



HOLIDAY LIGHTS—The lights overhanging Nome's Front Street show a bit of holiday cheer Tuesday morning.

Photo by Tyler Rhodes

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Photo by Tyler Rhodes

HAPPY THANKSGIVING—Harry Karmun is all smiles as he delivers another round of turkey to the serving line while he volunteers at the Community Thanksgiving Dinner held at the XYZ Center last Thursday.

How long before you can drive to Nome?

State Department of Transportation studies connecting to Nome state's highway system

By Diana Haecker

It has been talked about for 30-some years, but now the Alaska State Department of Transportation and Public Facilities has marching orders to study the viability of a transportation corridor between the Alaska highway system and the 300 miles of roads around Nome.

Since August, the DOT has been actively pursuing the so-called Western Alaska Access Planning study, which encompasses the area west of the Dalton Highway, north of the Yukon and lower Tanana River basins and south of the Brooks Range. Part of the study will be to determine if it will be a highway, rail or just telecommunications corridor over a length of approximately 600 miles. "Our primary focus is geared toward the development of a highway, but our study may dive into how a rail may play into it," said the DOT's Northern Region area planner Patrick Cotter.

The study looks at economic benefits and costs, identifies possible routes and recommends future action, he said.

The DOT awarded a contract to DOWL HKM, an engineering firm owned 51 percent by NANA Regional Corp., to conduct the study. The study's release is slated for December 2009.

Community and resource development are the drivers of the study, and, according to DOT officials, the project originated within the Northern Region's office of the DOT, identifying it as a possible Roads to Resources candidate. "The DOT Northern Region put together a proposal in February 2007, and the DOT commissioner thought it was a worthwhile project and gave the go-ahead," said DOT spokeswoman Meadow Bailey.

A press release said the routes would be identified based on potential economic benefits, topographic and environmental constraints, and land management considerations. Planning-level estimates will be prepared for design, construction and maintenance. The study will include review and updates of relevant information from previous publications and studies.

Cotter said that the study follows a twofold approach to identify different possible routes: The road should facilitate access to the state's resources, as in oil, gas, minerals, gold, timber, fisheries and tourism. The second consideration was that infrastructure could be key in transporting fuel to bush villages as well as resource development and the job creation going hand in hand with it.

continued on page 4

Nomeites gather for turkey and trimmings at annual community Thanksgiving

By Tyler Rhodes

Harry Karmun blasted through the XYZ Center's kitchen doors, a steaming bowl of turkey leading his charge.

On the other side of the room a line of

servers, ranging in age from their early teens to not-so-early adulthood, awaited the replacements armed with long spoons and tongs.

It was a scene to be repeated several times throughout the day during Nome's annual Com-

munity Thanksgiving Dinner last Thursday.

The numbers tell the tale of another successful year in the approximate decade of community dinners—a dozen turkeys, four hams, pounds and pounds of potatoes, thou-

sands of scoops of side dishes, 100 volunteers and 200 people fed.

Those 200 diners battled chilly tempera-

continued on page 24

Utility loses one big customer

Rock Creek Mine at full production would have spread costs thinner for ratepayers

By Tyler Rhodes

In this first week of December, Nomeites were still likely digesting their Thanksgiving turkey and trying to swallow the prospect a major employer shedding 100 jobs at the start of the holiday season.

On the last Monday in November,

NovaGold announced it was suspending operations at its Rock Creek Mine just outside of Nome and eliminating 100 positions at the project.

Nome's utility service provider, Nome Joint Utility System, is one entity that will feel the ripple effect of the mine not going into production

as was planned. The mine was expected to purchase a significant

continued on page 4

UNPLUGGED—The Rock Creek Mine won't draw as much power as was earlier anticipated.



Photo by Tyler Rhodes

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• Power

continued from page 1

amount of power from NJUS once it hit full production. With new generators in place, the utility was ready to sell that power to the mine.

With the mine not developing into the giant customer that it was believed to become, the costs of providing power to the city will be borne by a smaller pool. "There will be a loss of revenue and a reduction in variable costs, and having had a larger sales base over which to spread fixed costs has definitely helped customers overall," Nome Joint Utility System Manager John Handeland wrote in an e-mail to *The Nome Nugget*.

