 2025, 37th ed., March 2026.

governments organized under state law. More than half of Alaska lies outside an organized borough and therefore has no borough government.[7]

A single community of a few hundred residents may be served by a Tribal government, an ANC, and a municipal government, each with distinct authorities, lands, and responsibilities, often referred to as a trilateral structure. This structure is a source of strength: where these entities coordinate, communities speak with a unified voice and combine complementary assets. It also means federal engagement models built on the assumption of a single local counterpart do not work for Alaska. Effective project consultation and implementation recognizes and works with the distinct roles of Tribal governments, ANCs, and municipal governments, and supports coordination among them.

Community Capacity

Rural Alaska communities are typically small, and their governments and organizations operate with correspondingly small staffs. One person frequently serves several roles, managing grants, compliance, infrastructure, and community services simultaneously. These small staffs in rural communities are often subsistence users who must engage in such activities for their survival in windows that may conflict with federal process timelines. These teams engage with the same federal application, reporting, and consultation requirements that apply to organizations many times their size. High federal staff turnover compounds the strain, because communities must repeatedly orient new personnel to local context.

The listening sessions made clear that capacity constraints are operational, not motivational. Communities demonstrated strong leadership, practical problem-solving, and sustained commitment across every session. The constraint is the mismatch between the volume and complexity of federal processes and the capacity of the teams available to navigate them. Rural Alaska communities are resilient and resourceful, a strength the listening sessions confirmed repeatedly. However, that resilience is a foundation for implementation to build upon; it is not a substitute for aligned federal processes, capacity support, or infrastructure investment.

Implications for Federal Implementation

Taken together, these conditions carry three implications for implementing the Administration's Alaska directives.

First, timing dominates. Permitting, funding, and consultation schedules that ignore the construction season and variables like the barge calendar convert small administrative delays into year-long project delays, thus threatening project viability.

Second, coordination can help substitute for scale. Communities often cannot maintain the staff to manage many parallel federal processes, but coordinated federal engagement, shared documentation, and single points of contact allow small teams to participate more fully.

[7] Called "the unorganized borough" this land area is not a municipal corporation or political subdivision, and the State Legislature is required to provide the mandatory borough services within the unorganized borough. See Alaska Municipal League, Alaska's local Government, pp. 4–5. https://www.akml.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/AML-Govt-Primer-2025.pdf

Third, Alaska's distinctive structures are assets. ANCs, Tribal governments, municipal governments, statewide revenue sharing, and proven local partnership models give federal implementation capable counterparts that most rural regions of the country lack.

The recommendations in this report are designed around these three implications: they align federal processes with Alaska's calendar, consolidate federal engagement to match community capacity, and build on the governance and partnership structures that already work.

3. Community Perspectives and Priorities

The recommendations in this report rest on direct, statewide engagement with the leaders who shape, implement, respond to, and are affected by development decisions in rural Alaska. Between October 2025 and January 2026, AFN conducted 11 statewide and regional listening sessions, engaging Tribal governments, ANCs, Alaska Native nonprofit and Tribal health organizations, regional service providers, Tribal consortia, borough and city governments, and industry and community leaders. These leaders bring distinct perspectives shaped by their various locations, structures, and governing authorities, and no single group decides whether or how resource development in Alaska may proceed. Together, their input reflects a broad range of roles impacting resource projects in practice. Sessions were held at the AFN Convention and other statewide gatherings, and regionally across the Aleutian, Southeast, Kodiak, Bristol Bay, Bering Strait, and Interior regions, supplemented by written comments from across the state.

Two features of this engagement distinguish the findings. First, the input was gathered through a structured format designed to elicit practical implementation experience: where communities see opportunity, what obstacles they encounter, and what approaches are working. Second, the findings were reviewed and validated by an Alaska Native and Rural Community Leadership Working Group composed of regional and community leaders from across the state, established to help ensure that findings and recommendations reflect on-the-ground conditions, regional differences, and community priorities (see Appendix C). The recommendations in this report are therefore both community-informed and community-validated.

What Communities Identified as Necessary for Responsible Development

Across listening sessions, regions, and roles, participants delivered a consistent message. Alaska Native and rural communities are prepared to engage with responsible development, and they are invested in effective federal implementation where development aligns with local priorities, protects subsistence resources, and provides clear community benefit. Participants described the conditions under which development can be beneficial and supportable: federal processes aligned with Alaska's seasons and logistics, project design that protects subsistence resources, supported local capacity, meaningful and predictable consultation that demonstrably impacts decision-making, and benefits delivery structured to remain in the communities where development occurs.

Participants were equally clear that these conditions do not guarantee support for every project. Some projects may face community opposition regardless of the safeguards applied, where impacts to subsistence resources, fisheries, cultural sites, lands, or waters are unacceptable to the affected community. Development priorities also differ across regions, and positions that serve one community may burden another. These judgments ultimately belong to communities, and respecting them is part of what makes legally required consultation meaningful.

Where projects do proceed, participants consistently describe successful development as follows. Projects move forward more efficiently when the conditions above are met, and they stall when those conditions are absent, resulting in higher costs for project proponents and delayed benefits for local communities and other stakeholders. In short, the same misalignments that frustrate communities also slow federal objectives. This report is grounded in that practical alignment: implementation is more effective when federal processes are designed around the conditions Alaska Native and rural communities identified as necessary for responsible development.

Six Pillars for Success

Six themes emerged consistently across all sessions, regardless of region or dominant local industry. These themes describe the practical conditions that determine project timelines, costs, and outcomes in rural Alaska.

Capacity and navigation support. Tribes, ANCs, municipal governments, and agencies all require staffing and technical assistance to engage effectively with permitting, funding, and development processes. Small organizations must manage multiple complex processes with few staff, and high federal turnover forces these small organizations to bear the burden of repeated re-education.

Environmental review and permitting alignment. Reviews, permits, and interagency coordination need to be responsive to Alaska's seasonal construction constraints. Predictability and coordination shorten timelines and reduce costs for agencies and communities alike. Early investment in baseline research and ongoing environmental monitoring can support timely agency decisions and reduce delays caused by information gaps.

Workforce needs as core infrastructure. Local hire pathways, training, leadership development, and workforce housing all determine whether development produces lasting local benefit. Population influxes that accompany projects (especially in the absence of local hire) strain public safety and emergency resources and services, requiring coordinated planning.

Consultation standards and education. Tribal and ANC consultation is legally required and most valuable when it is consistent, predictable, early, and well understood by agencies and communities alike. Clarity and advance communication on timelines, expectations, materials, and decision-making authority improve outcomes on both sides.

Transportation and logistics recognition. The movement of materials and workers, often by seasonal barge and small aircraft, is central to project success. Federal timelines for permitting, funding, and performance periods must be incorporated into federal permitting and funding timelines and should account for seasonal transportation schedules and other rural Alaska logistics realities.

Safety and emergency infrastructure investment. Remote communities need emergency response systems scaled to both current conditions and the increased activity that development brings. This includes planning for public safety, utilities, public facilities, and access to sustainable subsistence resources so development strengthens rather than undermines community well-being. Federal implementation should support flexible, coordinated approaches that reflect local capacity and community structure.

What is Already Working

Participants did not only identify constraints. They documented approaches that already succeed in Alaska that can inform federal implementation to meet the Administration's objectives.

Dedicated agency liaisons who listen, document, and act on community input were cited as models, including a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service liaison approach that visibly incorporated Tribal input into final plans, decisions, and agency materials. Flexible program models, including the 477 Program and direct federal-to-Tribal funding arrangements, were described as among the most effective federal structures in Alaska. The Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium was cited as proof that centralized capacity can serve many small communities, a model participants believe can extend to infrastructure and energy. Trilateral partnerships among Tribal governments, ANCs, and municipalities allow communities to speak with a unified voice and combine complementary assets. Participants described the partnership among the Tribe, village corporation, and city government in Unalaska as making a difference in engagement with state and federal officials. They also cited the Kodiak workforce housing project, a USDA-supported effort in which the City of Kodiak provided land at reduced cost, a local Tribe contributed a full-time employee, an ANCSA regional corporation contributed resources, and legal support was provided at no cost. Alaska Native-led development projects across the state, profiled in Section 6 and Appendix D, demonstrate that responsible development, community benefit, and federal objectives advance together.

The message of these examples matches the message of the themes: the approaches federal implementation needs already exist in Alaska. The opportunity is to support, replicate, and build on them.

From Priorities to Recommendations

The six pillars for success, the documented working models, and the detailed experiences participants shared form the evidentiary base for this report. Section 4 translates them into recommendations for federal agencies and decision-makers, pairing each recommendation area with the community perspectives that support it. Section 5 applies them to the Department of the Interior's implementation of Secretary's Order 3422. The community voice does not end with this section; it appears throughout the recommendations, where it belongs.

4. Community-Informed Recommendations and Implementation Opportunities

The recommendations in this section respond to the priorities identified through the ARTIC Project's 11 statewide and regional listening sessions and validated by the Alaska Native and Rural Community Leadership Working Group. Each recommendation area follows the same structure: the implementation challenge, community perspectives, the recommendations, the implementation opportunities available to federal decision-makers, and the expected benefits.

Two principles connect all seven areas. First, these recommendations build on the policy foundation established by Executive Orders 14153 and 14154 and Secretary's Order 3422 by aligning implementation with Alaska's operating environment. Second, the reforms that accelerate project delivery are the same reforms that strengthen communities and result in lasting value.

Implementation opportunities are presented with administrative actions first, because most can begin under existing authority. Opportunities involving increased appropriations or authorizing legislation are identified descriptively for completeness. The full mapping appears in Appendix A.

A. Modernize Environmental Review for Alaska Conditions

Challenge. Environmental review processes apply similar procedural expectations to projects of very different scale and risk. In rural Alaska, small community infrastructure projects (such as small water system upgrades, emergency facilities, fuel storage improvements, and community-scale energy installations) can face review timelines of two to four years, even when the project footprint and environmental risk are limited, or the project at issue is a rebuilding effort following natural disaster. When these reviews intersect with construction seasons that can be as short as roughly 120 days in some regions, a project that misses its window can be delayed a full year, increasing costs and postponing essential services. Aligning review requirements with project scale is an opportunity to deliver both federal efficiency objectives and community infrastructure more quickly, without compromising environmental review or public accountability.

Community Perspectives. Participants across the listening sessions described Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) and Environmental Assessment (EA) processes as poorly calibrated for smaller, community-scale projects. Participants questioned whether communities undertaking managed retreat for communities such as Kivalina should be required to complete a full EIS to rebuild existing critical infrastructure in a safer location, or whether life, health, and safety considerations could support an expedited or alternative review pathway. Participants also identified uneven review timelines across entities performing similar work, citing one example in which Tribal housing environmental reviews took up to a year while a comparable regional housing authority completed reviews in roughly two months. Communities consistently supported environmental protection process integrity but asked that review requirements be proportionate to project scale and risk.

Recommendations.

