

Public Notice of Application for Permit

Regulatory Division (1145) CEPOA-RD 2175 University Avenue, Suite 205 Fairbanks, Alaska 99709-4927

PUBLIC NOTICE DATE: April 16, 2021

EXPIRATION DATE: May 03, 2021

REFERENCE NUMBER: POA-2006-02047

WATERWAY: Fish Creek

Interested parties are hereby notified that a Department of the Army permit application has been received for work in waters of the United States (U.S.) as described below and shown on the enclosed project drawings.

All comments regarding this Public Notice (PN) should be sent to the address noted above. If you desire to submit your comments by email, you should send it to the Project Manager's email as listed below or to regpagemaster@usace.army.mil. All comments should include the PN reference number listed above.

All comments should reach this office no later than the expiration date of this PN to become part of the record and be considered in the decision. Please contact Ashley Kraetsch at (907) 458-1606, or by email at Ashley.M.Kraetsch@usace.army.mil if further information is desired concerning this notice.

<u>APPLICANT</u>: Fairbanks Gold Mining Inc. (Attention: Bartly Kleven)

<u>LOCATION</u>: The project site is located within Section 8, T. 2 N., R. 3 E., Fairbanks Meridian; Latitude 65.024° N., Longitude 147.106° W.; near Fairbanks, Alaska.

<u>PURPOSE</u>: The applicant's stated purpose is to profitably produce gold from mineral reserves on State of Alaska Land, utilizing open-pit mining methods and existing recovery processes.

PROPOSED WORK: The applicant intends to develop the required infrastructure in order to mine the Gil Project. The first step is to upgrade the access road for moving mining equipment to the Gil Project in the fourth quarter of 2021. The main access road will be widened and impact 0.44 acre of wetlands and 0.18 acre of the freshwater reservoir, which will be reclaimed after three years. The mining will start on Gil Ridge in uplands in late 2021 and progress to Sourdough Ridge in 2023. Mining will end at both locations in 2023. Reclamation will commence in 2024 and progress through 2025. On site, monitoring will continue after reclamation. The ore from the open pits will be hauled to the existing Fort Knox processing facility. No wetlands or waters will be impacted at the Fort Knox processing facility. The proposed impacts for the Gil Project will include 3.27 acres of permanent impacts for mine roads and pit development. All work would be performed in accordance with the enclosed plan (sheets 1-17), dated March & April 2021.

<u>ADDITIONAL INFORMATION</u>: The applicant is concurrently seeking a Fish Habitat permit from Alaska Fish & Game, a Mine Plan and Closure permit from the Alaska Department of Natural Resources, and a Waste Rock permit from the Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation (ADEC).

<u>APPLICANT PROPOSED MITIGATION</u>: The applicant proposes the following mitigation measures to avoid, minimize, and compensate for impacts to waters of the U.S. from activities involving discharges of dredged or fill material.

- a. Avoidance: The applicant has evaluated several mine designs, road layouts, and processing scenarios to identify the Least Environmentally Damaging Practicable Alternative (LEDPA). During the process, the applicant made substantive efforts to avoid and minimize impacts to wetlands at Gil, and on the access route to Gil. These avoidance and minimization measures were incorporated in the preferred alternative.
- b. Minimization: The Gil project incorporates an existing access route to the Gil site which avoids and minimizes impacts to waters of the U.S. The mining of six smaller open pits, instead of two larger pits on ridges, will reduce wetland impacts in the upper reaches of the watershed. Another design factor considered was the preservation of the Slippery Creek wetland and headwater stream system. Gil and Sourdough Ridges are separated by Slippery Creek. Instead of crossing Slippery Creek with a road the applicant chose a longer ridge top route to access the two project components. Additionally, no camps, living structures, or processing facilities are planned on site. The mine will utilize their existing workforce and transport workers to and from Gil daily. Impacts to wetlands and waters at the Gil site are almost entirely due to configuration on the internal mine roads, as these roads must be designed to meet road grade safety requirements. Finally, multiple best management practices (BMPs) will be employed to minimize impacts to waters of the U.S., including the erosion control and construction methods described in the Stormwater Pollution Prevention Plan (SWPPP) required by the State of Alaska. BMPs for embankment stabilization, including contouring and seeding will be employed, and the applicant will use native seed mixes for revegetation to avoid the introduction of invasive species. Vegetation along the roadway and mining area will be cleared around migratory bird timing windows to avoid nesting birds. Water withdrawals will be available for dust control during construction and during regular road operation, and dust control measures would be implemented as needed to reduce suspension of fugitive dust. Surface drainage will be culverted at the mine site to ensure flow connectivity.

