

PLACER MINING

RESOURCE NETWORK NEWSLETTER

SPRING 2025

DEAR ALASKA PLACER MINERS

The Placer Mining Resource Network (PMRN) is an informal, cooperative network of interested parties (permitting agencies and miners) that was formed to address challenges placer miners and agencies face related to permitting and compliance.

Goals of the PMRN are to:

1. Improve permitting and compliance processes.
2. Improve technical assistance to placer miners related to permitting and compliance.
3. Develop and maintain relationships built on trust and mutual understanding among agencies and between agencies and placer miners.

COOPERATING AGENCIES

- Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation (ADEC)
- Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G)
- Alaska Department of Natural Resources (ADNR)
- Bureau of Land Management (BLM)
- National Park Service (NPS)
- Salcha-Delta Soil & Water Conservation District (SD-SWCD)
- U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE)
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS)
- U.S. Forest Service (USFS)

PLACER MINER SUGGESTIONS BEING USED

In 2022, the PMRN interviewed a group of placer miners, and in 2023, we invited all placer miners with an APMA to participate in a survey. From the information we gathered and other feedback received by agencies through their interactions with miners, challenges related to the permitting of mining operations and compliance with state and federal regulations were identified. Subsequently, PMRN agencies are working together to address these issues. In this newsletter, we update you on two key projects the PMRN has been working on: the first-ever Interagency Compliance Inspector Training and the Placer Mining 101 Guidebook.



INTERAGENCY COMPLIANCE INSPECTOR TRAINING PILOT GETS KUDOS!

Our interviews and survey research with Alaska placer miners highlighted concerns regarding field inspections. Issues included a lack of knowledge among new inspectors about the law and the placer mining business, poor coordination and information sharing among agencies, and a general lack of respect for miners' time. In response to these concerns, the PMRN Interagency Group developed and held a pilot Compliance Inspector Training on April 22 and 23. The training, which was held both in-person in Fairbanks and virtually at the BLM Fairbanks Field Office, was attended by more than 60 individuals from nine state and federal agencies!

The training consisted of four modules covering:

- 1. Inspection Basics:** Understanding why agencies conduct inspections, including their regulatory authority and enforcement capabilities.
- 2. Communication with Miners:** Training on effective interpersonal relationships and lessons from experienced inspectors.
- 3. Resources for Efficiency:** Tools to enhance inspection efficiency, such as data management systems and best practices for spill prevention and response and site restoration.
- 4. Logistics and Planning:** Basic land descriptions, inspection case studies, agency contacts, and the importance of sharing information to improve efficiency.

Of the students that evaluated the course, all gave the course a rating of 4 or 5, with 5 being the highest. We will use student feedback from this pilot training to improve future courses. Additionally, we will schedule a follow-up meeting in the fall, asking students to share their experiences from the 2025 field season. The fall meeting will go over frequently asked questions from placer miners and inspectors' ideas about information or tools that could assist in inspections. Our intention is to offer an improved version of this training course in 2026.

"I really appreciated the variety of information. The communication skill section was great. Also liked all the real world examples."

- Student



"I came away with a much clearer idea of the roles of each agency/department in permitting, inspecting, assisting with compliance, and enforcement. Having topics like 'the importance of inspections', 'regulatory authorities', 'inspection walkthrough', etc. and having each agency present on that topic in succession was really effective for this. Knowing where our areas of interest crossover and diverge, I feel much more inclined and empowered to coordinate site visits with other contacts outside my program, follow up with sharing information, etc. because I feel more confident knowing who the relevant party(ies) may be."

- Student

PLACER MINING 101 GUIDEBOOK: REVIEW COMPLETE

In our last newsletter, we discussed the Guidebook the PMRN has been developing for new placer miners and those placer miners needing a refresher. The idea of writing a guidebook emerged from miner feedback during the survey. Miners clearly indicated that the permitting process is very complex, largely due to the numerous agencies involved and their different requirements, which often complicates permitting and compliance.