- Establish clear, agency-specific criteria for applying categorical exclusions to essential rural infrastructure projects with limited environmental scope and effects. Criteria should consider project footprint, location, activity type, and potential risk. Eligible project types could include water systems, community-scale energy, fuel storage improvements, emergency response facilities, housing, relocation projects, and other community-serving infrastructure.
- Allow agencies to adopt or apply appropriate categorical exclusions across federal programs when legally permissible, reducing inconsistent treatment of comparable projects.
- Establish expedited EIS and EA tracks for community-critical infrastructure, adaptation, and relocation projects while preserving required subsistence, cultural, historic, archaeological, and other resource reviews. Where applicable, reviews under ANILCA Section 810, the National Historic Preservation Act, and other governing authorities should begin early and proceed concurrently with National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) review.
- Clarify the appropriate level of environmental review for rebuilding and relocation projects, particularly projects constructed within an existing footprint or within areas identified through prior community, regional, or programmatic planning and environmental review.

Implementation Opportunities.

Administrative. Federal agencies can expand or adopt appropriate categorical exclusions and create expedited review procedures under existing authority. DOI can issue guidance through implementation of Secretary's Order 3422. For projects involving multiple agencies, the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) and relevant agencies can coordinate guidance that identifies applicable permits and resource reviews early and allows reviews to proceed concurrently where legally permissible.

Appropriations. The annual appropriations process could support expanded interagency environmental review coordination and dedicated review staff, consistent environmental research and monitoring, cumulative-effects analysis, and programmatic environmental reviews that inform subsequent project decisions.

Authorizing legislation. Legislation could establish Alaska-specific categorical exclusions and small-project review criteria while preserving site-specific screening, extraordinary-circumstances review, and applicable Tribal and ANC consultation, subsistence, historic preservation, archaeological, and environmental requirements.

Expected Benefits. Such benefits include environmental reviews proportionate to project scale and risk, faster delivery of essential community infrastructure, fewer missed construction seasons, and continued environmental integrity.

B. Align Permitting Timelines with Alaska Construction Realities

Challenge. In some regions of rural Alaska, the construction season can be as short as roughly 120 days, and in many communities materials arrive on one or two barge deliveries per year. Federal permitting timelines rarely account for these constraints. A decision delayed by even a few weeks can push a project back an entire year, increasing costs and disrupting financing, procurement, contractor availability, and community planning. Aligning permitting decisions with the lead time required for procurement, shipping, and mobilization can help convert existing agency effort into completed projects.

Community Perspectives. Participants in every session connected permitting delays to missed construction seasons, citing broadband, dock, airport, and relocation projects that lost a year or more to misaligned review sequencing. Transporting materials, equipment, and crews to off-road communities requires precise coordination that permitting uncertainty makes difficult and expensive. Participants asked for clearer agency response timelines once relevant applications are submitted and for more predictable guidance throughout the permitting review process.

Recommendations.

- Adopt firm federal decision timelines that account for procurement and mobilization requirements and allow projects to proceed within short seasonal construction windows.
- Issue coordinated permitting schedules for projects requiring approvals from multiple agencies or levels of government.
- Create a prioritization mechanism to expedite review when further delay would cause a project to miss an upcoming construction season or scheduled barge delivery.

- Integrate logistics planning, including transportation, staging, and supply chains, into federal permitting timelines.

Implementation Opportunities.

Administrative. Agencies can adopt firm decision timelines that account for seasonal construction and logistics requirements and issue coordinated permitting schedules under existing authority, consistent with the expedited permitting direction in Secretary's Order 3422.

Appropriations. The annual appropriations process could support interagency permitting coordination positions and systems for tracking permitting actions against seasonal construction deadlines.

Authorizing legislation. Legislation could require permitting schedules to account for seasonal construction and logistics requirements across administrations.

Expected Benefits. Implementing these recommendations would lead to more projects completed within their planned construction seasons, lower costs, greater predictability for communities, agencies, and investors, and faster realization of the development objectives established in Executive Order 14153.

C. Establish Federal Interagency Coordination Mechanisms

Challenge. Alaska projects routinely require approvals, funding, or reviews from multiple federal agencies, each with their own requirements, timelines, and points of contact. Communities with small staffs, whether Tribal, ANC, or municipal, must navigate each agency separately, and interagency working groups that once supported coordination have become less active. Implementation of the Alaska FAST-41 MOU[8] has begun, providing a coordination framework for eligible projects, but smaller rural and community projects may not qualify.[9] Broader coordination mechanisms remain necessary to reduce burdens on both communities and agencies while accelerating the coordinated federal action anticipated by the Executive Orders.

Community Perspectives. Participants described the burden of engaging separately with numerous agencies on single projects, repeating the same information in different formats. As an example, participants cited broadband microwave tower installations delayed by coordination gaps between federal agencies, with some projects advancing only after intervention from a Member of Congress. Participants spoke positively of past interagency forums and dedicated agency liaisons, and asked for a single, navigable point of entry into federal processes.

[8] In August 2025, the State of Alaska and the Federal Permitting Improvement Steering Council signed a five-year MOU to facilitate FAST-41 implementation for eligible Alaska infrastructure projects. The MOU provides for dedicated project contacts, recurring interagency coordination, concurrent reviews, shared documentation, coordinated permitting timelines, and federal-state efforts to reduce duplication: https://gov.alaska.gov/wp-content/uploads/Permitting-Council-SOA-MOU.pdf

[9] FAST-41 applies to infrastructure projects in designated sectors that require federal authorization or environmental review. The Standard Pathway generally covers NEPA projects exceeding $200 million, while the Discretionary Pathway covers other complex NEPA projects that would benefit from enhanced federal coordination. The Tribal Sponsored Pathway has no minimum investment threshold and covers qualifying NEPA projects sponsored by a Tribe or ANC on land it owns or has jurisdiction over: https://www.permitting.gov/projects/eligibility.

Recommendations.

- Establish a senior federal point of contact for Alaska resource, energy, and infrastructure projects at the White House or another federal interagency office with sufficient authority to convene agencies, track project status, and facilitate coordination with Alaska Native and rural communities, Tribes, ANCs, municipal governments, state agencies, and project sponsors.
- Reconstitute and formalize interagency working groups specific to Alaska energy and infrastructure projects.
- Require joint review processes and shared documentation across agencies to eliminate duplicative requests and reduce the burden on project proponents and local entities.
- Build on the Federal Permitting Dashboard to provide a centralized source for permitting requirements, agency contacts, project status, funding opportunities, and technical assistance.

Implementation Opportunities.

Administrative. A senior federal point of contact for Alaska resource, energy, and infrastructure projects could be established at the White House Office of Intergovernmental Affairs, or another federal interagency office. This role would provide a clear federal entry point, identify coordination gaps, and support timely interagency engagement without replacing agency decision-making authority.

Existing mechanisms could support implementation of some of these recommendations. For eligible projects, the Permitting Council and participating agencies can fully implement the Alaska FAST-41 MOU.

The proposed senior federal point of contact would serve a broader role by addressing coordination gaps across federal programs and supporting projects that do not qualify for FAST-41.

Appropriations. The annual appropriations process could support a senior point-of-contact program within the White House Office of Intergovernmental Affairs or an interagency office, dedicated coordination staff for eligible Alaska projects, and development and maintenance of an integrated project-navigation resource.

Authorizing legislation. Congress could codify the broader Alaska coordination framework, expand FAST-41 eligibility or establish a comparable pathway for smaller rural and community projects, and provide continuity across administrations.

Expected Benefits. If recommendations are implemented, expected benefits include reduced duplication for communities and agencies, faster multi-agency approvals, earlier identification of project obstacles, stronger federal accountability for coordination, and coordinated support for projects both within and outside FAST-41.

D. Reduce Jurisdictional and Regulatory Fragmentation

Challenge. Overlapping federal, state, and local jurisdictions create uncertainty about which requirements apply, in what order, and on what timeline. Similar projects can face different

requirements depending on the entity performing the work or the community where it occurs. Greater consistency is an opportunity to reduce planning costs, shorten timelines, and make federal requirements more predictable and easier to meet. This area complements Area A: where Area A addresses the proportionality of environmental review, this area addresses consistency across agencies and jurisdictions, including programmatic permitting for recurring project types.

Community Perspectives. Participants described overlapping jurisdictions and inconsistent requirements as persistent sources of confusion and delay, complicating even routine projects. Participants noted that requirements can vary across communities and projects in ways that are difficult to anticipate, and that federal and state processes sometimes conflict. Participants supported clearer, more consistent rules rather than reduced standards, and identified recurring project types—such as broadband installations, docks, and airports—where standardized approaches could serve multiple communities.

Recommendations.

- Issue uniform guidance across federal agencies for ANC/Tribal and non-Tribal project review timelines and for consistent application of environmental standards.
- Expand federal-state coordination protocols to reduce conflicting requirements.
- Pilot programmatic permits or approvals for recurring project types, including broadband, docks, airports, and relocation projects.

Implementation Opportunities.

Administrative. Agencies can issue uniform guidance to promote regulatory consistency and can pilot programmatic permitting for recurring project types under existing authority.

Appropriations. The annual appropriations process could support dedicated federal-state coordination positions.

Authorizing legislation. Uniform review timeline standards and programmatic permits for recurring project types could be established in statute.

Expected Benefits. If these recommendations are implemented, expected benefits include predictable requirements across agencies and jurisdictions, shorter planning and review cycles, reduced legal and administrative costs, and replicable approval templates that accelerate common community infrastructure projects statewide.

E. Reform Consultation to Support Project Delivery and Meaningful Engagement

Challenge. Consultation with Tribes and ANCs is required by law, and communities consistently engage when asked. High agency staff turnover, unclear decision-making authority, compressed consultation timelines, or timelines that disregard community values and needs such as subsistence harvest seasons, limit the value of that legally required engagement for both communities and agencies, turning the process into what feels to affected communities like a box-checking exercise rather than meaningful consultation. Consultation that is predictable, well documented, and followed up on reduces downstream delay, litigation risk, and project redesign while honoring federal commitments to the Alaska Native people.

Community Perspectives. Participants reported consultation windows offered by federal agencies as short as 14 days, often conflicting with subsistence seasons and travel and connectivity constraints, and sometimes beginning before communities received enough project information to conduct a meaningful review. Participants described consultation that felt procedural, with little indication of how input was considered in final decisions, and noted that high agency turnover requires communities to repeatedly orient new staff to local context. Participants emphasized that they could not always identify who within an agency held decision-making authority. Participants asked for predictable timelines, advance materials, documented follow-through, and greater Alaska Native representation within agencies.

Recommendations.

