Biden Admin Moves to Kill Alaska Copper Project

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One of North America's most promising new mineral developments just took a major hit from the Biden Administration.

The project is called Ambler, in northern Alaska. It's mineral rich, with many ore-grade zones assaying at astonishing levels of copper, zinc, cobalt, gold, silver and more. Some zones have returned grades of 12% copper, with associated elements adding to the mix.

Ambler is remote, though. It's nestled on the south side of the mighty Brooks Range of northern Alaska, and currently accessible only by foot or air. (Yes, I've been there.) Project development absolutely will require an industrial-level road. Here's the broad outline:



Map courtesy of Trilogy Metals.

As you can see on the map, the proposed road generally tracks west-east, paralleling the mountain range to the north, and connects with the existing Dalton Highway which runs from Fairbanks to Alaska's North Slope at Deadhorse.

For over a decade, a junior company called **Trilogy Metals Inc. (NYSE American: TMQ | TSX: TMQ)** has explored the Ambler area and made numerous, significant mineral discoveries. Then in 2019, a major mining company called **South 32 Limited (ASX: S32 | OTC: SOUHY)** optioned a 50% interest in the project. All along, exploration and pre-development efforts have been ongoing.

In mid-2020 the U.S. government issued a key permit to build the access road, running about 211 miles through what is called “roadless wilderness.” Government actors included the Department of Interior, Bureau of Land Management and Corps of Engineers. About 42 miles of road would cross federal lands, versus state or tribal owned lands.

Up to now, development has proceeded apace on Ambler, with $60 million worth of engineering work scheduled to begin this spring as soon as weather and ground conditions permit.

But this week, on Feb. 22 the U.S. Department of Interior filed suit in federal district court in Anchorage to revoke the previously issued permit, allegedly because environmental assessments were inadequate. For now, the permit is suspended which will halt almost all work on any roadbuilding effort.

What’s going on here? Well, the Washington Post ran a story on the matter, with a headline that is likely quite indicative of the Biden Administration’s true political rationale: “Biden administration suspends right of way for Alaska mining road advanced by Trump officials.”

Aha. Yes, it may just be that simple.

We are living under the Biden regime, a collection of policymakers that includes ardent environmentalists opposed to pretty much all mining and energy development, everywhere. And up in Alaska is this nice, ripe target, the Ambler Road that was approved under the Trump Administration.

We’re witness to environmental lawfare, pure and simple. The idea is to focus on a Trump era decision and then go to court to challenge it. Halt work. Slow and impede progress. Delay everything. Drive up costs and risks, while diminishing the overall economic return.

It matters not that Trilogy and South 32 have spent many years preparing baseline environmental studies, along with extensive engineering work and analyses of alternatives. Nor that they worked diligently and respectfully with local residents in the Ambler area, as well as native corporations that hold extensive land claims and stand to benefit from jobs, taxes and royalties. Or that the state government of Alaska is heartily in favor of the road and mine development, along with the Alaska Congressional delegation.

Nor does it matter that the Biden Administration is making a full-bore push for “renewable” energy projects in America, ranging from solar and wind to a rebuilt power grid to electric vehicles – all of which require copper, zinc, cobalt and more.

Somehow or another, in the collective mind of Biden and his brain trust, the country can decarbonize and re-electrify, all without additional energy or mineral development. Buy everything from China, perhaps?

But despite the apparent cognitive dissonance on display – more electrification without metals production – give the Biden Administration credit for knowing how to shoot straight at the heart of mineral development. By going to court, Biden’s Interior Department is challenging a road plan that is nothing less than essential to develop the Ambler Mining District.

No road, no project; it’s that easy.

Meanwhile, this latest effort to block development in Alaska makes for a remarkable bookend to the life and times of Joe Biden. Because as a freshman Senator in 1973, one of Biden’s first votes was to oppose construction of the Alaska Pipeline, which entailed building that above-noted Dalton Highway.

Now, 49 years later, Biden returns to Alaska to kill a

significant mining project. He’s consistent.

And along these lines, as Karl Marx once noted, history repeats itself. First as tragedy, then as farce.

That’s all for now… Thank you for reading.

Best wishes…

Byron W. King