



Media contact:

Sarah Erkmann Ward, Blueprint Alaska, (907) 441-1899

sarah@thompsonpr.com

Business, resource leaders: Alaska is the biggest loser in wake of President Biden’s Ambler Road decision

Anchorage—April 19, 2024—Alaska's leading business and resource development associations strongly condemn the Biden Administration’s unlawful rejection of the essential right-of-way permit required for the construction of the Ambler Access Road. This marks the second time in less than a week that the Department of the Interior has brazenly stripped Alaska of its right to responsibly develop its natural resources.

The Alaska Miners Association, Alaska Metal Mines, Resource Development Council for Alaska, Alaska Chamber, Alaska Support Industry Alliance, Greater Fairbanks Chamber of Commerce, and Associated General Contractors of Alaska are outraged by the Bureau of Land Management’s (BLM) decision to thwart the Ambler Road project by blocking access to the area—another blatant assault on Alaska’s economy.

The proposed Ambler Road, a 211-mile controlled access route, is critical for reaching the Ambler Mining District in northwestern Alaska. This project is pivotal for the exploration and development of significant deposits of cobalt, germanium, copper, zinc, and other critical minerals vital for national defense and renewable energy infrastructure, like electric car batteries, windmills, solar panels, and other green energy projects the Biden Administration claims to support. Moreover, the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA) expressly and explicitly requires the Department of Interior to guarantee access to the Ambler Mining District. This means the Administration’s action is illegal.

“By denying access and the necessary right-of-way across federal lands, the BLM's action essentially abandons these critical minerals, undermining not just regional economic growth but also national interests,” said Deantha Skibinski, executive director of the Alaska Miners Association. “This decision exposes a glaring hypocrisy: the Biden administration has repeatedly acknowledged the need for minerals and has touted sourcing them domestically. Unfortunately, it appears the Administration is content to rely on cobalt sourced through child and slave labor in Africa and China rather than supporting ethical, sustainable mineral production in Alaska.”

“We are incensed that the Biden administration has blatantly ignored Congress’ mandate in ANILCA that access ‘shall’ be provided to the Ambler district in Alaska and is once again blocking Alaska’s right to develop its resources,” said Leila Kimbrell, executive director for the Resource Development

Council for Alaska. “While this obstructionist stance may curry favor with Outside environmentalists, this hurts Alaskans by denying thousands of jobs for this region and the economic uplift associated with developing new infrastructure that an access road would provide, as well as development of minerals crucial for reliable energy and national security.”

Karen Matthias, executive director for Alaska Metal Mines, expressed strong criticism on behalf of the state’s producing mines. “The federal government’s refusal to grant access and the necessary permits for the Ambler Road is not just a denial of Alaska’s development rights—it’s a reckless disregard for our national and environmental integrity.”

“This is a stark betrayal of ethical governance and states’ rights,” said Rebecca Logan, CEO of the Alaska Support Industry Alliance. “My members represent hardworking families who show up every day to grow the state’s economy and provide for their families. This decision will result in friends and neighbors missing out on family-sustaining wages. It also means lost job opportunities for Alaskans living in rural areas. It’s no wonder the state continues to lose people to the Lower 48.”

“The Ambler Road is not just a road; it’s a lifeline for economic revival of communities throughout the Interior and northwestern Alaska, who face threats to their traditional ways of life from unemployment and skyrocketing costs of living,” said Kati Capozzi, CEO of the Alaska Chamber. “Businesses are made up of real people, and in this case, real Alaskans. This decision to prevent access to the area is a loss not just for small businesses but the employees who work for them.”

“The Greater Fairbanks Chamber of Commerce has long supported responsible natural resource development as well as efforts to explore and develop rare earth and critical minerals found in Alaska,” said Jeremy Johnson, president and CEO of the Fairbanks Chamber. “Alaska is in a unique position to contribute positively to the green energy needs of the United States. Resource development in the U.S. is done to the highest environmental and human safety standards. This should be lauded and not prohibited.”

“Alaska employs a world-class construction community that now will be left to look for other work, perhaps out-of-state,” said Alicia Amberg, executive director of the Associated General Contractors of Alaska. “The most frustrating part is that this decision to deny access to the area is that it is clearly politically motivated and so unnecessary.”

This project is expected to generate at least \$1.3 billion in tax and royalty payments to state and local governments, over \$17 billion in labor income, and create upward of 14,000 jobs, fueling vital public services like schools, healthcare, and infrastructure for Alaska Native people and local communities. That is now all at risk.

About the Alaska Miners Association

AMA is a professional membership trade organization established in 1939 to represent the mining industry in Alaska. AMA’s more than 1,400 members come from eight statewide branches: Anchorage, Denali, Fairbanks, Haines, Juneau, Kenai, Ketchikan/Prince of Wales, and Nome. Alaska’s miners are individual prospectors, geologists, engineers, suction dredge miners, small family mines, junior mining companies, major mining companies, Alaska Native Corporations, and the contracting sector that supports Alaska’s mining industry.

About the Alaska Support Industry Alliance

The Alaska Support Industry Alliance is a 45-year-old professional trade association representing 500 Alaska companies with 35,000 employees who provide support to the oil, gas and mining industries in Alaska.

About the Associated General Contractors of Alaska

The mission of Associated General Contractors of Alaska is to advocate, educate, and promote the construction industry in Alaska.

About Alaska Metal Mines

Alaska Metal Mines is a professional association formed in 1992 to represent Alaska's large metal mines and advanced projects. We work to inspire Alaskans to support a growing mining industry that produces essential minerals while prioritizing safe operations, community partnerships, and environmental protection.

About the Resource Development Council for Alaska, Inc.

RDC is a statewide professional trade association comprised of individuals and companies from Alaska's fishing, forestry, mining, oil and gas, and tourism industries. RDC's membership includes Alaska Native corporations, local communities, government entities, organized labor, and industry support firms. RDC's purpose is to encourage a strong, diversified private sector in Alaska and expand the state's economic base through the responsible development of our natural resources.

About the Alaska Chamber

The Alaska Chamber is a non-profit founded in 1953 working to promote a positive business environment in Alaska. The Chamber is the voice of small and large business representing more than 700 businesses, manufacturers, and local chambers across Alaska. Our member companies employ more than 55,000 hard-working Alaskans. The Chamber advocates for a positive investment climate that provides certainty and stability for Alaska.

About the Greater Fairbanks Chamber of Commerce

The Greater Fairbanks Chamber of Commerce is the leading voice advocating for community by supporting business prosperity to our more than 600 members in the Interior of Alaska.

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