- Establish minimum consultation timelines that account for subsistence seasons, significant community and cultural events, travel and connectivity constraints, and community deliberation needs.
- Require agencies to provide project information and technical materials in advance of consultation and to hold consultations early in the federal decision-making process so consultation input can meaningfully impact outcomes.
- Require agencies to document how Tribal and ANC input was considered and provide a clear explanation of the agency's response to significant issues raised during consultation.
- Create decision-making maps identifying project roles, decision-making authority, and appropriate escalation pathways when issues cannot be resolved through the regular consultation process.
- Support local capacity and technical assistance for meaningful Tribal and ANC participation in complex federal permitting decisions.
- Expand Alaska-specific training for federal staff and expand Alaska Native and local hire in federal positions in Alaska under existing authorities.[10]

Implementation Opportunities.

Administrative. Agencies can issue consultation guidance establishing minimum timelines, advance material requirements, follow-through documentation, and decision-making maps. Agencies can develop a shared interagency consultation calendar, implement Alaska-specific training, and apply Alaska Native and local hire preferences available under existing authorities.[11]

Appropriations. The annual appropriations process could support consultation staffing, documentation and tracking systems, and Alaska-specific training.

[10] ANILCA §§ 1307–1308; Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act, 25 U.S.C. § 5307; and the Alaska Native Utilization Agreement established under the Trans-Alaska Pipeline System Federal Grant of Right-of-Way.
[11] ANILCA §§ 1307–1308; Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act, 25 U.S.C. § 5307; and the Alaska Native Utilization Agreement established under the Trans-Alaska Pipeline System Federal Grant of Right-of-Way.

Authorizing legislation. Minimum consultation timelines and documentation requirements could be established in statute, providing consistency across administrations.

Expected Benefits. Implementation of these recommendations could result in consultation that improves decisions rather than delaying them, reduced litigation and redesign risk, stronger community support for well-designed projects, institutional knowledge that survives staff transitions, and fulfillment of existing legal obligations in a manner that works in practice.

F. Align Funding and Program Design with Rural Alaska Realities

Challenge. Federal funding programs are often designed for applicants with dedicated grant staff, cash reserves for matching requirements, and road-system logistics. Rural Alaska communities frequently have none of these. Match requirements serve a legitimate purpose in demonstrating local commitment and extending the reach of federal dollars; the difficulty in rural Alaska is that a cash match is often unavailable at any level, not that the requirement is unwarranted. Program requirements can dominate scarce local capacity, and funding available for planning does not always extend to construction. Aligning program design with rural conditions is an opportunity to convert appropriated dollars into completed projects more reliably.

Community Perspectives. Participants described non-federal match requirements as difficult to meet in cash-limited economies, and that even in-kind match is difficult to document. They suggested allowing grants from different federal sources to be stacked in place of a non-federal match, on the view that the investment in a project should matter more than its source. Participants cited one trail project whose grant application required contact with eight federal and state agencies and roughly 42 hours of writing time. Participants described fragmented grant portals that are difficult to navigate, especially with limited broadband, and situations in which funding covered studies and planning but not construction, leaving completed plans outdated before projects could proceed. Smaller communities reported that they cannot compete effectively against larger, well-resourced community applicants. Marine-dependent communities also reported exclusion from transportation funding because eligibility frameworks and formulas apply only to surface transportation systems and do not account for marine-based systems.

Recommendations.

- Streamline and consolidate federal grant application systems through a centralized, accessible portal whenever possible.
- Allow flexible funding structures, including block grants and stacking of federal funding sources.
- Reduce or waive match requirements for rural and small communities.
- Expand funding for project implementation, not only planning, to reduce costs associated with having to redo out-of-date planning materials.
- Expand funding for technical assistance, including permitting, grant writing, and project management support.
- Recognize marine-based transportation systems (including ports, harbors, docks, barges, ferry systems, marine access routes, navigation improvements, and related infrastructure) in

federal transportation funding eligibility and formulas, especially where there is no surface transportation system alternative. Provide clear federal guidance identifying qualifying project types and funding opportunities so rural Alaska communities can more effectively access existing transportation funding programs.

- Support dedicated, non-competitive funding pathways for small Tribes, ANCs, local governments, and communities where capacity constraints limit competitive participation.

Implementation Opportunities.

Administrative. Agencies can apply existing match waiver authorities, expand formula and direct funding where authority permits, simplify and consolidate application systems, discourage planning-only grant structures, and expand technical assistance models such as the AFN Navigators program, which helps Alaska Native communities identify, access, and manage federal funding opportunities.

Appropriations. The annual appropriations process could support flexible block grant structures, match waiver programs, non-competitive set-asides for small rural communities, centralized grant portal development, and technical assistance.

Authorizing legislation. Statutory changes could permit stacking of federal funding sources, authorize block grant approaches for rural Alaska, establish non-competitive direct funding for communities below capacity thresholds, and require implementation funding parity with planning funding.

Expected Benefits. Implementation of these recommendations is expected to lead to higher completion rates for funded projects, reduced administrative burden on communities and agencies, broader participation by small communities, and federal investments that produce finished infrastructure rather than unbuilt plans.

G. Improve Access to Capital for Energy and Infrastructure Projects

Challenge. Community-scale energy and infrastructure projects in rural Alaska face financing structures designed for larger borrowers and conventional markets. High transaction costs, long review timelines, and program requirements misaligned with small project economies can stall or end otherwise viable projects. Improving capital access is an opportunity to move shovel-ready projects to construction and reduce long-term federal energy support costs.

Community Perspectives. Participants cited the Department of Energy Tribal Energy Loan Program as difficult to access, with one closed loan guarantee since 2018 despite significant allocated funding. Participants highlighted the discontinued Ounalashka geothermal project, which pursued program financing for years before extended timelines and process requirements ended the effort. Participants also reported that some financing and project structures have required broad waivers of Tribal sovereign immunity, which several Tribes described as a barrier to participation. Participants expressed interest in alternative financing mechanisms, including community-owned investment funds and settlement trusts, and in alternative delivery models suited to remote construction.

Recommendations.

- Reform federal financing programs to reduce transaction costs and review timelines and to align with small-scale and rural project economies. Support financing structures that protect Tribal sovereign immunity while allowing Tribes to negotiate narrowly tailored, transaction-specific remedies necessary to secure investment.
- Support direct and non-competitive funding pathways for Tribes where capacity constraints limit participation.
- Support alternative financing mechanisms, including community-owned investment funds and settlement trust approaches.
- Support alternative project delivery models, such as Construction Manager/General Contractor approaches, appropriately scoped for community needs.

Implementation Opportunities.

Administrative. Agencies can issue program guidance reducing administrative burdens, establish a dedicated Alaska point of contact, and provide technical assistance and model financing terms that protect Tribal sovereign immunity while supporting access to capital. Agencies can also support alternative contracting models through procurement guidance.

Appropriations. The annual appropriations process could support additional program staffing to reduce review timelines, technical assistance for loan applicants, and seed capital for community investment funds.

Authorizing legislation. Statutory changes could reduce program transaction costs, streamline loan guarantees for small and remote projects, and authorize community-owned investment fund and settlement trust structures.

Expected Benefits. Implementation of these recommendations can be expected to lead to shovel-ready projects reaching construction, financing terms that match rural project economics, reduced diesel dependence and long-term energy costs, and federal credit programs that deliver on their authorized purpose.

5. Guidance for Implementation of Secretary's Order 3422

Secretary's Order 3422 directs the Department of the Interior's implementation of Executive Order 14153 and establishes action planning requirements across the Department's bureaus and offices. This section provides suggested guidance for more successful implementation of these directives, drawn from the priorities identified through the ARTIC Project listening sessions and validated by the Alaska Native and Rural Community Leadership Working Group.

The guidance in this section is addressed primarily to the Department of the Interior and can be carried out under existing authority. It complements the government-wide recommendations in Section 4 by identifying how the Department can institutionalize the practices that communities identified as most important to successful project implementation. Where guidance areas build on Section 4 recommendations, cross-references are provided rather than repeating the underlying detail.

Two themes connect the six guidance areas. First, implementation succeeds when development activity is aligned with community infrastructure readiness, local capacity, and Alaska Native governance and values. Second, practices established through written frameworks, protocols, and agreements maintain continuity across staff transitions and administrations, protecting both federal objectives and community relationships.

A. Establish an Implementation Framework that Addresses Alaska's Conditions and Needs

Context. Secretary's Order 3422 sets action planning requirements and deadlines but does not itself prescribe how implementation should account for Alaska's operating environment. An implementation framework that specifically addresses Alaska's unique conditions and needs gives the Department a single reference point for sequencing decisions, aligning bureaus, and integrating the governmental roles unique to Alaska.

Guidance.

Develop an Implementation Plan for Secretary's Order 3422 that accounts for Alaska's unique conditions and defines project prioritization criteria.

Align development activity with community infrastructure readiness, including transportation, energy, housing, water, and public safety systems.

Integrate Tribal, ANC, and local government roles into implementation planning from the outset.

Expected Benefits. Incorporating these guidelines will result in a common framework across DOI bureaus, prioritization decisions that reflect on-the-ground readiness, fewer implementation conflicts discovered late in project development, and clear entry points for Tribal, ANC, and local government participation.

B. Institutionalize Meaningful ANC/Tribal Consultation Practices

Context. Section 4, Area E presents government-wide Tribal and ANC consultation recommendations. Communities reported that consultation quality currently depends heavily on individual personnel; written protocols convert good practice into standard practice. Within the Department, the opportunity is to institutionalize those practices so they operate consistently across bureaus and persist through staff and administration transitions. Tribal consultation practices institutionalized by the Department also shape how other agencies develop and apply their own.

Guidance.

Establish standardized consultation protocols with clear timelines, documentation requirements, and accountability mechanisms.

Ensure protocols account for subsistence seasons, travel constraints, significant community and cultural events, and community decision-making and deliberation needs.

Require bureaus to report on consultation frequency and on how Tribal and ANC input was incorporated into permits and associated federal actions.

Expand the use of consultation liaison roles to maintain continuity and build long-term working relationships.

Expected Benefits. The expected benefits of implementing such guidance include Tribal and ANC consultation that operates predictably across bureaus, documentation that preserves institutional knowledge through personnel changes, fewer delays after consultation begins, lower litigation risk, and stronger working relationships between the Department and Alaska Native governments, corporations, and organizations, and rural Alaska communities.

C. Build Local and Regional Implementation Capacity

Context. Communities identified capacity as a major barrier to participating effectively in federal processes. Small Tribes, ANCs, and local governments often manage permitting, grant, and consultation obligations with one or two staff members serving multiple roles. Capacity investment is a precondition to the participation that the Department's implementation mandate assumes.

Guidance.

Develop and fund regional and statewide technical assistance hubs, including support for technical certifications and leadership development, building on models such as the AFN Navigators program.

Support multi-entity partnerships among Tribes, ANCs, and municipalities in developing unified implementation plans with federal agencies and project developers.

Expected Benefits. Expected benefits include communities able to engage fully in permitting and consultation, shared expertise available to organizations that cannot maintain it individually, unified local positions that simplify federal engagement, and higher completion rates for federally supported projects.

D. Encourage Community Partnership and Local Hire Mechanisms

Context. Communities reported that development delivers lasting local benefit when employment, contracting, training, and revenue commitments are structured into projects from the beginning. Successful Alaska models, including ANC-shareholder employment programs and benefit-sharing structures on ANC lands, demonstrate that these mechanisms can support rather than impede project success.

