



Office of the Secretary
Washington, D.C. 20250

July 25, 2022

The Honorable Akis Gialopsos
Acting Commissioner
Alaska Department of Natural Resources
550 West 7th Avenue
Suite 1400
Anchorage, Alaska 99501

Dear Acting Commissioner Gialopsos:

Thank you for your letter of May 25, 2022, from the former Alaska Department of Natural Resources Commissioner Corrie Feige, regarding the Southeast Alaska Sustainability Strategy and responsible exploration, development, and production of mineral resources. I apologize for the delayed response.

I understand the crucial role the mining industry plays in Southeast Alaska's economy and the Tongass National Forest's importance in providing mineral production in the region. The U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Forest Service is currently managing 10 active mineral projects on the Tongass National Forest, eight of which include activity within inventoried roadless areas.

As a part of the Southeast Alaska Sustainability Strategy, USDA announced an initial commitment of \$25 million to the region. Following this announcement, and throughout the fall of 2021, the regional USDA team engaged with a broad spectrum of regional partners—including the State of Alaska—to gather input and recommendations for funding opportunities. USDA received over 270 investment ideas with an estimated combined value of \$276 million. Based on community engagement and the expansive set of investment ideas generated during the Southeast Alaska Sustainability Strategy public engagement last year, the initial \$25 million investment has been committed and allocated to Tribal and other organizational partnerships with the Forest Service, Rural Development, and Natural Resources Conservation Service.

I appreciate the State's recent recommendation to update scientific field studies for mineral resources in Southeast Alaska. While this proposal was not able to be included in the initial Southeast Alaska Sustainability Strategy investment package, I support engaging the Forest Service in further discussions about cooperative work between the State Division of Geological and Geophysical Surveys and the U.S. Geological Survey on assessing critical minerals in Alaska.

I encourage you to continue to work directly with the Forest Service's Alaska Region. They will serve as the primary point of contact for coordinating the Southeast Alaska Sustainability Strategy and the Tongass National Forest minerals program.

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Again, thank you for writing and for your continued support of USDA and the Nation's domestic mineral supply chain. If you have any further questions, please contact Chris French, Deputy Chief, National Forest System, at (202) 205-1689 or christopher.french@usda.gov.

Sincerely,

Thomas J. Vilsack
Secretary