

APPENDIX F

ALASKAN MINERAL RESOURCES

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I regret that Dr. Smith, the Chief Alaskan Geologist, was unable to be present at this meeting as he would be far better able to handle this subject than I am.

First let me assure you of the willingness of the Alaskan Branch of the Geological Survey to cooperate with the Joint Economic Committees in any way that it can in the furthering of its North Pacific Planning Project.

The Geological Survey has been investigating the mineral resources of Alaska for more than 50 years and for more than 40 years this work has been done by the Alaskan Branch. This work has resulted in a large mass of information on minerals and related subjects, including hundreds of reports and maps. All of the information in our maps and reports is, of course, at the disposal of your group.

Alaska has produced nearly nine hundred million dollars worth of mineral commodities, mostly gold. The next most valuable production has been of copper from the Kennecott area which, as you know, is now for the most part worked out. Significant contributions have been made of such other commodities as platinum metals, coal, tungsten, quicksilver, antimony, limestone and gypsum.

In recent years almost the entire effort of the Alaskan Branch in its minerals investigations has been on deposits of the so-called strategic, critical, or war minerals. In other words, our efforts recently have largely been turned away from gold. Most of the reports on these investigations have been written for, and distributed to the various war agencies concerned with mineral problems and have not yet been made available to the public. The Alaskan Branch hopes to shortly evolve a method whereby as much as possible of the information on these deposits of war minerals be released to the public, or at least to those who have a legitimate need for it. During the winter of 1942-43 about 40 such reports to the war agencies were distributed. I feel sure that, if your group has need of the information in these reports, they could be obtained by request through proper administrative channels.

In all of its work in Alaska the Alaskan Branch has realized a responsibility beyond its principal function of reporting on the mineral deposits in the area being investigated and consequently, through its reports runs a thread of information on such other related subjects as geography, climate, topography, frozen ground, agriculture, and timber.

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With the above very sketchy background let us consider what may be expected in regard to the mineral industry of Alaska during and after the war - what changes may be brought about by improved or different means of transportation such as the airplane or new highways. It seems to the Alaskan Branch in this connection that we should consider mineral commodities as to falling into two general types--those which may enter the world markets and those which may be produced and consumed locally. Concerning the possible development of deposits of the first type, transportation, as in any mining venture, is one of the important cost factors. Any development that will reduce this factor in regard to a commodity or a deposit will mean that certain deposits previously unworkable will either come into the market or will come closer to coming into the market. The present and predicted greatly increased use of the airplane, for example, will have an important bearing on the possible opening up of deposits of mineral commodities that have a high unit value such as gold, quicksilver, platinum or tungsten. Conversely the airplane will be less important in the opening up of deposits of such materials as limestone or iron ore.

Always in the background is the possibility that certain deposits which are now unknown, or deposits of which the possibilities are unknown, may, on discovery or systematic examination, prove to be large enough and rich enough to justify development in spite of relative inaccessibility. Into this type might fall possible Alaskan oil fields or, because of the possibility of the development of a ferrous industry in the Puget Sound area, the iron deposits of southeastern Alaska. These iron deposits, by the way, might be a good subject for joint discussions between United States and Canada in view of the fact that similar deposits are known in coastal British Columbia.

In regard to deposits of the second class, any development of the Territory by such means as transpolar air lines, highways, railroads, military or defense establishments or agricultural communities will create local markets for certain mineral commodities that cannot at present, or in the predictable future, enter world trade, but, because of the high cost of transportation to bring such materials in, may well be important for local use. An example of this sort of development might be the opening up of a coal field near an air base.

The Alaskan Branch feels that, in view of the predicted development of the North country, its work and its responsibilities are likely to be very greatly increased. During the war, of course, it will continue to give first priority to the study of deposits of mineral commodities and other duties that may have a bearing on the conduct of the war. The Branch predicts that its coal work, which goes back over many years, must be expanded and intensified. The same is true of petroleum. The Branch intends, to the best of its ability, to continue and enlarge its traditional place in guiding the destinies of the Territory in regard to mineral deposits.

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