Federal law already provides Alaska-specific precedent. ANILCA sections 1307 and 1308 establish preferences for certain Native Corporation and local visitor-service providers and for hiring local residents in specified federal positions. The Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act requires Indian employment, training, and contracting preferences in covered agreements. The Alaska Native Utilization Agreement was established under the Trans-Alaska Pipeline System Federal Grant of Right-of-Way. These are long-standing authorities, not new programs, and their effectiveness has varied, underscoring the need for clear commitments, measurable outcomes, transparent reporting, and accountability.[12]

[12] These mechanisms vary in scope, implementation, and results and would require refinement or expansion for broader application. See ANILCA §§ 1307–1308; Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act, 25 U.S.C. § 5307; and Department of the Interior, Alaska Native Utilization Agreement.

Guidance.

Where authorized by law, incorporate formal agreements that ensure benefits to communities, including workforce development, infrastructure investment, and revenue sharing, into federal approvals and support.

Use existing authorities to expand lawful local and Alaska Native employment, training, and contracting opportunities.[13]

Establish transparent reporting and accountability for local employment and contracting outcomes, workforce training, and community-level economic benefits.

Expected Benefits. Expected benefits include development that builds lasting local workforces and economies, measurable community benefit that sustains public support for projects over multi-decade horizons, and a factual record that informs future federal decisions.

E. Promote Flexible, Tribal, and Local Delivery Models

Context. Communities cited existing flexible delivery models, including the 477 Program, self-determination contracting and self-governance compacting under Public Law 93-638, and direct federal-to-Tribal funding arrangements, as among the most effective federal approaches in Alaska. The 477 Program allows Tribes and ANCs to integrate employment, training, and related federal funding into a single plan, while 638 contracting and compacting allow Tribes to assume responsibility for administering certain federal programs, functions, services, and activities. These models succeed because they allow Tribes to organize funding and implementation around local conditions rather than program silos.

Communities also emphasized that implementation structures must reflect local governance and capacity. In some communities, Tribal governments may be best positioned to lead delivery. In others, city or borough governments, ANCs, regional nonprofit organizations, or partnerships among them may be responsible for infrastructure, utilities, public facilities, emergency services, housing, or project coordination. Flexible federal implementation should support the local delivery model that meets the needs of the individual community.

Guidance.

Expand self-governance frameworks, building on existing flexible delivery models.

Expand direct federal-to-Tribal funding arrangements.

Allow funding to be bundled across sectors, including energy, housing, transportation, and community infrastructure.

Allow communities to tailor implementation to local conditions.

Expected Benefits. Expected benefits include federal resources organized around community priorities rather than program boundaries, reduced administrative burden for communities and the

[13] ANILCA §§ 1307–1308; Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act, 25 U.S.C. § 5307; and the Alaska Native Utilization Agreement established under the Trans-Alaska Pipeline System Federal Grant of Right-of-Way.

Department alike, stronger local governments and organizations, and delivery models with demonstrated performance in Alaska.

F. Strengthen Coordination and Transparency Mechanisms

Context. Section 4, Area C presents government-wide coordination recommendations. Communities reported that coordination mechanisms have historically weakened over time as personnel and priorities changed. Within the Department, the opportunity is to give coordination a standing institutional form so that it does not depend on individual initiative or effectively lapse between projects.

Guidance.

Institutionalize regional coordination bodies, such as advisory councils, with defined membership and meeting schedules.

Require regular coordination meetings among federal agencies, Tribes, and ANCs.

Establish shared project tracking dashboards accessible to federal, Tribal, ANC, and local participants.

Expand the use of memoranda of understanding and formal partnership agreements to support long-term collaboration.

Expected Benefits. Expected benefits include coordination that survives staff transitions and administration changes, earlier identification of project obstacles, shared visibility into project status for all parties, and written agreements that preserve commitments and expectations over time.

6. Demonstrated Success: Alaska Native-Led Development in Practice

Why These Case Studies Are Included

The recommendations in this report build on a proven model. Alaska Native communities and their partners have been demonstrating it for decades. This section summarizes five Alaska Native-led or supported development projects spanning mining, energy, and regional infrastructure, from a village of roughly 70 residents operating a first-of-kind energy technology, to one of the world's highest producing zinc mines, to a proposed all-season road network connecting three Arctic communities. The full case studies appear in Appendix D.

The projects differ in scale, sector, region, and structure. Read together, they demonstrate the report's central theme in practice: responsible development, meaningful community benefit, and federal policy objectives advance together when implementation is structured well. Where these projects have advanced despite the barriers this report addresses, they demonstrate what well-structured implementation makes possible. Improved federal implementation would allow more communities, with fewer resources, to pursue similar opportunities with less burden.

Case Studies at a Glance

Project	Region	Sector	Alaska Native Leadership Role	Primary Lessons Illustrated
Red Dog Mine	Northwest Arctic	Mining (zinc, lead, silver, germanium)	NANA Regional Corporation: landowner with shared management authority	Formal benefit and local hire mechanisms; standing subsistence engagement; statewide ANCSA revenue sharing
Donlin Gold Project	Yukon-Kuskokwim	Mining (gold) with power, pipeline, and port infrastructure	Calista Corporation and The Kuskokwim Corporation: landowners with direct project oversight	Coordinated federal permitting; contractual local hire; community input shaping project design
Hiilangaay Hydroelectric Project	Prince of Wales Island (Southeast)	Energy (small storage hydroelectric)	Haida Corporation: joint venture equity partner and co-owner	Stacked federal, state, and Tribal financing; regional infrastructure benefit; strategic ANCSA land selection
Igiugig RivGen Hydrokinetic Project	Bristol Bay	Energy (river hydrokinetic with microgrid and battery storage)	Igiugig Village Council: Tribal FERC license holder and project lead	Tribal-led delivery; collaborative environmental oversight; braided federal funding
Triangle Community Road	North Slope	Transportation (all-season community road network)	North Slope Borough: ASTAR program co-sponsor, serves and represents eight predominantly Iñupiat communities	Planning-stage interagency coordination through a federal PEL study; sustained community engagement shaping route selection; braided planning-stage funding

How the Case Studies Connect to This Report

The case studies illustrate the report's recommendation areas in practice. Red Dog Mine demonstrates formal benefit and local hire mechanisms (Section 4, Area F; Section 5, Area D) and sustained subsistence engagement through a standing committee of hunters (Section 4, Area E). The Donlin Gold Project demonstrates interagency permitting coordination at scale (Section 4, Area C), contractual local hire (Section 5, Area D), and community input that shaped project design (Section 4, Area E). The Hiilangaay Hydroelectric Project demonstrates capital assembly across federal, state, and Tribal sources (Section 4, Area G) and the value of regional rather than single-community energy infrastructure (Section 4, Area F). The Igiugig RivGen Hydrokinetic Project demonstrates Tribal-led project delivery (Section 5, Area E), collaborative environmental oversight

(Section 4, Area A), and braided federal funding for first-of-kind projects (Section 4, Areas F and G). The Triangle Community Road demonstrates coordinated planning and environmental review (Section 4, Area C), early community engagement (Section 4, Area E), and planning-stage support for rural infrastructure development (Section 4, Areas F and G).

Together, the five projects illustrate federal priorities reflected in Executive Order 14153 and Secretary's Order 3422, including domestic critical mineral supply, coordinated permitting, and economic development that benefits Alaskans. Each advances those priorities through Alaska Native ownership, leadership, or governance authority, demonstrating that federal resource objectives and Alaska Native self-determination advance together.

What These Projects Show

Alaska Native leadership and decision-making authority. Alaska Native ownership, leadership, and regional or local decision-making authority, not host-community status alone, help build the community support that sustains projects across decades. Every project profiled pairs Alaska Native leadership or ownership with a direct role in project governance or planning.

Long-term partnership and local benefit. Development horizons in Alaska span decades, and the projects that endure are built on patient partnerships, hiring preferences, workforce investment, and benefit structures that keep value in the region across generations.

Coordinated federal review and implementation. Coordinated permitting and standing oversight structures, from consolidated interagency review to collaborative monitoring teams, show what the coordination recommendations in Section 4 make possible in practice.

Financing and capacity challenges. The energy projects profiled assembled funding across multiple federal, state, and Tribal sources because no single program fit rural project economies. Their experience supports the funding and capital access reforms in Section 4, Areas F and G.

Designing community benefit into projects from the beginning. Hiring preferences, royalties, training investment, and infrastructure co-benefits structured into project agreements and plans from the **outset** help establish the community support that sustains long-horizon projects.

The case studies appear in full in Appendix D.

7. Where Implementation Can Begin

The recommendations in this report vary in the mechanisms they involve and the time they require. They do not vary in one respect: none requires waiting for all the others. This section identifies where implementation can begin under existing authority, and which early actions advance multiple recommendation areas at once.

Actions Available Under Existing Authority

Federal agencies can begin implementing the majority of this report's recommendations now, under the authority of Executive Order 14153, Secretary's Order 3422, and existing program and coordination authorities. Five actions are highlighted here because each advances several recommendation areas simultaneously.

Reconstitute Alaska interagency coordination mechanisms. Reactivating interagency working groups for Alaska energy and infrastructure creates the structure through which most other coordination recommendations operate, including joint review processes, shared documentation, and coordinated permitting schedules. (Advances Areas B, C, and D.)

Establish a senior federal point of contact for Alaska resource, energy, and infrastructure projects. A designated entry point allows small community staffs to engage the federal government as one system rather than many and gives agencies earlier visibility into project pipelines. (Advances Areas C, E, and F.)

Issue consultation guidance with minimum timelines and advance materials. Consistent Department-level consultation guidance establishing predictable timelines, advance technical materials, and documented follow-through addresses the consultation priorities communities identified most consistently, and reduces downstream litigation and redesign risk. (Advances Area E and Section 5, Area B.)

Expand categorical exclusion use for essential rural infrastructure. Existing authority permits agencies to expand categorical exclusion categories for small-scale, community-critical projects, delivering proportionate review without new rulemaking. (Advances Area A.)

Direct development of an Alaska Implementation Plan for Secretary's Order 3422. A Department-level implementation plan gives the guidance in Section 5 a single vehicle: prioritization criteria, consultation protocols, capacity investment, benefit mechanisms, delivery models, and coordination structures. (Advances all Section 5 areas.)

These five actions share a practical logic. Each can begin without new resources or authority, each reduces burden on agencies as well as communities, and each builds the coordination infrastructure that makes subsequent actions easier.

Actions Involving Funding and Program Structure

A second group of recommendations involves funding levels or program design and could be supported through the annual appropriations process, including technical assistance hubs, interagency coordination staffing, match waiver programs, and non-competitive funding pathways for small communities. These are identified descriptively in Section 4 and mapped in Appendix A. Agencies can prepare for such opportunities now by documenting Alaska-specific program performance and identifying where existing waiver and formula authorities already permit administrative action.