THE PLACER MINING 101 GUIDEBOOK WILL COVER THE FOLLOWING TOPICS:

Early Planning & Site Assessment

1. Understanding Placer deposits
2. Deposit types
3. Collecting public information
4. Boots on the ground

Exploration & Evaluation

1. Exploration methods
2. Sampling
3. Bulk sampling
4. Exploring overburden & water
5. Ongoing exploration

Economic Evaluation

1. Resource estimation
2. Cost estimation
3. Profit or loss evaluation

Designing Your Mine

1. Types of operations
2. Material handling equipment
3. Classification equipment
4. Pit design
5. Water management
6. Overburden management
7. Tailings management
8. Site management

Freshwater Suction Dredging

1. Small-scale suction dredging
2. Large-scale suction dredging
3. Fish-bearing streams
4. Nome offshore suction dredging

Reclamation

1. Rolling footprint
2. Settling pond reclamation
3. Stream reclamation
4. Reclamation bonding requirements

Permitting & Compliance

1. Introduction
2. Generally allowed uses on state lands
3. Application for permits to mine in Alaska (APMA)
4. What is not covered by APMA
5. Permitting agencies, regulators & land managers

The Guidebook framework is a collaborative effort by all of the PMRN agencies with writing support by Shane Lasley, Publisher of North of 60 Mining News. A draft of the Guidebook was recently reviewed by a group of placer miners throughout the state. The PMRN is in the process of reviewing and incorporating input from miners and agencies. While some of the input we received may be out of the scope of this product, we appreciate all of the comments and, as part of the larger PMRN work, we will seek to address them in other ways and/or in other products. Our intention is to have the Guidebook finalized this summer. We will send you an announcement when it is available.

While we recognize that there is still much work to be done to assist miners and agencies with their work, the PMRN is committed to continuing our collaboration with placer miners. Our goal is to better understand challenges and identify solutions that build positive working relationships and improve services to assist miners with permitting and compliance.

SMALL SPILL MANAGEMENT AND BEST PRACTICES WHEN WORKING IN REMOTE ALASKA

PREVENTION, PREPAREDNESS AND RESPONSE PROGRAM

Remote work in Alaska is a challenge. Transporting and storing fuel, chemicals, equipment, and supplies can be expensive and time consuming. Planning and taking steps to prevent spills can save time and money and can help avoid environmental damage. To prevent or reduce fuel and chemical spills, the following prevention measures should be implemented.

Fuel Storage

- Avoid storing fuel within 100 feet of any drinking water source or surface water.
- Store fuel containers in diked, lined areas. If possible, cover and elevate off the ground on level pallets. Liner is typically a thick plastic or coated fabric.
- Placeliners under the engines of equipment to catch drips while staging or conducting maintenance.
- Install check valves on fuel tank manifolds. Do not manifold (connect) fuel storage tanks unless check valves are properly installed.

Fuel Lines

- Welded joints are more secure than threaded or compression joints.
- Install expansion joints or flex couplers every 100 feet along fuel lines.
- Install fuel lines under roadways in casing sleeves of sufficient strength to withstand crushing or rupture by all anticipated wheel loads.
- Mark location of buried fuel lines.
- Include large loops in fuel lines for flexibility. Avoid kinks or short loops.

Fueling Operations

- Never leave fuel transfers unattended.
- Gauge and visually inspect the amount of fuel in the tank before beginning a fuel transfer.
- Stop fueling operations immediately if a leak or spillage is detected or suspected.
- Keep accurate records of all fuel usages to identify if there is a loss of fuel from an unknown leak.
- Keep spill kits onsite and easily accessible to quickly contain spills. See #6 for recommended items for your spill kit.
- Place portable containment ponds under valves and connectors during fueling operations to catch drips.

WHAT TO DO IF A SPILL OCCURS

1. Safety first! Protect yourself and others onsite by limiting exposure to fumes and wearing appropriate personal protective gear, such as safety glasses and gloves. Conduct safety briefing so everyone understands the risks and how to avoid injury.
2. Stop the source of the spill if possible and safe to do so.
3. Report oil spills to water, oil spills to land larger than 55 gallons or chemical releases immediately. Oil spills under 55 gallons to land may be reported within 24 hours. Report to Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation (ADEC) by calling 1-800-478-9300. Technical assistance can be provided by ADEC.
4. Analyze the incident including source and volume of spill, likely behavior of the spill such as flow direction, and collect hazard information on the product spilled. Will this product flow to surface water or a sensitive area? Or flow under buildings that could cause unhealthy vapors for building occupants? Prioritize your response to minimize potential hazards.