c. Compensatory Mitigation: The Gil Project will be fully bonded for reclamation and closure with the State of Alaska. At the end of mining activities in 2023, the mine surface disturbance will be reclaimed and closed according to the Reclamation and Closure Plan. The Gil mining activities are located on two ridges. The wetlands impacted by the project are on slopes near the top of each ridge. These locations make wetland creation or restoration difficult to non-feasible during mine reclamation. There is no assurance there will be a water source for creation/restoration of wetlands in these landscape positions. The applicant proposes to compensate for the 3.27 acres of permanent impacts with the purchase of credits from the Tanana Valley Mitigation Bank. No compensatory mitigation is offered for exempt temporary fills.

<u>WATER QUALITY CERTIFICATION</u>: A permit for the described work will not be issued until a certification or waiver of certification, as required under Section 401 of the Clean Water Act (Public Law 95-217), has been received from the ADEC.

<u>CULTURAL RESOURCES</u>: The latest published version of the Alaska Heritage Resources Survey (AHRS) has been consulted for the presence or absence of historic properties, including those listed in or eligible for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places. There are no cultural resources in the permit area or within the vicinity of the permit area. The permit area has been determined to include the portions of the project which will impact wetlands and other waters of the U.S., in addition to the footprint of the proposed roads which will be used for site access. Consultation of the AHRS constitutes the extent of cultural resource investigations by the Corps of Engineers (Corps) at this time, and we are otherwise unaware of the presence of such resources. The Corps has made a No Historic Properties Affected (No Effect) determination for the proposed project. This application is being coordinated with the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO). Any comments SHPO may have concerning presently unknown archeological or historic data that may be lost or destroyed by work under the requested permit will be considered in our final assessment of the described work. The Corps is requesting the SHPO's concurrence with this determination.

<u>ENDANGERED SPECIES</u>: No threatened or endangered species are known to use the project area.

We have determined the described activity would have no effect on any listed or proposed threatened or endangered species and would have no effect on any designated or proposed critical habitat, under the Endangered Species Act of 1973 (87 Stat. 844). Therefore, no consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service or the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) is required. However, any comments they may have concerning endangered or threatened wildlife or plants or their critical habitat will be considered in our final assessment of the described work.

ESSENTIAL FISH HABITAT: The Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act, as amended by the Sustainable Fisheries Act of 1996, requires all Federal agencies to consult with the National Marine Fisheries Service on all actions, or proposed actions, permitted, funded, or undertaken by the agency, that may adversely affect Essential Fish Habitat (EFH).

No EFH species are known to use the project area. We have determined the described activity would not adversely affect EFH in the project area.

TRIBAL CONSULTATION: The Alaska District fully supports tribal self-governance and government-to-government relations between Federally recognized Tribes and the Federal government. Tribes with protected rights or resources that could be significantly affected by a proposed Federal action (e.g., a permit decision) have the right to consult with the Alaska District on a government-to-government basis. Views of each Tribe regarding protected rights and resources will be accorded due consideration in this process. This PN serves as notification to the Tribes within the area potentially affected by the proposed work and invites their participation in the Federal decision-making process regarding the protected Tribal right or resource. Consultation may be initiated by the affected Tribe upon written request to the District Commander during the public comment period.

<u>PUBLIC HEARING</u>: Any person may request, in writing, within the comment period specified in this notice, that a public hearing be held to consider this application. Requests for public hearings shall state, with particularity, reasons for holding a public hearing.