Reforms Involving Statutory Change

A third group of recommendations, including statutory consultation timelines, federal funding stacking, construction season protection provisions, and enforceable benefit agreement frameworks, would involve authorizing legislation to become consistent across administrations. These pathways are identified for analytical completeness and are mapped in Appendix A.

Timing and Continuity

Two timing considerations apply across all three groups. First, Alaska's operational calendar rewards early action: guidance issued before a permitting season shapes that season's projects,

while guidance issued mid-season shapes the next year's. Second, practices established in written form (through orders, protocols, memoranda of understanding, and published guidance) maintain continuity through personnel transitions and across administrations. Communities identified institutional continuity as a condition for the long-horizon projects Alaska requires, and the case studies in Section 6 and Appendix D demonstrate what multi-decade continuity makes possible.

Implementation can begin with the five actions above. Each is available now, each addresses priorities that Alaska Native and rural community leaders identified statewide, and each advances the objectives the Administration has already established.

8. Conclusion

The Administration has established the policy foundation for responsible energy and resource development in Alaska. This report has identified what turning that foundation into completed projects requires: federal processes aligned with Alaska's construction calendar and logistics, coordination structures that match the scale of small community staffs, consultation that is predictable, documented, and meaningful, funding and financing designed for rural project economies, and implementation of Secretary's Order 3422 that builds on the governance structures and partnership models already working in Alaska.

The evidence behind these recommendations is statewide and specific. Eleven listening sessions produced a consistent account of the conditions that determine project outcomes, validated by an Alaska Native and Rural Community Leadership Working Group and demonstrated by decades of Alaska Native-led development. That evidence supports one central conclusion: streamlining and community benefit are mutually reinforcing. The reforms that deliver projects faster are the reforms that deliver lasting benefit to the communities where development occurs.

The reason to act now is practical. In Alaska, implementation timing compounds: a permitting season used well delivers projects a full year sooner, and infrastructure, jobs, and energy savings arrive with them. Projects like those profiled in this report face near-term decision points, and communities across the state are prepared to engage with development that meets the conditions this report describes.

Alaska Native and rural community leaders have identified what successful implementation requires, and their priorities converge with the Administration's objectives on the same practical reforms. This report is offered to support the federal decision-makers who will carry that implementation forward, and its authors and partners stand ready to assist.

Acknowledgments

This Policy Report was developed jointly by the Alaska Federation of Natives (AFN), the Alaska Native Village Corporation Association (ANVCA), the ANCSA Regional Association (ARA), the Alaska Tribal Administrators Association (ATAA), and the Alaska Municipal League (AML). Together, these organizations represent a broad cross-section of Alaska Native, Tribal, Alaska Native Corporation (ANC), municipal, and regional perspectives. Their partnership throughout the ARTIC Project helped ensure the report reflects the priorities, opportunities, and challenges identified by the communities they serve.

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This report builds upon insights gathered through 11 statewide and regional listening sessions conducted across Alaska between October 2025 and January 2026. The co-authors sincerely thank the Alaska Native, Tribal, ANC, municipal, industry, and community leaders who shared their experiences, priorities, and recommendations. They also thank the members of the Alaska Native and Rural Community Leadership Working Group, whose review helped ensure the report's findings and recommendations reflect on-the-ground conditions, regional differences, and community priorities. Their perspectives are at the heart of this report.

The co-authors also thank the organizations whose projects are profiled in Section 6 and Appendix D. Their leadership provides practical examples of Alaska Native-led development in action. Appreciation is also extended to the subject matter experts who volunteered their time and expertise to review the draft report.

ARTIC Project Team

This Policy Report was developed with support from Lukin Advisory Group, LLC. Sarah Lukin served as ARTIC Project Lead and prepared the initial draft of the report, synthesizing the listening session findings and developing the policy recommendations for review and refinement by the co-authors and project team. TJ Presley led development of the case studies and supported policy development, editing, and refinement of the recommendations.

Van Ness Feldman LLP provided legal support, contributing legal and policy analysis related to Executive Orders 14153 and 14154 and Secretary's Order 3422. The firm also supported development of the Alaska Native Resource Development Priorities Framework and related implementation framework materials that informed this report.

Leif Fonnesbeck drafted the Implementation Pathways Framework, which informed Appendix A and supported development of the report's implementation analysis and policy recommendations.

AFN President Benjamin Mallott provided the vision, guidance, and direct engagement with Alaska Native and rural community leaders that helped shape the ARTIC Project, this report, and its focus on advancing Alaska Native priorities for responsible resource development and infrastructure investment.

Nikki Stoops led the report's design and layout for publication.

Appendix A: Implementation Pathways Reference Matrix

This appendix maps the recommendations in Sections 4 and 5 to the three implementation pathways available to federal decision-makers. It is a reference tool: readers can locate any recommendation area and identify the actions available under each pathway.

Administrative action. Actions available under existing authority, including Executive Orders, Secretary's Orders, agency guidance, program administration, and interagency coordination mechanisms. Most of the report's recommendations can begin through this pathway.

Appropriations. Actions that could be supported through the annual appropriations process, including funding for staffing, technical assistance, coordination systems, and program expansion.

Authorizing legislation. Statutory changes that could make reforms consistent across administrations. These are identified descriptively.

The matrix identifies mechanisms available to federal decision-makers for analytical completeness. It does not constitute a request for legislative action.

Recommendation Area	Administrative Action	Appropriations	Authorizing Legislation
A. Environmental Review	Expand categorical exclusions through agency guidance; establish expedited review tracks through administrative action; issue Alaska-specific review guidance under S.O. 3422	Interagency environmental review coordination; dedicated staffing for streamlined tracks	Rural Alaska categorical exclusions; small-project review thresholds
B. Permitting Timelines	Adopt decision timelines tied to the construction season; issue coordinated permitting schedules; integrate logistics planning into permitting	Interagency permitting coordination positions; seasonal deadline tracking systems	Construction season protection provisions
C. Interagency Coordination	Reconstitute working groups through Executive or Secretary's Order or other appropriate administrative action; establish joint review and shared documentation; develop centralized permitting and funding portal	Senior point-of-contact program; working group staffing; portal development and maintenance	Permanent Alaska interagency permitting coordination body

Recommendation Area	Administrative Action	Appropriations	Authorizing Legislation
D. Regulatory Consistency	Issue uniform review guidance; pilot programmatic permits for recurring project types	Federal-state coordination positions	Uniform review timeline standards; statutory programmatic permits
E. Consultation	Issue consultation guidance with minimum timelines, advance materials, follow-through documentation, and decision-making maps; shared consultation calendar; Alaska-specific training; Alaska Native and local hire preferences under existing authorities	Consultation staffing; documentation and tracking systems; training; hiring initiatives	Statutory minimum consultation timelines and documentation requirements
F. Funding and Program Design	Apply existing match waiver authorities; expand formula and direct funding where authorized; consolidate application systems; expand technical assistance models; recognize marine-based transportation systems in program eligibility where existing authority permits	Block grant structures; match waiver programs; non-competitive set-asides; centralized grant portal; technical assistance	Federal funding stacking; block grant authorization; non-competitive direct funding; implementation funding parity; marine transportation eligibility in funding formulas
G. Access to Capital	DOE program guidance reducing administrative burden; dedicated Alaska point of contact; procurement guidance for alternative delivery models	Program staffing to reduce review timelines; applicant technical assistance; community investment fund seed capital	Reduced program transaction costs; streamlined loan guarantees; community investment fund and settlement trust structures
Local Capacity and Technical Assistance (Sections 4 and 5)	Expand technical assistance models such as AFN Navigators; support multi-entity partnership planning	Regional and statewide technical assistance hubs	Dedicated capacity funding authorization

Recommendation Area	Administrative Action	Appropriations	Authorizing Legislation
Community Benefit and Local Hire (Section 5, Area D)	Consider benefit agreements and local hire provisions in approvals; establish reporting mechanisms for employment and economic outcomes	Reporting and monitoring systems	Enforceable benefit agreement frameworks
Tribal and Local Delivery Models (Section 5, Area E)	Expand self-governance frameworks and direct federal-to-Tribal funding under existing authority; allow cross-sector bundling where authorized	Expanded 477-type program funding	Broadened statutory authority for cross-sector funding integration
S.O. 3422 Guidance (Section 5)	Alaska Implementation Plan; standardized consultation protocols; institutionalized coordination bodies; MOUs and partnership agreements; project tracking dashboards	Coordination body operations; dashboard development; liaison staffing	—

Appendix B: Executive Order and Secretary's Order Provisions by Sector

This appendix summarizes the provisions of Executive Order 14153, "Unleashing Alaska's Extraordinary Resource Potential"; Executive Order 14154, "Unleashing American Energy"; Executive Order 14276, "Restoring American Seafood Competitiveness"; and Secretary's Order 3422 that are most relevant to the sectors addressed in this report. It is a reference summary, not a legal analysis.

Energy and Natural Resources

Executive Order 14153 directs federal agencies to expedite the permitting and leasing of energy and natural resource projects in Alaska and to prioritize the development of Alaska's liquefied natural gas potential, including permitting for all necessary pipeline and export infrastructure. Executive Order 14154 directs agencies government-wide to review and revise actions that burden domestic energy development. Secretary's Order 3422 directs Department of the Interior bureaus to implement these directives through action plans on defined timelines, including provisions addressing the National Petroleum Reserve in Alaska and the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge Coastal Plain leasing program.

Minerals and Mining

Executive Order 14153 directs agencies to facilitate the development of Alaska's mineral resources, including critical minerals. Secretary's Order 3422 directs bureaus to identify and advance actions supporting mineral development on federal lands in Alaska, including permitting reviews and land status actions such as Public Land Order revocations relevant to mineral entry.

Forestry and Timber

Executive Order 14153 addresses timber development in Alaska, including direction relevant to the Tongass National Forest. On August 18, 2026, the U.S. Department of Agriculture announced a proposed rule and draft environmental impact statement to rescind the Roadless Rule. The proposed rule was published in the Federal Register on August 20, 2026, opening a 30-day public comment period.

Fisheries and Seafood

Executive Order 14276 directs reforms to strengthen the competitiveness of the United States seafood industry, including regulatory review and trade-related provisions relevant to Alaska's fishing communities and seafood economy.

Land Status and Conveyances

Executive Order 14153 and Secretary's Order 3422 include provisions addressing ANCSA land conveyances, Public Land Orders, navigability determinations, land-into-trust processing, and related land status actions that affect project siting and development planning across Alaska.

Provisions Relevant to Alaska Native Communities

Across these directives, several provisions bear directly on the interests of Alaska Native communities, including direction affecting lands owned by or significant to Alaska Native Corporations and Tribes, subsistence-related considerations, and the land status actions described above. This report's recommendations are designed to support implementation of these provisions in a manner that aligns with community priorities and produces lasting local benefit.