5. Control the spill.
 - Stop transferring immediately if spill occurs during transfer.
 - Close valves upstream of the leak to stop the flow of product.
 - Place buckets or basins under a leak from a pipe or a valve.
 - Apply a temporary patch over a leaky pipe or plug in damaged tank.
 - If spill is from a damaged tank, transfer fuel to another tank.
6. Contain the spill as soon as possible. The quicker the spill is contained, the less potential for danger to humans and less impact to the environment. Recommended spill response tool kit:
 - Absorbent sausage boom, absorbent pads, oily waste bags, containment pond, bag of granular absorbent, shovel, and rake.
 - In summer, use sausage boom and pads or dirt and mud to form a dike around the spill.
 - In winter, snow and ice may be piled to form a dike to contain the spill. Fill area with absorbent boom and pads.
 - Dig a ditch and line with plastic to divert oil away from streams or other bodies of water.
 - Pay particular attention to protecting sensitive areas (such as drinking water sources, fish and wildlife habitats, culturally sensitive areas, or residential areas).
7. Recover and clean up.
 - Recover contained product before it enters a waterbody by pumping to drums, tanks or other containers. Use absorbent pads to slow the flow and absorb product.
 - Clean contaminated equipment, tanks, pipes, or other objects in a way that controls run off from the cleaning operation.
 - Coordinate with ADEC to properly dispose of contaminated soil and materials.

FISH & WILDLIFE CORNER

TIME FOR BIRDS!

Migratory bird nesting season is here! Birds are most vulnerable during breeding and nesting, when ground disturbances, vegetation clearing, and other site construction activities can destroy active nests, eggs or nestlings.

The most effective way to protect them is to conduct these activities before or after the breeding season. The following link provides timing recommendations to help you plan ahead to protect birds: <https://www.fws.gov/alaska-bird-nesting-season>.

Top right: Bar-tailed godwit
Middle right: Yellow warbler
Bottom right: Common redpole
Below: Camouflaged nest

Photo credit:
Lisa Hupp/USFWS



To report spills and/or request technical assistance, call
1-800-478-9300
Online Spill Reporting:
ReportSpills.Alaska.Gov
For State of Alaska Reporting Requirements please see:
<https://dec.alaska.gov/spar/ppr/spill-information/reporting/>



Photo credit:
Lisa Hupp/USFWS

NOTICES, REMINDERS AND INFORMATION OF INTEREST

ADNR

Tax and Production Royalties are Due

Mining License Taxes are due April 30 and Production Royalty Returns on State Land are due May 1. File both online https://online-tax.alaska.gov/atp/webdoc/_/.

Physical State Production Royalties Returns can be printed at <https://dnr.alaska.gov/mlw/cdn/pdf/forms/Production-Royalty-Form-2021.pdf> and mailed to the Anchorage DNR office.

Fact Sheet can be found at <https://dnr.alaska.gov/mlw/cdn/pdf/factsheets/production-royalty.pdf>.

Need Help?

Mining License Tax: dor.tax.mining@alaska.gov, or call Suzanne M Anderson (907) 269-6948. State Production Royalties question, Amber.Rhoads@Alaska.Gov or call Amber Rhoads at (907) 269-8633.

ADEC

- **Permittees with discharge authorizations under the ADEC Mechanical Placer Miners General Permit:** Please remember that Daily Inspection Logs must be completed each day while on site. See the permit for details.
- **Permittees with discharge authorizations under the ADEC Medium Suction Dredge and Norton Sound Large Dredge General Permits:** Please remember that Daily Monitoring Logs must be completed each day while discharging. See the permits for details.
- ADEC just published a fact sheet titled Small Spill Management and Best Practices When Working in Remote Alaska. See page 4 and at <https://dec.alaska.gov/spar/ppr/regulations-guidance/manuals-guidance>.

The Placer Mining Resource Network Newsletter is published twice yearly. To unsubscribe to the newsletter, please email Dave Charon at david.charron@alaska.gov.