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Allakaket hosts officials who represent Ambler road project

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Matt Buxton/News-Miner

ALLAKAKET — Despite “No Road to Ambler” stickers plastered throughout the Koyukuk River village and an anti-road resolution passed by the tribal council, the community of Allakaket greeted officials representing the project with open arms on Thursday.

People representing various state agencies, the mining company eyeing copper deposits in the Ambler Mining District and their consultants were treated to hearty meals, a river trip to fishing and hunting camps along the Koyukuk River and a promise of civility.

The Allakaket Tribal Council is hosting a meeting today to express to an envoy of state officials their feelings on the proposed industrial access road headed up by the

Ambler road

PJ Simon, the second chief of the Allakaket Tribal Council, leads a tour of his community’s subsistence hunting and fishing camps along the Koyukuk River on July 24, 2014, the day before a community meeting on a controversial proposed access road to the Ambler Mining District. The council invited a number of state officials and company representatives to the meeting.

Alaska Industrial Development and Export Authority.

“Whether we agree with each other or not, we’ll treat each other with respect,” said PJ Simon, the second chief of the Allakaket Tribal Council, before serving the group a dinner of kabobs and barbecue chicken. “We’re all Americans and we’re all Alaskans. We’ve shown you guys our land and how we live.”

Earlier in the day, Simon and members of the community led a group of officials from AIDEA, the departments of Natural Resources and Health and Social Services, and a representative from Canada-based NovaCopper on a boat ride up the Koyukuk River.

They pointed out fishing and hunting camps, favorite fishing spots for salmon and grayling, places where they harvest logs for cabins and prime hunting spots for bears.

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But don't take the hospitality as a sign that Allakaket residents have had a change of heart on the road.

While Simon and others didn't mention it during the boat ride, they're concerned that the 200-mile road from the Dalton Highway to the Ambler Mining District in Northwest Alaska could endanger that way of life.

"The bridges are crossing rivers that are the spawning grounds for salmon," Simon said. "The people here love this lifestyle."

Proponents of the road argue the road still needs to go through environmental impact studies, permitting with the federal government and rigorous financial review, during which those concerns will be addressed.

"It has got to go through a rigorous financial analysis and testing of the business case," said Karsten Rodvik, AIDEA's spokesman. "The bottom line is if there is not sufficient revenues then the road will not be built."

Rodvik says the state has voluntarily held more than 30 meetings in communities throughout the region. Rodvik attended previous meetings but not the Allakaket meeting.

As for the reception, AIDEA Infrastructure Development Officer John Springsteen, who was in Allakaket on Thursday, said he's been grateful for the welcome.

"We thank them for their hospitality," he said. "All the parties are going into this meeting with the idea that we're going to have a respectful discussion."

Contact staff writer Matt Buxton at 459-7544. Follow him on Twitter: @FDNMpolitics.

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