Appendix C: Listening Session Overview and Methodology

Sessions Conducted

The ARTIC Project conducted 11 statewide and regional listening sessions between October 2025 and January 2026, supplemented by written comments submitted from across the state.

Date	Session	Format
October 16, 2025	AFN Convention Listening Session (statewide)	In person
October 22, 2025	Alaska Municipal League / ANVCA Session (statewide)	In person
November 5, 2025	BIA Providers Conference Session (statewide)	In person
November 13, 2025	Aleutian Region Session	Virtual
November 18, 2025	Southeast Region Session	Virtual
November 20, 2025	Kodiak Region Session	Virtual
December 2, 2025	Bristol Bay Region Session	Virtual
December 9, 2025	Bering Strait Region Session	Virtual
December 11, 2025	Statewide Open Session	Virtual
January 13, 2026	Statewide Open Session	Virtual
January 16, 2026	Interior Region Session	Virtual

Participants

Participants included leaders of Tribal governments, Alaska Native regional and village corporations, Alaska Native nonprofit and Tribal health organizations, regional service providers, Tribal consortia, borough and city governments, and industry and community organizations. Sessions were open to all interested participants within each convening, and participation varied by region and format.

How Input Was Gathered

Sessions followed a structured format of approximately 90 minutes, organized around five guiding questions: where communities see opportunity in the current federal policy environment; what permitting, regulatory, and infrastructure obstacles they encounter; what workforce and capacity conditions affect project delivery; what consultation and engagement practices work well or poorly; and what approaches are already working that federal implementation should build on. Facilitators documented input in real time, and participants were invited to submit written comments following each session.

Validation

Findings from the listening sessions were consolidated into a summary report and reviewed by the Alaska Native and Rural Community Leadership Working Group, composed of regional and community leaders from across the state. The Working Group validated the findings, identified regional differences, and reviewed the recommendations developed from them. The recommendations in this report are therefore both community-informed and community-validated.

Appendix D: Case Studies

This appendix presents the full case studies summarized in Section 6. Each case study stands on its own and can be read independently. The participating organizations reviewed and approved their case studies; the Triangle Community Road case study was compiled from publicly available sources.

Case Study: Red Dog Mine

A NANA Regional Corporation (NANA) case study on 35+ years of Alaska Native-led resource development in Northwest Alaska

Project Snapshot

Project Name	Red Dog Operations
Location	Northwest Alaska, approximately 80 miles north of Kotzebue and 170 km north of the Arctic Circle, on NANA-owned land
Lead Organization(s)	NANA (landowner) in partnership with Teck Alaska, Inc. (operator), under the 1982 operating agreement
Project Type	Resource development — one of the world's highest producing zinc mines, also producing lead, silver, and germanium
Status	Operating since 1989; current Aqqaluk deposit projected to be exhausted by 2031; advanced exploration underway on State of Alaska owned lands at the Aktigiruq and Aŋarraaq deposits to extend operations
Key Outcomes	~980 shareholder jobs in 2025 (~$71M wages); $500M+ cumulative shareholder wages since 1989; ~$3B in royalties to Alaska Native corporations life-to-date, with ~$2.2B shared statewide via ANCSA 7(i)/7(j); funds 80%+ of Northwest Arctic Borough budget; ~70% of U.S. zinc production

Why This Matters

For more than three decades, Red Dog has been the economic foundation of Northwest Alaska. The mine funds over 80 percent of the Northwest Arctic Borough budget, supports nearly 1,000 jobs, is the largest private sector employer and third largest employer after healthcare and education, and has generated more than $3 billion in royalties to Alaska Native corporations life-to-date — over $2 billion of which has been shared with other regional and village corporations under ANCSA Sections 7(i) and 7(j), making Red Dog one of the most significant single sources of Alaska Native economic benefit in the country. Red Dog also supplies approximately 70 percent of U.S. zinc production, a critical mineral for steel, infrastructure, defense, and clean-energy supply chains. With the current Aqqaluk ore body projected to be exhausted by 2031, the federal coordination required to extend

Red Dog through the Aktigiruq and Aŋarraaq deposits will determine whether the United States can meet its critical minerals goals and sustain this Alaska Native-led model of responsible Arctic resource development.

Alaska Native Leadership & Local Priorities

Red Dog is governed by Iñupiat values and Iñupiat decision-making. NANA's 23-member board is composed entirely of Iñupiaq shareholders, with two board directors from each NANA village plus an Elder Advisor.

- **Joint Management Committee:** The 1982 NANA-Teck operating agreement created a Management Committee with NANA representation that oversees strategic direction, operations, subsistence priorities, shareholder employment, and community development — NANA shapes day-to-day decisions and not just receive royalties.
- **Subsistence Committee:** Hunters from Noatak and Kivalina meet regularly with mine representatives to ensure subsistence activities and resources are protected.
- **Sustained shareholder support:** More than 82 percent of NANA shareholders supported continued Red Dog operations in NANA's 2023 Shareholder Survey, reflecting durable community support.
- **Three generations of Iñupiat workers:** More than 3,000 shareholders have worked at Red Dog since 1989, building one of the deepest Indigenous mining workforces in North America.

Effective Strategies Used

- **The 1982 operating agreement:** NANA's founding leaders, including first chairman Robert Aqqaluk Newlin, negotiated an agreement that combined a landowner royalty (35% rising in 5% increments every five years to 50%; currently 40%, stepping up to 45% in October 2027), shareholder hiring preference, ongoing subsistence oversight, and shared management authority. The structure remains a benchmark for ANC-industry partnerships.
- **Workforce pipeline:** Shareholders consistently make up more than half of the Red Dog workforce; 2023 employment reached ~980 shareholders earning ~$71 million in wages, supported by NANA-led vocational training and apprenticeships.
- **Indigenous supplier development:** Red Dog spent $155 million with Indigenous suppliers in 2019 alone, building a regional contracting base that strengthens the broader Iñupiat economy.
- **Environmental performance:** Red Dog operates under more than 70 stringent permits and 40 work plans. Mine-related water management has improved Red Dog Creek downstream conditions, which were naturally toxic before development and now support aquatic life.
- **Long-horizon federal coordination:** The November 2024 USACE Section 404 permit for the Aktigiruq exploration access road — the last permit needed to begin advanced exploration — followed years of close coordination among NANA, Teck, Kivalina, Noatak, and federal regulators.

Lessons for Other Projects

- ANC landowner-operator partnerships with shared management authority — not just royalties — produce more durable community support and better operational outcomes than transactional models.
- Standing subsistence committees with real authority give hunters a continuous voice in operational decisions, building trust that survives leadership transitions on both sides.

- Escalating royalty structures (Red Dog's 35% to 50% step-ups) align long-term incentives between operator and landowner and create growing community benefit as mines mature.
- Shareholder hiring preferences paired with sustained workforce investment can build multi-generational Indigenous workforces even in remote Arctic locations.

Alignment with Federal Priorities and Executive Orders

- **Alaska Native self-determination and statewide Native benefit:** Red Dog is governed through an Iñupiat-led partnership structure on Iñupiat-owned land, reflecting Alaska Native leadership and locally driven development under the ANCSA framework. Through ANCSA 7(i) and 7(j) revenue sharing, the project has distributed approximately $2.2 billion to regional and village corporations across Alaska.
- **Domestic critical minerals supply:** Red Dog produces a significant share of U.S. zinc supply and is also a major domestic source of germanium, along with lead and silver. Zinc, lead, silver, and germanium all appear on the 2025 List of Critical Minerals, supporting federal priorities related to secure domestic mineral supply chains, infrastructure materials, defense applications, and emerging energy technologies.
- **Arctic economic development:** The mine provides the majority of the Northwest Arctic Borough's operating revenue, directly contributes to the Borough's Village Improvement Fund that invests in locally led infrastructure, and remains the region's largest private-sector employer in a remote Arctic area with limited infrastructure and economic alternatives.
- **Permitting and interagency coordination:** The 2024 Section 404 permit for the Aktigiruq exploration road provides a significant Alaska-based example of coordinated federal, Alaska Native, and industry collaboration in support of resource development and long-term project planning.

Case Study: Donlin Gold Project

A Calista Corporation case study on Alaska Native-led resource development in the Yukon-Kuskokwim Region

Project Snapshot

Project Name	Donlin Gold Project
Location	Yukon-Kuskokwim (Y-K) Region of southwest Alaska, on Calista Corporation (Calista) and The Kuskokwim Corporation (TKC) lands approximately 10 miles north of Crooked Creek
Lead Organization(s)	Calista (surface owner and subsurface mineral owner) and The Kuskokwim Corporation (TKC) (surface owner), in partnership with Donlin Gold LLC.
Project Type	Resource development — proposed open-pit gold mine with associated on-site power generation, natural gas pipeline and fiber optic cable, and transportation infrastructure including a port, road and airstrip
Status	Most major Federal and state permits have been issued, and a Bankable Feasibility Study is underway, with completion targeted for the first half of 2027 to inform a Final Investment Decision (FID). Commercial operations would follow an estimated three- to four-year construction period after FID.
Key Outcomes	~3,000 construction jobs and ~1,000 operations jobs over a 27+ year mine life; shareholder hiring preference; statewide ANCSA 7(i)/7(j) revenue sharing across all 12 regional corporations and 200+ village corporations; new natural gas, fiber, port, and power infrastructure for the Y-K Region

Why This Matters

The Y-K Region is one of the most economically distressed areas in the United States — the Denali Commission has classified nearly every Y-K community as distressed. Donlin Gold offers a generational opportunity to bring living-wage jobs, lower energy costs, and modern infrastructure to a region where they have long been out of reach, while keeping decision-making in Alaska Native hands. Under ANCSA Sections 7(i) and 7(j), 70 percent of Calista's resource revenues are shared among all 12 regional corporations and flow through to more than 200 village corporations statewide — so a single large-scale project on Calista lands delivers economic benefit to Alaska Native people across the entire state. The associated 316-mile natural gas pipeline, two new ports, power plant, fiber optic line, and access roads also represent the largest single infrastructure investment ever proposed for rural western Alaska.

Alaska Native Ownership, Leadership & Local Priorities

The Donlin Gold Project's roots trace back to ANCSA land selections by the Elders from the village of Crooked Creek. The Elders specifically selected lands 10 miles north of their village because of the area's known mineral potential. Due to their land selections, Calista owns the mineral estate in the Donlin Gold Project lease area, and the surface land is owned by TKC, formed by a merger of 10 middle Kuskokwim village corporations. Calista waited roughly 20 years before signing exploration agreements in the mid-1990s, after passage of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) established key environmental and cultural protections.

- **Direct Calista and TKC oversight:** In addition to State and Federal regulatory oversight, Calista and TKC are actively involved in mine development, operations, continuous reclamation, and closure decisions — not passive landowners.
- **Subsistence first:** Calista's stated top priority is protecting fish and the subsistence way of life. Subsistence knowledge and shareholder hire participation are required components of project monitoring and oversight.
- **Sustained shareholder engagement:** Calista's Shareholder Relations Committee, established in 2004, has held more than 200 meetings in Y-K Region villages; Donlin Gold has hosted hundreds of additional meetings since 2011.
- **Community input shaped design:** Shareholder concerns **strongly influenced** the decision to add a natural gas pipeline (significantly reducing Kuskokwim River barge traffic) and to include a liner for the tailings storage facility.