EVALUATION: The decision whether to issue a permit will be based on an evaluation of the probable impacts, including cumulative impacts of the proposed activity and its intended use on the public interest. Evaluation of the probable impacts, which the proposed activity may have on the public interest, requires a careful weighing of all the factors that become relevant in each particular case. The benefits, which reasonably may be expected to accrue from the proposal, must be balanced against its reasonably foreseeable detriments. The outcome of the general balancing process would determine whether to authorize a proposal, and if so, the conditions under which it will be allowed to occur. The decision should reflect the national concern for both protection and utilization of important resources. All factors, which may be relevant to the proposal, must be considered including the cumulative effects thereof. Among those are conservation, economics, aesthetics, general environmental concerns, wetlands, cultural values, fish and wildlife values, flood hazards, floodplain values, land use, navigation, shore erosion and accretion, recreation, water supply and conservation, water quality, energy needs, safety, food and fiber production, mineral needs, considerations of property ownership, and, in general, the needs and welfare of the people. For activities involving 404 discharges, a permit will be denied if the discharge that would be authorized by such permit would not comply with the Environmental Protection Agency's 404(b)(I) guidelines. Subject to the preceding sentence and any other applicable guidelines or criteria (see Sections 320.2 and 320.3), a permit will be granted unless the District Commander determines that it would be contrary to the public interest.

The Corps is soliciting comments from the public; Federal, State, and local agencies and officials; Indian Tribes; and other interested parties in order to consider and evaluate the impacts of this proposed activity. Any comments received will be considered by the Corps to determine whether to issue, modify, condition, or deny a permit for this proposal. To make this decision, comments are used to assess impacts on endangered species, historic properties, water quality, general environmental effects, and the other public interest factors listed above. Comments are used in the preparation of an Environmental Assessment and/or an Environmental Impact Statement pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act. Comments are also used to determine the need for a public hearing and to determine the overall public interest of the proposed activity.

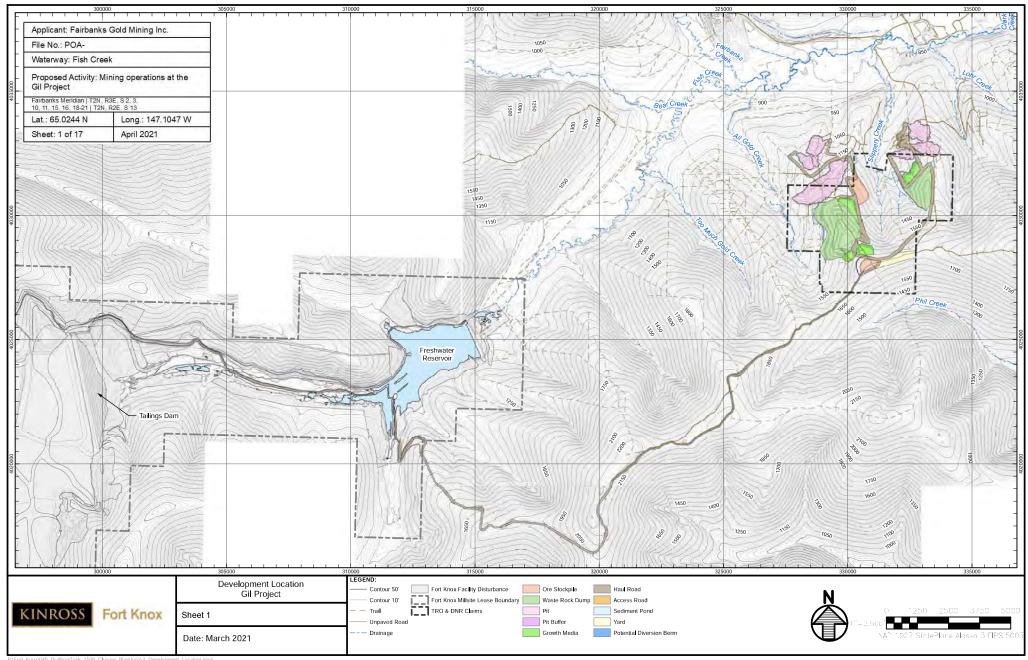
AUTHORITY: This permit will be issued or denied under the following authority:

