

Nanushuk Coal Prospect

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Ground Truth Trekking

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News: After several years of no documented activity (to early 2017) related to this project, we are classifying it as “inactive”. This page will be kept for reference

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NANUSHUK COAL — Rolling tundra hills across this region of the state are underlain by layered sediments gently folded along the northern edge of the Brooks Range. The layers stripe riverbanks like this, and create sinuous ridges of gravel running along the hilltops. Vast deposits of coal in these hills are already attracting attention, both in this

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immediate region (/Issues/AlaskaCoal/Nanushuk-Coal-Prospect.html) and throughout the Arctic (/Issues/AlaskaCoal/WesternArcticCoalDeposits.html). — Get Photo (/photos/nanushuk-coal/)

Summary

In 2010, the Alaska Department of Natural Resources (DNR) began working on approval for preliminary coal prospecting permits within the Nanushuk Group north of the Brooks Range. Covering 116,000 acres of land, these permits are opposed by a nearby tribal council concerned about risks to essential subsistence resources (/Issues/OtherIssues/Subsistence.html) in the area. A “Site Specific Plan” designating the area for resource management was approved by the DNR, but has been appealed and is awaiting adjudication.

Geology and Geography

The Nanushuk coal deposits are part of the massive Northern Alaska-Slope coal province that contains up to 3.6 trillion tons (/Issues/AlaskaCoal/HowMuchCoal.html) of hypothetical coal resource (/Issues/AlaskaCoal/CoalTerminology.html). Other deposists in this coal province have also been recently explored (/Issues/AlaskaCoal/WesternArcticCoalDeposits.html). The Nanushuk Group (spanning a significant portion of the Arctic) contains over 150 coal beds (http://pubs.usgs.gov/dds/dds-077/), including those at Corwin Bluffs, Cape Beaufort, and along the Kukpowruk River. Coal mining to supply whaling ships took place at Corwin Bluffs as early as 1879 (/Issues/AlaskaCoal/

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AlaskaCoalHistory.html) but no modern coal mine has ever operated in this region. The coal in this group is primarily bituminous and subbituminous (/Issues/AlaskaCoal/TypesOfCoal.html).

The permitting area is just north of the Brooks Range and just west of the haul road - extending from 5 miles west of Toolik Lake to 3 miles west of the Anaktuvurk River. There are several fish-bearing waters within the permitting area including the Anaktuvuk, Nanushuk, Kanayut, and Itkillik Rivers. As part of the permitting process the state performed a “coal potential” evaluation of the are and determined that the coal development potential for the permitting area was “Low”.

Permitting status

In February 2010, the state of Alaska announced a preliminary decision (http://notes4.state.ak.us/pn/pubnotic.nsf/1604e191287514068925678500 6767f6/fbbc4f0afe4537e1892576c500083c84?OpenDocument) to open prospecting of the Nanushuk coal deposits. This was in response to requests from three exploration companies, Beischer and Associates, Xplore LLC, and St. George Ventures Inc. The decision in question would grant an exclusive right to prospect for coal, but specific physical activities in the area will be permitted separately. This means that a given company has the right to prospect in the area, but if they want to drill any holes, those will go through a different regulatory review.

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> “Any actual work on the ground must be permitted under the Alaska Surface Coal Mining Control and Reclamation Act (As 27.21, and the associated regulations at 11 AAC 90). These statutes and regulations require a written finding with public notice and comment for all activities.” (DNR Feb 2011)

As part of this preliminary decision, the state DNR has written a draft plan classifying the area for resource management. The resulting “site-specific plan” is necessary for the issuance of coal prospecting permits since the land is currently unclassified with respect to resource management. The site-specific plan was approved in July 2010 (http://notes4.state.ak.us/pn/pubnotic.nsf/0/57BC23C2C932E8D989257768006ED438?OpenDocument), but has been appealed and is awaiting adjudication.

Although coal development in this area is at a very preliminary stage, local resistance to the idea has been strong. In February 2011, the Naqsragmiut Tribal Council adopted an official resolution strongly opposing coal exploration the area and sent a letter to the governor outlining their concerns about impacts on the water, air, and subsistence resources (/Issues/OtherIssues/Subsistence.html) of the area.

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Current status

The site-specific plan for Nanushuk is awaiting appeal (as of February 2011). For all documentation relating to the Nanushuk permitting process see “Further Reading” below. As of early 2017 we are considering this project inactive.

Further Reading

> Final Site Specific Plan for Nanushuk (2010, DNR) (http://www.groundtruthtrekking.org/Documents/Final Nanushuk Site Specific Plan.pdf)

> Nanushuk Preliminary Decision documents (2010, DNR). (http://www.groundtruthtrekking.org/Documents/Nanushuk Preliminary Decision.pdf)

> Nanushuk Preliminary Decision Plates (includes detailed maps) (2010, DNR) (http://www.groundtruthtrekking.org/Documents/Nanushuk Preliminary Decision Plates.pdf)

> Naqsragmiut Tribal Council open letter (2011) (http://www.groundtruthtrekking.org/Documents/Nanushuk Resolution - 20110131 Adopted.pdf)

> Naqsragmiut Tribal Council resolution opposing development of the Nanushuk deposits (2011) (http://www.groundtruthtrekking.org/Documents/Nanushuk Letter-All.pdf)

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