Effective Strategies Used

- **Long-horizon partnership built on patience:** More than 45 years of Calista involvement and 20+ years of joint development with Donlin Gold built the trust and technical depth needed to navigate one of the most complex permitting processes in the country.
- **Contractual shareholder-hire preference:** Donlin's leases with Calista and TKC require hiring preference for shareholders, descendants, and their families, producing an average shareholder hire rate as high as 90 percent in some years. Rotational schedules let workers maintain, and afford, subsistence activities at home.
- **Workforce development:** Donlin Gold funds scholarships, vocational training, and youth programs; Calista subsidiaries in construction, environmental services, and heavy equipment provide additional pathways into project work.
- **Advance royalties before production:** Calista receives advance royalty payments today, generating Shareholder benefits well before the mine produces its first ounce of gold.
- **Coordinated state-federal permitting:** The Donlin Gold Project has undergone an extensive, multi-year federal and state environmental review and permitting process, and most major permits have been issued. Tribal governments, Alaska Native Corporations, communities, and residents across the Yukon-Kuskokwim Region provided substantial input through consultations, public meetings, hearings, and formal comment opportunities. This input helped inform the environmental review, permit conditions, and important project design decisions. State decisions on water rights and the pipeline right-of-way lease have been upheld by the Alaska Supreme Court, and the project's inclusion in FAST-41 supports continued federal coordination and transparency.

Lessons for Other Projects

- ANC ownership of mineral resources — a uniquely Alaska framework — places Alaska Native people in the driver's seat on land-use decisions and aligns project success with community benefit.
- Patient development timelines anchored in sustained shareholder dialogue build the durable community support and project understanding required for projects spanning decades.
- Contractual hiring preferences, training investments, and rotational schedules can deliver high local-hire outcomes even on technically demanding projects in remote locations.
- Front-loaded benefits (advance royalties, scholarships, community investment, training) help bridge the long gap between project initiation and operations.
- ANCSA 7(i)/7(j) revenue sharing means well-structured projects on a single corporation's land can produce statewide Alaska Native benefits — a feature federal partners should weigh when prioritizing resource projects on ANC lands.

Alignment with Federal Priorities and Executive Orders

- **Alaska Native self-determination:** The project is led by Alaska Native Corporations exercising decision-making authority over development on Native-owned resources, reflecting Alaska Native self-determination and locally driven development principles under the ANCSA framework.
- **Domestic critical and precious metals supply:** Donlin would be among the largest domestic gold mines in the United States, supporting federal priorities related to secure domestic mineral supply chains and long-term economic resilience.
- **Rural infrastructure modernization:** Associated investments in pipeline infrastructure, port facilities, power generation, and communications align with federal priorities related to rural infrastructure modernization, energy reliability, and long-term regional connectivity.
- **Permitting modernization:** Donlin's inclusion in the FAST-41 process provides a significant Alaska-based example of coordinated federal permitting and interagency project delivery on Alaska Native lands.
- **Economic opportunity in distressed communities:** By creating long-term employment and economic activity in a region identified by the Denali Commission as economically distressed, the project advances federal priorities related to rural economic opportunity and regional development.

Case Study: Hiilangaay Hydroelectric Project

A Haida Corporation case study on Alaska Native-led regional renewable energy infrastructure on Prince of Wales Island

Project Snapshot

Project Name	Hiilangaay Hydroelectric Project (formerly Reynolds Creek)
Location	Reynolds Creek basin on Prince of Wales Island, Southeast Alaska, ~10 miles east of Hydaburg — a predominantly Haida community of ~400 residents
Lead Organization(s)	Haida Energy, Inc. — a joint venture of Haida Corporation (the ANCSA village corporation for Hydaburg) and Alaska Power & Telephone Company. Operated by Alaska Power Company.
Project Type	Energy — 5 MW small storage hydroelectric facility interconnected with the Prince of Wales Island regional transmission grid
Status	Placed in service January 20, 2021 after roughly 20 years of planning. Land selected by Haida Corporation under ANCSA specifically for hydroelectric potential.
Key Outcomes	~6.1 million kWh of clean, fish-friendly electricity in 2025 with considerably more capacity to serve load addition; serves Craig, Klawock, Hollis, Hydaburg, Thorne Bay, Kasaan, Coffman Cove, and Naukati; surplus clean power has enabled regional adoption of air-source heat pumps and biomass heating in Hydaburg

Why This Matters

Hiilangaay is the only hydroelectric project in the southern half of Prince of Wales Island and the keystone that pushed the island's interconnected grid toward fully renewable generation. America's fourth-largest island now has clean energy to spare, allowing communities to electrify heating loads through heat pumps and biomass and reducing exposure to volatile diesel prices across an entire regional system. The project also demonstrates a distinctive model: an ANCSA village corporation that selected its land specifically for hydroelectric potential decades in advance, then partnered with a private utility to deliver regional infrastructure benefiting eight communities. For federal policymakers, Hiilangaay shows what is possible when ANCSA land selection foresight meets patient federal program support — and how federal permitting structures designed for utility-scale hydropower can impose disproportionate costs on small Tribally led rural projects.

Alaska Native Leadership & Local Priorities

- **Strategic ANCSA land selection:** Haida Corporation's founding leaders selected the Reynolds Creek lands under ANCSA specifically for their hydroelectric potential, anchoring an energy vision that took 40+ years to fully realize.

- **Tribally co-owned regional infrastructure:** Haida Corporation co-owns the asset through Haida Energy, Inc. — not as a host community, but as an equity partner in a regional energy utility — ensuring long-term Haida benefit and decision-making.
- **Aligned with cultural values:** The project name honors the community's practice of weaving Haida language and identity into infrastructure that will serve generations. The 100% renewable goal reflects Haida stewardship values for the lands and waters of the Alexander Archipelago.
- **Regional benefit beyond Hydaburg:** Power flows across the Prince of Wales intertie to seven additional communities, advancing a Tribally co-owned project as shared regional infrastructure rather than a single-village asset.

Effective Strategies Used

- **ANC – utility joint venture structure:** Haida Energy, Inc. pairs Haida Corporation's land, capital, and Tribal standing with Alaska Power & Telephone's utility operating expertise and regulatory experience — a model that lets a small village corporation deliver utility-grade infrastructure.
- **Patient long-horizon development:** The project survived a 20+ year arc, including a 1996–2003 DOE grant cycle, FERC license maintenance through long delays, name change to Hiilangaay in 2015, and final commissioning in 2021. Persistence kept federal approvals alive across multiple funding gaps.
- **Braided financing: The project combined multiple public and private funding sources, creating a financing structure that no single program could have supported on its own.**
- **Integration with existing regional grid:** Connecting Hiilangaay into the existing Prince of Wales hydro-and-diesel system avoided duplicative transmission investment and let the new asset immediately displace diesel across multiple communities.

Lessons for Other Projects

- Strategic ANCSA land selection, made decades ago for purposes only realized later, is a uniquely Alaskan tool that federal partners should recognize and leverage when prioritizing infrastructure investment.
- ANC – private utility joint ventures can deliver utility-grade renewable infrastructure that neither party could build alone, while keeping equity and decision-making in Tribal hands.
- Patient federal program support over multiple decades, not just initial grants, is what allows small Tribal energy projects to survive funding gaps and bring complex infrastructure across the finish line.
- Connecting new Tribal generation into existing regional transmission unlocks far greater diesel displacement than serving a single village, federal program design should reward regional benefit, not just project-host benefit.

Alignment with Federal Priorities and Executive Orders

- **Alaska Native self-determination and energy sovereignty:** An ANCSA village corporation co-owns regional energy infrastructure on its own selected lands, reflecting Alaska Native leadership in long-term energy planning and community-scale infrastructure development on ANCSA-selected lands.

- **Rural energy security and diesel displacement:** Hiilangaay displaced more than 110,000 gallons of diesel in its first 11 months of operation, supporting federal priorities related to rural energy reliability, reduced diesel dependence, and long-term energy affordability in remote Alaska communities.
- **Permitting and project delivery lessons:** The project highlights how federal hydropower licensing requirements designed for large-scale projects can create disproportionate costs and administrative burdens for small, community-scale Alaska Native energy projects, offering practical lessons for future permitting modernization discussions.
- **Regional infrastructure and replicability:** The project's joint-venture structure and regional grid-integration approach provide a potentially replicable model for future ANC, Tribal, and utility partnerships supporting renewable energy development in rural and remote regions.

Case Study: Igiugig RivGen Hydrokinetic Project

An Igiugig Village Council (IVC) case study on Tribal-led river hydrokinetic energy and the path off diesel in remote Alaska

Project Snapshot

Project Name	Igiugig Hydrokinetic Project (RivGen Power System)
Location	Kvichak River at Igiugig, Bristol Bay region, southwest Alaska — a community of ~70 year-round residents at the outlet of Lake Iliamna
Lead Organization(s)	Igiugig Village Council (federally recognized Tribe and FERC license holder), in long-term partnership with Ocean Renewable Power Company (ORPC)
Project Type	Energy — grid-connected river hydrokinetic turbines integrated with smart microgrid controls and battery storage to displace diesel generation
Status	First device installed 2019 (one of the longest-operating hydrokinetic projects in the Americas); second device installed 2023; FERC pilot license through April 2029
Key Outcomes	First U.S. Tribal entity to receive a FERC hydrokinetic pilot license; target of ~$170,000/year in avoided diesel costs at full operation and up to 90% diesel displacement with two-device array based on the battery energy storage system; no documented injuries or mortality to aquatic life, including sockeye salmon, after multi-year monitoring; local crew training to deploy and retrieve devices

Why This Matters

Igiugig is one of roughly 250 remote Alaska communities dependent on isolated diesel microgrids. Fuel costs have reached above $10 per gallon in recent years, and fuel must be flown in. Resulting electricity costs are above 90 cents per kilowatt-hour against a national average closer to 10 cents. The Igiugig Hydrokinetic Project demonstrates that a small Tribal community can lead the adoption of an emerging energy technology, navigate first-of-kind federal licensing, and operate a working renewable system in one of the most ecologically sensitive watersheds in the world. The Kvichak River and eight other rivers that flow into Bristol Bay support the largest sockeye salmon run on Earth. Igiugig's deployment without documented adult salmon impacts establishes a critical proof point for hydrokinetic energy nationally. For the federal government, Igiugig is a working model of how targeted DOE investment can unlock Tribal energy sovereignty, reduce long-term Power Cost Equalization obligations, and produce technical data and workforce capacity that benefits remote communities worldwide.