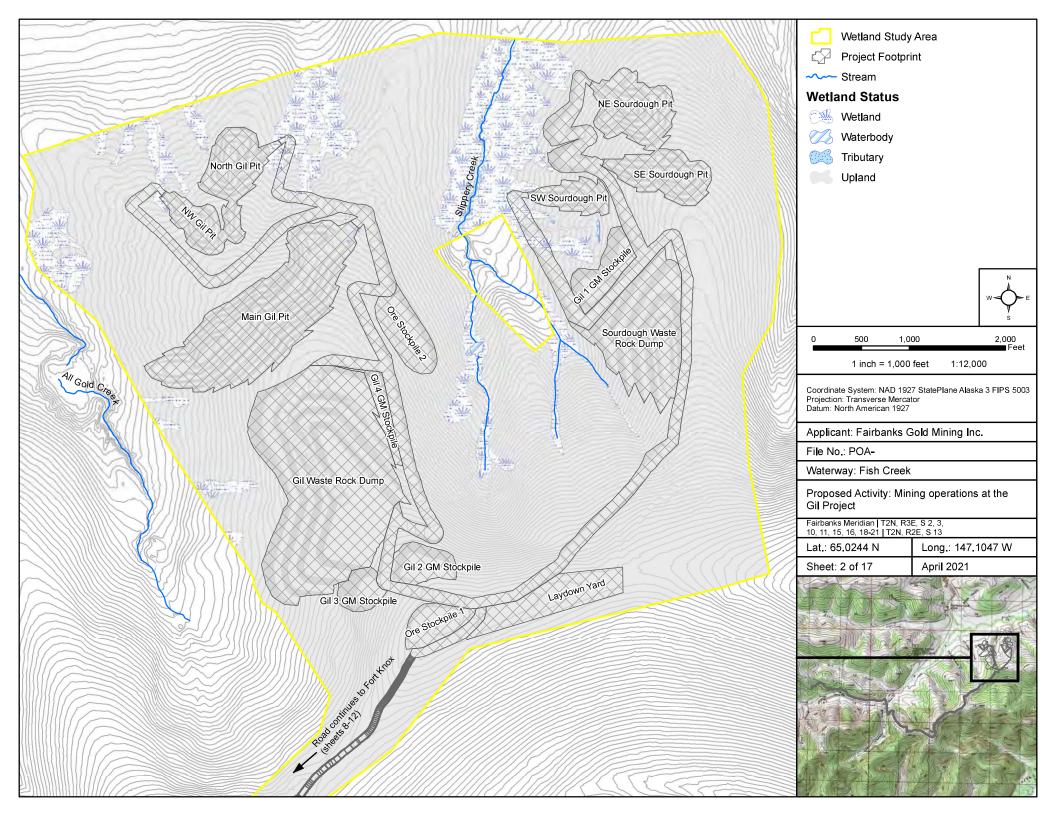
(X) Discharge dredged or fill material into waters of the U.S. – Section 404 Clean Water Act (33 U.S.C. 1344). Therefore, our public interest review will consider the guidelines set forth under Section 404(b) of the Clean Water Act (40 CFR 230).

