



May 26, 2023

Subject: **Early notification** of wastewater discharge general permit for Norton Sound Large Dredge Placer Miners

Dear Local and Tribal Government Leaders:

The Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) proposes to reissue an Alaska Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (APDES) general permit (AKG374000) for Norton Sound Large Dredger Miners. This permit would regulate wastewater discharges into Norton Sound.

Background information

This general permit would provide coverage for placer mining activities occurring in marine waters of Norton Sound up to three nautical miles offshore from a point due south of Cape Rodney to a point due south of Cape Darby (Figure 1). Proposed operations within three miles of Sledge Island or east of Cape Nome require additional DEC review and approval prior to authorization. Estuarine waters of Safety Sound and Bonanza Channel are excluded from permit coverage.

The permit would authorize discharge from placer mining operations utilizing either *large-size suction dredges*, which are classified as having a suction hose with an intake nozzle diameter greater than ten inches, or *mechanical dredges*, such as barge-based excavators. A placer mining dredge is a device that floats on the ocean surface and elevates ocean water and bed material to a sluice box, where gold or other minerals are accumulated and recovered. The discharge from dredges consists entirely of in situ water and bed material immediately released back into the receiving water.

Description of discharge

The discharge from dredge activities associated with placer mining may contain elevated levels of turbidity and solids. In order to ensure protection of water quality and human health, this general permit will set conditions and limitations on the discharge and require the operator to implement specific best management practices (BMPs). Limitations include restrictions on turbidity and petroleum hydrocarbons. BMPs include implementing operational practices to reduce turbidity, utilizing care when managing petroleum hydrocarbons, and cleaning up and reporting all spills to DEC. The permit also includes special conditions restricting the locations and timing of dredge operations.

General Permit additional information

Any operator that meets the eligibility requirements of the general permit will be authorized to discharge after filing a Notice of Intent (NOI) with DEC so long as all conditions of the permit are met. The public has an opportunity to comment and provide information for this general permit; however, public notice will not be issued for individual NOIs submitted by qualified facilities. The general permit will expire five years after the effective date.

Opportunities for tribal and local government participation in this permitting decision

DEC recognizes rural Alaska has unique needs and considerations with regard to wastewater discharges and strives to issue permits that reflect a full understanding of local conditions. This letter is intended as an **early notice** to assist you in determining whether your community may be affected and inform you of the opportunity to provide traditional, cultural, or other local information that DEC should consider as part of this permit reissuance. DEC would like to know how your area and resources may be affected by this permitting action.

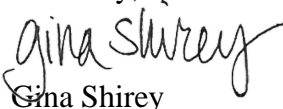
Next steps

After the permit is drafted, there will be a **10 day applicant review period** of the preliminary draft permit. Following the applicant review period, there will be a minimum of a **30 day public review and comment period**. I will provide a copy of the public notice for the permit by mail or e-mail at the start of the public comment period. After the public review and comment period, there will be a **5 day applicant review period** of the final draft permit before the permit is issued.

If requested, I can also provide notice of the preliminary draft and proposed final applicant review periods. Due to the short timeframes for those reviews, notices are sent by email or fax. Please provide an e-mail address or fax number if you would like to receive notices for the preliminary draft and proposed final applicant review periods.

If you would like more information or would like to provide DEC with information about this permit, please do not hesitate to contact me at (907) 465-5272 or at gina.shirey@alaska.gov. For technical questions about the permit, you may also directly contact the permit writer, Nick Dallman, at (907) 451-2142 or at nicholas.dallman@alaska.gov.