Alaska Native Leadership & Local Priorities

- **Tribally led from the start:** Igiugig Village Council (IVC) is the FERC license holder and project lead — not just a host community for an outside developer. ORPC operates as the technology partner under IVC's direction.
- **Driven by community vision:** The Council set a long-term "diesels off" goal more than two decades ago, and over time has evaluated, tested, and implemented wind, solar, hydro, and hydrokinetic options. IVC selected the ORPC RivGen Power System and its experienced operations team as the best fit for the Kvichak's fast-flowing current.
- **Salmon protection as a non-negotiable:** Because the Kvichak is critical sockeye habitat, IVC required a robust fish monitoring plan in the FERC license, supported by an adaptive management team of federal and state agencies, universities, and national labs. After multi-year monitoring with no documented adult salmon impacts, the Alaska Department of Fish and Game and FERC retired the adult salmon monitoring requirement.
- **Local workforce partnership: In partnership with ORPC,** Igiugig-based construction crews helped offload, assemble, deploy, and retrieve the RivGen devices. The community is highly involved in how the system operates and is maintained, a deliberate strategy to build local capacity and lower lifecycle cost.

Effective Strategies Used

- **Long-arc public-private-Tribal partnership:** IVC has pursued hydrokinetic solutions since 2009, progressing through short-duration pilots with ORPC in 2014 and 2015 to commercial deployment in 2019 and a two-device array in 2023. The patient development arc allowed both technology and community capacity to mature together.
- **Layered federal, state and local funding:** The project was assembled from U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) Water Power Technologies Office, DOE Office of Indian Energy, USDA, Alaska Energy Authority, the Denali Commission, IVC and private match, a braided model that no single program could have funded alone.
- **First-in-nation FERC pathway:** IVC became the first U.S. Tribal entity to receive a FERC hydrokinetic pilot license (May 2019), creating a template other Tribes can now follow rather than build from scratch.
- **Adaptive Management Team:** A standing committee of IVC, ORPC, federal regulators (FERC, NOAA Fisheries), and state agencies, supported by technical experts from Pacific Northwest National Laboratory, the National Laboratory of the Rockies, the University of Alaska Fairbanks, and the University of Washington, governs monitoring decisions, turning what could have been adversarial permitting into collaborative oversight.
- **Microgrid integration:** An ongoing smart microgrid controls and battery storage project, co-funded by the DOE Office of Indian Energy, is designed to allow the system to operate autonomously and to accelerate Igiugig's "diesels off" goal.

Lessons for Other Projects

- Tribal license-holder status, not just host-community status, is the foundation of energy sovereignty and produces stronger long-term project ownership.
- Creating project-level adaptive management teams that include federal regulators, state agencies, and academic researchers can lead to collaborative permitting cycles with strong oversight, especially in ecologically sensitive watersheds.

- Building local operations and maintenance capacity from day one improves operational uptime and the affordability of remote-community renewable projects over their full lifecycle.
- Braided funding (WPTO + Office of Indian Energy + USDA + state) is essential for first-of-kind projects in small communities; no single program is structured to do it alone.
- Full or significant Tribal ownership is the foundation of energy sovereignty, and that ownership leads to greater community involvement and personal investment in the project's success. The project has created a framework other communities can adopt to reduce the long timelines that typically hinder adoption of renewable energy projects while building local technical expertise and community trust.

Alignment with Federal Priorities and Executive Orders

- **Tribal self-determination and energy sovereignty:** The Igiugig Village Council holds the FERC license and directs the project, reflecting Tribal leadership in community-scale energy development under the federal policy of Tribal self-determination and federal Tribal energy priorities.
- **Rural energy security and diesel displacement:** The project supports federal priorities related to reducing diesel dependence in remote Alaska communities, strengthening local energy reliability, and reducing long-term energy costs in isolated microgrid systems.
- **Marine and hydrokinetic energy advancement:** Among the longest-running hydrokinetic projects in the Americas, the project provides valuable operational and environmental data supporting the advancement of emerging domestic marine energy technologies and rural deployment models.
- **Replicability for remote communities:** The project demonstrates a potentially replicable model for river-adjacent Tribal and remote communities seeking community-scale renewable energy solutions, particularly in isolated microgrid environments across Alaska and other rural regions.

Case Study: Triangle Community Road

An Arctic Strategic Transportation and Resources (ASTAR) case study on community-informed transportation planning connecting Utqiaġvik, Atqasuk, and Wainwright on Alaska's North Slope

Project Snapshot

Project Name	Triangle Community Road, evaluated through the Triangle Community Road Planning and Environmental Linkage (PEL) Study
Location	North Slope Borough, Arctic Alaska — a proposed all-season road network connecting Utqiaġvik (pop. 4,927), Atqasuk (pop. 276), and Wainwright (pop. 628); much of the study area lies within the National Petroleum Reserve–Alaska (NPR-A)
Lead Organization(s)	The ASTAR program, sponsored by the Alaska Department of Natural Resources (DNR), the Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (DOT&PF), and the North Slope Borough. Environmental review is carried out by DOT&PF under assigned federal authority (23 U.S.C. 327). The project is supported by the Denali Commission.
Project Type	Regional transportation infrastructure — a proposed all-season gravel road network of approximately 131 to 190 miles, depending on the alternative selected
Status	In planning. The Draft PEL Study Report was published in April 2026; a 45-day public comment period (April 3 – May 18, 2026) has concluded. The Draft PEL recommends that three of six route alternatives advance to National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) review. A Final PEL Report is the next study milestone.
Key Outcomes	First project recommended under the ASTAR program; desktop route studies (2019, 2020) and multi-year state field data programs (2019–2024) completed; public meetings held in all three communities (2024–2026); estimated construction cost range of $782 million to $1.14 billion across six alternatives; sponsor-identified anticipated benefits include improved cultural and community connectivity, lower cost of goods and services, increased health and safety benefits, improved access to education, and workforce development opportunities.

Why This Matters

There are currently no all-season roads connecting Utqiaġvik, Atqasuk, and Wainwright — three predominantly Iñupiat communities that together are home to roughly 5,800 people, with no year-round overland link among them. The Triangle Community Road, the first project recommended under the ASTAR program, would create an all-season gravel road network of roughly 131 to 190

miles linking the three communities, much of it within the National Petroleum Reserve–Alaska. Project sponsors anticipate that the road would improve cultural and community connectivity, lower the cost of goods and services, increase health and safety benefits, improve access to education, and advance workforce development opportunities. For federal policymakers, the project is a working example of how community infrastructure in one of the most remote regions of the country can be moved from concept toward NEPA readiness through a structured federal planning framework, sustained community engagement, multi-year public data collection, and planning-stage support from federal partners including the Denali Commission.

Alaska Native Leadership & Local Priorities

- **Borough co-sponsorship, not consultation after the fact:** The North Slope Borough, the regional municipal government for eight predominantly Iñupiat communities, co-sponsors the ASTAR program alongside DNR and DOT&PF, giving the region a direct role in identifying and shaping the projects the program advances. The Triangle Community Road emerged as ASTAR's first recommended project through that joint process.
- **Sustained engagement in all three communities:** The PEL study team has held public meetings in Utqiaġvik (March 2024, January 2025, April 2026), Atqasuk (April 2024), and Wainwright (March 2025), along with virtual open houses in April 2026 and a standing Advisory Committee that met throughout the study.
- **Subsistence built into study design:** The PEL study team's stated commitment is to work with communities to identify and evaluate ways to increase subsistence opportunities and reduce subsistence impacts through project design.
- **Regional Iñupiat organizations engaged:** State reporting documents ASTAR outreach to the North Slope Borough Planning Commission, Assembly, and Port Authority; the Iñupiat Community of the Arctic Slope; VOICE of the Arctic Iñupiat; Ukpeaġvik Iñupiat Corporation; Arctic Slope Regional Corporation; Cully Corporation; and the communities of Utqiaġvik, Atqasuk, Wainwright, and Anaktuvuk Pass.

Effective Strategies Used

- **A PEL study before NEPA:** The sponsors chose the Federal Highway Administration's Planning and Environmental Linkage framework to evaluate route alternatives, engage communities, and document environmental considerations before formal NEPA review begins. The April 2026 Draft PEL evaluated six alternatives and recommends the three with the lowest environmental and engineering impacts advance to NEPA review.
- **Phased, data-driven route development:** A 2019 desktop analysis of Atqasuk–Utqiaġvik corridors was expanded in 2020 to a full three-community network analysis, and the Alaska Division of Geological & Geophysical Surveys carried out field programs from 2019 through 2024 — lidar, geotechnical sampling, hydrology monitoring, and geophysical surveys — closing Arctic data gaps before design begins.
- **Aligned state-federal environmental review:** The environmental review is carried out by DOT&PF pursuant to 23 U.S.C. 327 and a memorandum of understanding with the Federal Highway Administration, keeping transportation planning and environmental review aligned within one process.
- **Braided planning-stage funding:** The study has been carried forward through Denali Commission support (Denali Commission Project 1753) alongside state and borough

sponsorship. State reporting identifies approximately $2.5 million secured for Phase II of the PEL effort and approximately $1.7 million for a winter geotechnical program to analyze road construction and bridge crossings.

- **Local materials and construction methods:** State reporting documents a rock discovery in the NPR-A that could be crushed into gravel, and concept and initial design work on an Arctic Test Road, to inform construction methods and materials sourcing for future phases.

Lessons for Other Projects

- Planning-stage funding is decisive. Large rural infrastructure projects require multi-year study funding before any construction program will consider them; braided Denali Commission and state support carried this study through multiple phases.
- The PEL framework offers a replicable model for remote and Arctic projects: community engagement and environmental analysis conducted before NEPA narrows alternatives, surfaces subsistence and design concerns early, and builds a record that later permitting can draw on.
- Public field data is regional infrastructure in its own right. State-published lidar, geotechnical, hydrology, and geophysical data reduce cost and uncertainty for any future project in the corridor, not only the road itself.
- Multi-sponsor governance pairing borough leadership with state technical and permitting capacity has kept community priorities and project delivery in a single structure across an effort now spanning nearly a decade.

Alignment with Federal Priorities and Executive Orders

- **Arctic and rural economic development:** The project is intended to enhance quality of life and economic opportunity in North Slope communities through responsible infrastructure development, consistent with the Alaska-focused development priorities of Executive Order 14153. Sponsor-identified anticipated benefits include lower costs of goods and services, improved access to education, and workforce development.
- **Alaska Native self-determination and community-driven planning:** Project selection and route development are shaped by the North Slope Borough as program co-sponsor and by sustained engagement in the affected Iñupiat communities, reflecting locally driven planning led by the region's elected government.
- **Permitting modernization:** The PEL-to-NEPA structure, combined with state-assigned NEPA authority under 23 U.S.C. 327, provides a current Alaska example of linking early planning, community input, and environmental review in one coordinated pathway.
- **Responsible resource development co-benefits:** The North Slope Borough identifies cumulative regional benefits from ASTAR connectivity that include reduced costs for rehabilitating legacy wells in the NPR-A and more efficient development of state and federal hydrocarbon resources.

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