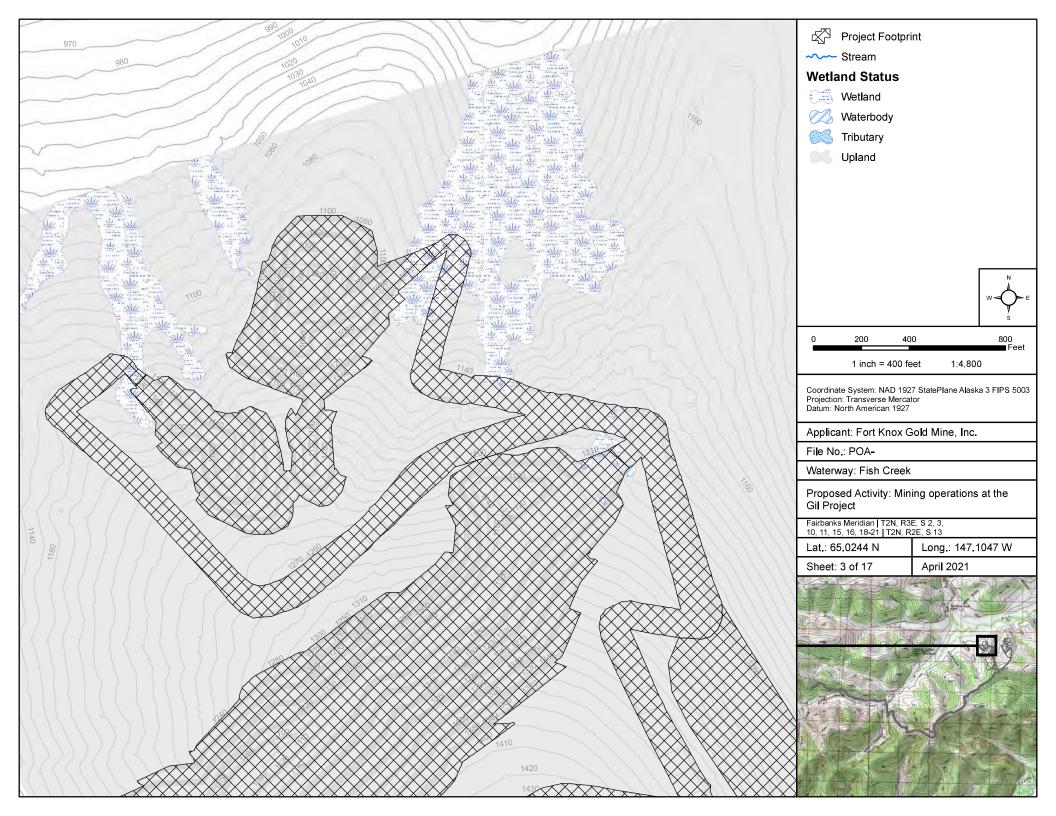
Project drawings are enclosed with this Public Notice.

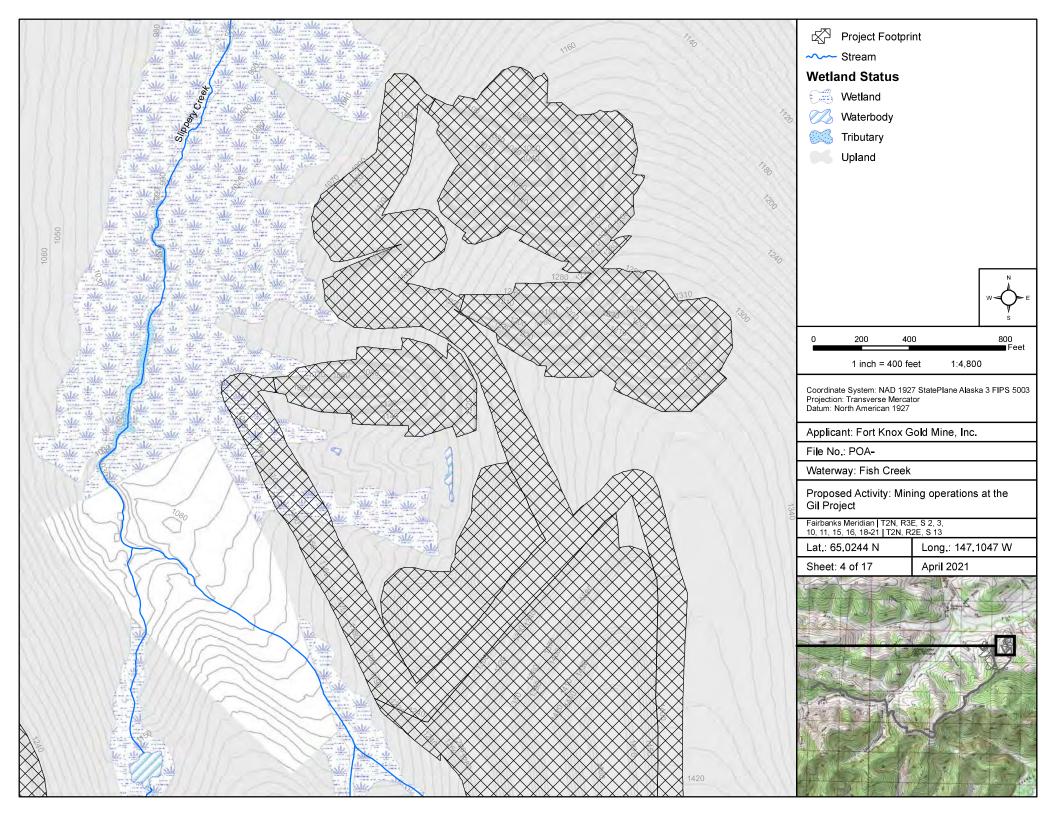
District Commander U.S. Army, Corps of Engineers

