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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Proactive approach to environmental permitting pays off for village relocation in Alaska

ANCHORAGE – On April 19, Joel Neimeyer, federal co-chair of the Denali Commission, was in Washington, D.C., to sign the Record of Decision (ROD) for the Mertarvik Infrastructure Development project, marking the end of an expedited, 15-month Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) process and removing a major hurdle between the Yup'ik people of Newtok, Alaska, and their new home.

The new village site is located nine miles south of Newtok on Nelson Island, well out of the path of the Ningliq River, which threatens to submerge the community if the relocation is not completed soon.

“When you have a river that is approaching at a rate of 70 feet per year, time is of the essence,” said Neimeyer. “Having the EIS complete allows us to move forward with construction a full year sooner and, more importantly, relocate more families before the river overtakes their homes. Our goal is to have as many occupiable housing units as possible in place by October 1, 2019.”

For the past two years, the seven-member Denali Commission board has committed to making the relocation project “shovel-ready” in anticipation of funding. Completion of the EIS streamlines future permitting required for other federal agencies to participate in the construction of homes, school, airstrip and other essential infrastructure.

Although the Mertarvik Infrastructure Development began its EIS process ahead of President Trump’s mandate that NEPA reviews be completed in 24 months or less, the project’s 15-month EIS turnaround is consistent with the directive and serves as a real-world example of expedited environmental permitting at the federal level.

“There is still work to be done, but this ROD marks a major milestone,” said Neimeyer at the signing. “I would like to recognize our commissioners for their foresight when they made completion of the EIS a priority, and for staying the course when budgets were thin and funding uncertain. This is a great example of a federally-funded project efficiently progressing with the oversight of stakeholders in both the public and private sectors.”

Neimeyer completes his second and final four-year term as federal co-chair of the Denali Commission this month. A replacement has yet to be announced by Secretary of Commerce Wilbur Ross.

About the Denali Commission: Introduced by Congress in 1998, the Denali Commission is an independent federal agency designed to provide critical utilities, infrastructure and economic support throughout Alaska.

**For more information or to schedule an interview, please contact the Denali Commission:
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