The result of the mine not drawing nearly as much power as earlier anticipated could have a negative effect on other NJUS ratepayers, though Handeland said other options would be considered before rate increases. "We will definitely look at any ways to reduce [costs] before considering rate changes. We've been working to develop our 2009 budget based

on including the mine; now we get to redo some of the work to take it out," Handeland wrote.

Part of the rates paid to NJUS cover debt service for the new power generation unit recently installed. Handeland said approximately \$8.5 million is owed for the new plant. While the timing of the new plant coincided with the mine's anticipated start-up, Handeland said it was constructed due to the old plant being 45 years old, and its location in flood and airport protection zones.

As far as any mechanical implications of the mine not going into production, Handeland said they would be minor. "We will have to make some adjustments to dispatching (what engines we run) which will affect efficiency, but not to a great degree," Handeland wrote in an e-mail. "I don't see a major effect on us from an operational standpoint, but I'm afraid there will be folks who have been unexpectedly laid off that will have a harder time paying their bills until they can find other employment."



Archive photo by Diana Haecker

SUSPENDED—Nome Joint Utility System will have to retool its 2009 budget since the Rock Creek Mine, which has suspended production, will not be purchasing the significant amount of power NJUS had expected it to.

• Road

continued from page 1

"There was talk of connecting rural communities to the Alaska highways system and how it would prevent them from drying up," Cotter said.

Starting in August, the DOWL HKM team reviewed existing resource and transportation studies of the western Alaska study area. They are also documenting the location and type of minerals, oil and gas, tourism, fisheries and agriculture resource development potential in the area. Starting in February, the team will begin to evaluate transportation corridors to access the resources and communities in western Alaska.

According to Cotter, the consultants have been in touch with Native corporations in the area, the City of

Nome, the Joint Pipeline Office, various state agencies, including the Department of Natural Resources, as well as those involved in industry, such as NovaGold.

NovaGold had been on the receiving end in the past, as the State of Alaska built the new Glacier Creek Road leading to the Rock Creek gold mine under its Road to Resources program. The \$8 million road to the mine was completed in 2006. With the mine complete and close to moving into full production, the company indefinitely suspended the mine's operation last week due to financial concerns and other issues.

Asked how the study prepares to avoid scenarios such as this, Cotter said that part of the study is an economic analysis which would look at

world and state economics, the availability of the resources and whether Alaska is in a good position to market the resource.

DOWL is currently compiling previous studies and looks at the quantity and quality of oil, gas, mineral, timber and tourism resources. After that, the study gets into a socio-economic analysis, followed by a phase of engineering studies to outline corridor alternatives and compiling data in a geo-

graphic information system database, and a cost analysis of how much money will be spent on building and maintaining the road. "Then we look at development scenarios to get an idea what could be expected from development and how fast a road or a resource could be developed," Cotter said.

During the study phase, the general public is not involved as the engineering firm consults with Native corporations, state departments

and industry representatives. After a release of the study, the outcome will be public and depending on recommendations, the DOT will initiate the public process. "At this point it is just gathering of data, then it goes out to community meetings," Bailey said. "At this point the scope is so broad and the study is just a baseline to get a feel for what is possible."

Progress of the study can be seen at www.westernakaccess.com.

"Our primary focus is geared toward the development of a highway, but our study may dive into how a rail may play into it."

— Patrick Cotter, DOT

The Firemen's Carnival is this Saturday, Dec. 6

Doors open at 7 p.m. at the Nome Rec Center

The Rec Center will be closed starting at 6 p.m., Friday, Dec. 5 and all day on Saturday, Dec. 6.

2008 raffle prizes include:

1. 2009 Polaris 550 Trail Touring HD Snowmachine
2. Two Alaska Airline tickets — donated by Alaska Airlines
3. Widescreen Flat-Panel TV & Nintendo Wii
4. 2009 Polaris 120 Dragon Snowmachine
5. Yamaha EF2600 watt LGenerator—Donated by Morgans Sales and Service
6. Siglin Cross Fox Freight Sled
7. Set of 4 BFGoodrich Tires (up to \$1,000.00)—Donated by Nome Machine Works
8. Kitchen Aid Professional Mixer
9. 100 gallons of Heating Fuel—Donated by Alaska Cab Garage

Drawing held at **midnight at the Carnival, Dec. 6, 2007** (Permit #08-0015) Need not be present to win.



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