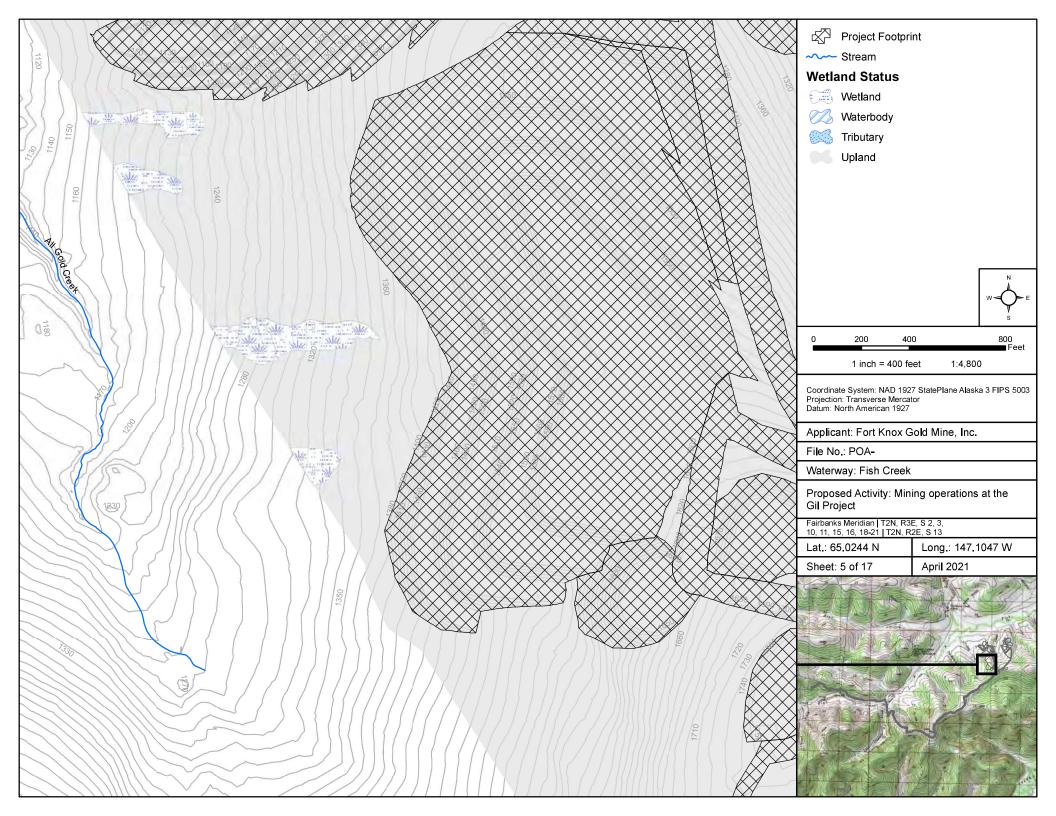
Enclosure

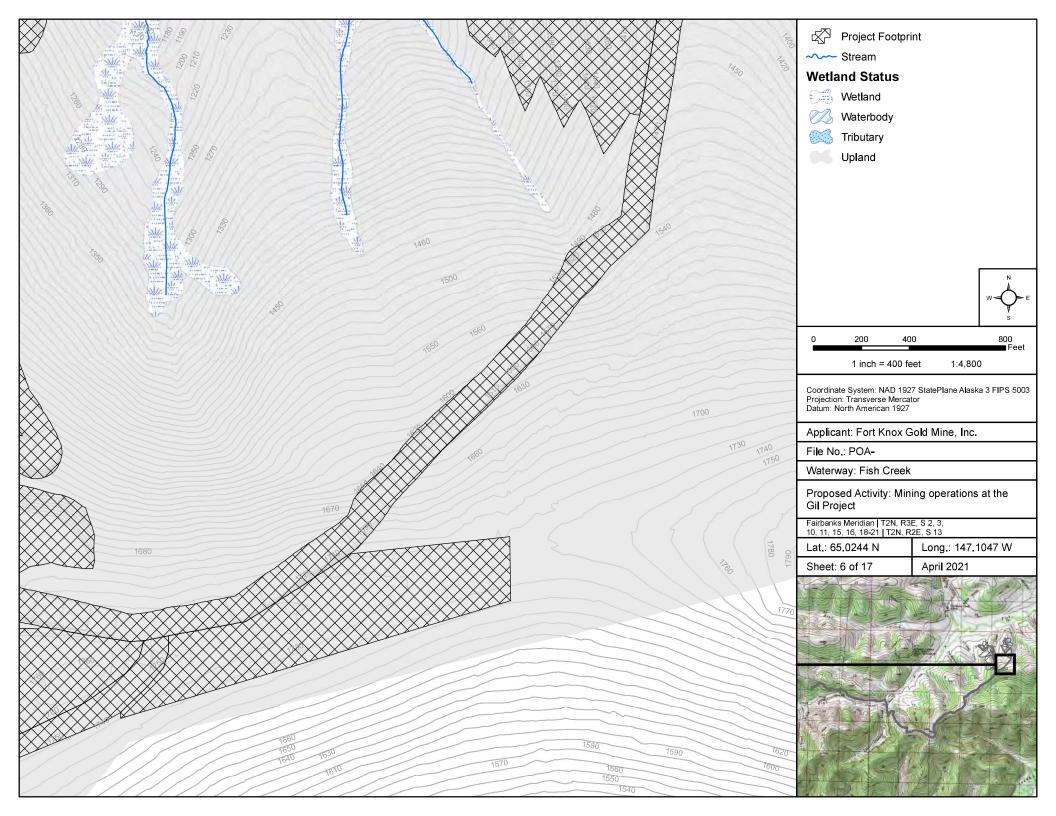




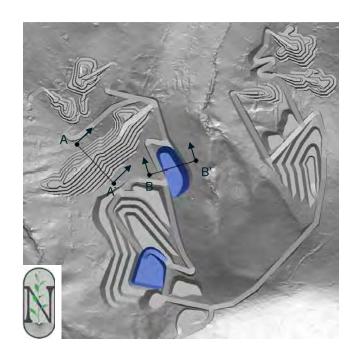


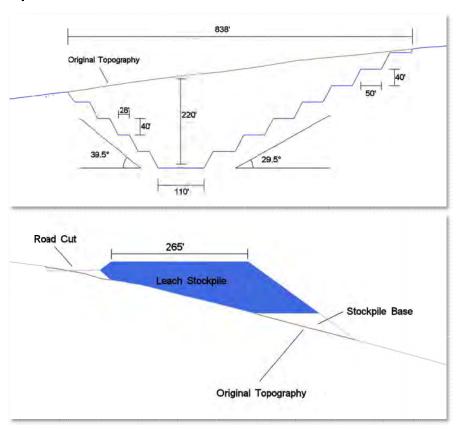




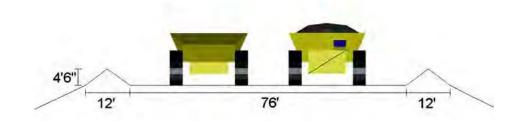


Pit and Stockpile Cross Sections





Typical Haul Road Cross Section



Applicant: Fairbanks Gold Mining Inc.	
File No.: POA-	
Waterway: Fish Creek	
Proposed Activity: Mining operations at the Gil Project	
Fairbanks Meridian T2N, R3E, S 2, 3, 10, 11, 15, 16, 18-21 T2N, R2E, S 13	
Lat.: 65.0244 N	Long.: 147.1047 W
Sheet: 7 of 17	April 2021