Sincerely,



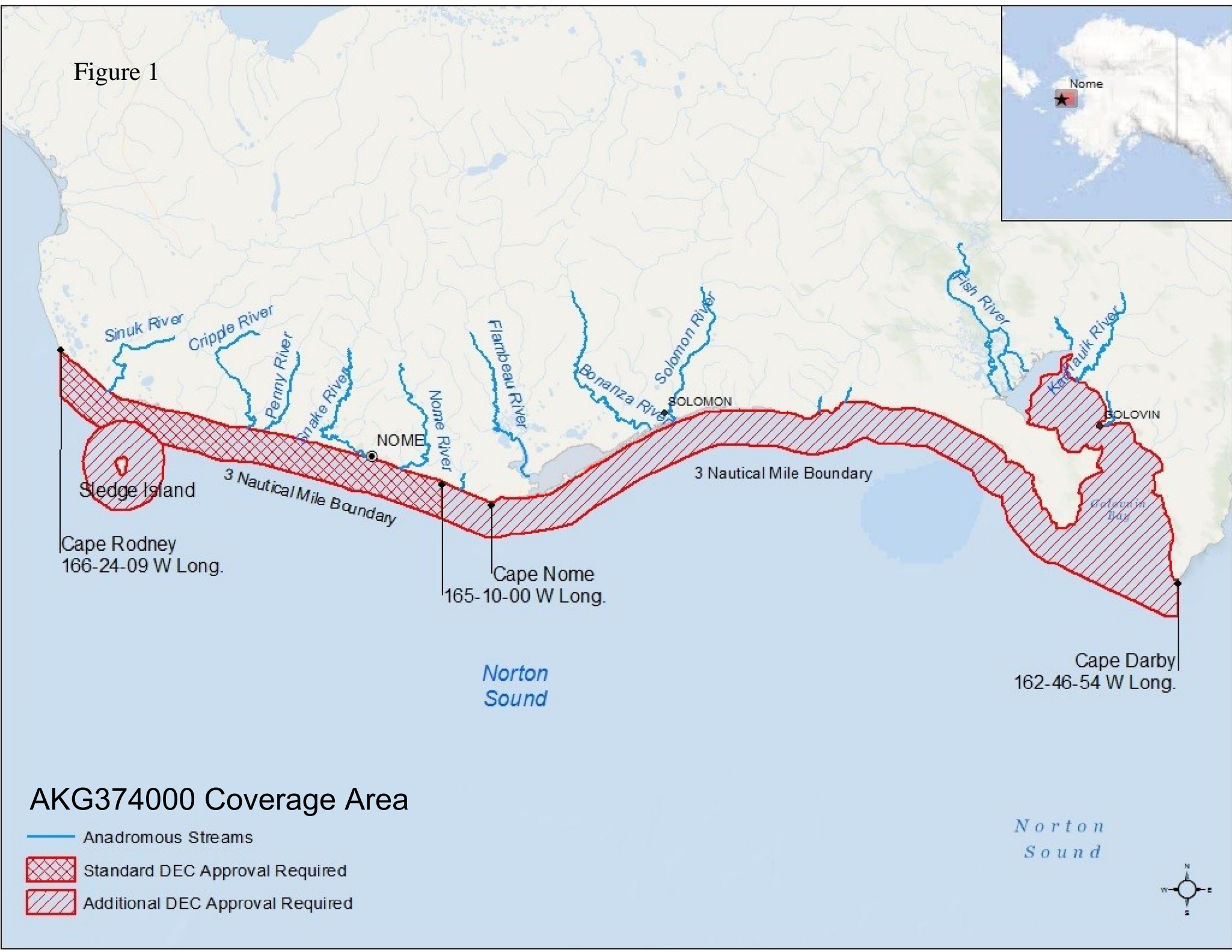
Gina Shirey

Local and Tribal Government Coordinator




Enclosure: Figure 1: Area Vicinity Map
Tribal Involvement in the Permitting Process postcard

cc: Potentially Affected Local Governments
Potentially Affected Federally-recognized Indian Tribes

Figure 1



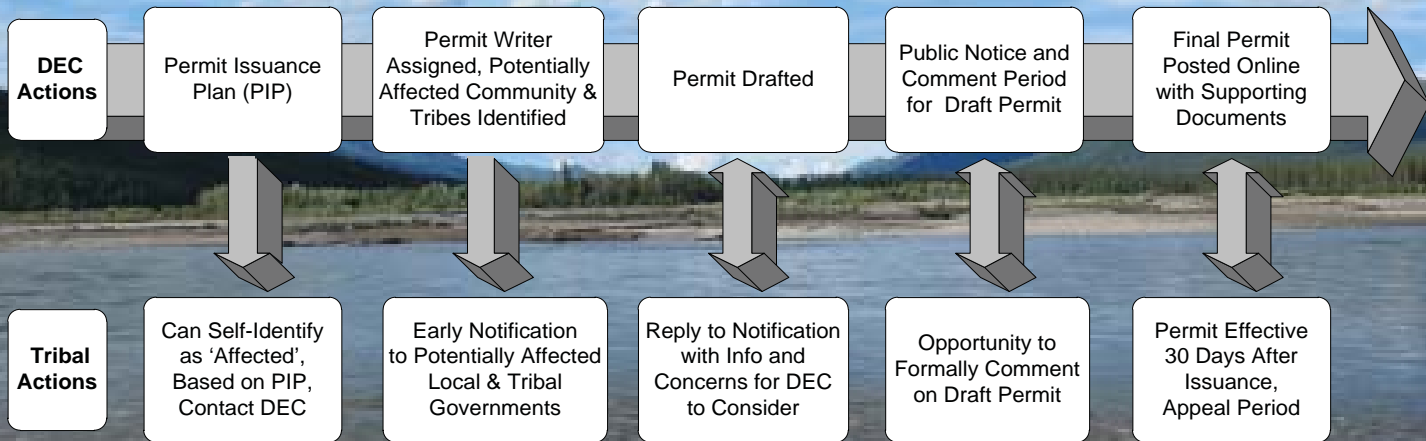
AKG374000 Coverage Area

-  Anadromous Streams
-  Standard DEC Approval Required
-  Additional DEC Approval Required

Norton Sound



Tribal Involvement in the Permitting Process



The Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) strives to develop sound permits based on a full understanding of local conditions, informs tribes about potential permitting actions that may affect them, and provides opportunities for tribal input during the permitting process.