# Summary of Consultation Comments: Abandoned Hardrock Mine Reclamation (AHMR) Program Proposed Tribal Grant Directed Announcement September 2025



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## I. Introduction

Section 40704 of the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (Public Law 117-58) created the Abandoned Hardrock Mine Reclamation (AHMR) program within the U.S. Department of the Interior to conduct inventory, investigation, remediation, and reclamation activities at abandoned hardrock mine sites on Federal, State, Tribal and private lands. Grants for Tribes are a vital component of the AHMR program.

As a result, the Department announced it would hold Tribal consultations with the goal of collecting feedback and recommendations on the draft grant solicitation entitled "Abandoned Hardrock Mine Reclamation (AHMR) Program Tribal Grant Directed Announcement, May 2025."

This Report summarizes comments received from potential grant applicants, including Tribal Consortia, Alaska Organizations, and Tribal Historic Preservation Offices (THPOs) during government-to-government consultations held in July 2025.

DOI will consider all comments received and announcements regarding any potential federal policy changes based on the comments will be forthcoming.

#### Background

The Office of Environmental Policy and Compliance (OEPC) and the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) hosted these consultation sessions to receive input from Federally recognized Tribes on the draft grant solicitation. The "AHMR Program Tribal Grant Directed Announcement" will be used to administer and guide distribution of the first round of grant funding, with approximately \$1.4 million total available for Tribal AHMR projects in this round of grants.

# II. Summary of Tribal Consultation and Input Received

On May 20, 2025, the Department announced consultation sessions in a letter to Tribal leaders. The letter was also posted to the BIA Tribal Consultation webpage, along with an AHMR Program Fact Sheet. The letter contained the following framing questions:

1. Is your Tribe interested in applying for an AHMR grant this funding cycle? If yes, what type? (Inventory only, Project only, or a combination of Inventory and Project grants)?

- 2. If known, what types of hardrock (non-coal) abandoned mines (gold, silver, gravel, uranium, etc.) and feature types (shafts, adits, pits, etc.) are located on your Tribal lands?
- 3. Does your Tribe have an abandoned hardrock mine inventory either in-progress or complete? (If yes, please explain where it is housed, how you collected the data, and estimated percentage complete.)
- 4. Do you have, or have you ever had, an abandoned hardrock mine program? (If yes, please explain.)
- 5. Do you have the capacity to perform data collection activities, reclamation or remediation work on abandoned hardrock mines? (If yes, please explain. If no, please describe what your Tribe would need to complete the work, such as increased staff, GPS units, vehicles, etc.)
- 6. Please provide contact information for the Tribal member either currently serving in an abandoned hardrock mine director role or who would assume that role on behalf of the Tribe and likely apply for the grant. (Please provide a name, title if applicable, email, and phone number.)
- 7. Do you have any other comments or suggestions regarding the AHMR Tribal Grants?

DOI hosted the consultation session via Zoom. The sessions were held on Tuesday, July 8, 2025, at 11:00 am ET/9:00 am MT, and Wednesday, July 9, 2025, at 1:00 pm ET/11:00 am MT. The consultations were led by BIA's Office of Regulatory Affairs and Collaborative Action (RACA) in partnership with OEPC.

Together, approximately 26 of representatives of Alaska Native Villages, Tribal Consortia, Alaska Native Organizations, Alaska Native Corporations, and individual Tribes attended the sessions.

- On July 8, 2025, there were 32 total attendees.
- On July 9, 2025, there were 18 total attendees.

DOI also accepted written comments as part of the consultation and received 2 written submissions.

# Summary of Tribal Comments

No comments or feedback were provided by Tribal representatives in response to any of the seven framing questions asked in the Tribal Leader Letter.

#### General comments

The following is a summary of general comments received related to issues outside of the categories above.

- Kawerak, Inc., a tribal consortium in the Bering Strait region of Alaska which represents an area with 20 federally recognized tribes and 16 communities, submitted written comments specifically related to the eligibility requirements as noted in the Tribal Grant Fact Sheet and Announcement. In summary, Kawerak would like the opportunity to apply for grants that will benefit the Tribes of the region, and that under the current definition of eligible applicants, they would be disqualified from applying based upon their status as a tribal consortium.
- The National Association of Tribal Historic Preservation Officers (NATHPO) is the only
  national organization devoted to supporting Tribal historic preservation programs. Their
  Executive Director submitted a written comment on behalf of the NATHPO, asking that
  meaningful dialogue with Tribal Nations be carried out in advance of new mining
  projects, so Tribal Nations can ensure development activities are carried out in ways
  that protect cultural sites, the environment, and other resources, thereby making
  remediation efforts less necessary when projects end.

Furthermore, she noted it is important that Tribal Nations be involved in all decision-making about activities occurring on their lands, and on lands that are culturally important or sacred to them. This includes decisions being made about hardrock mine reclamation, regardless of whether those mines are located on currently held Tribal lands and whether it is a Tribal Nation, state, or private entity that receives a federal grant to engage in mine reclamation activities.

Finally, the NATHPO strongly supports a reauthorization of the Historic Preservation Fund (HPF) which would require that Tribal Historic Preservation Offices (THPOs) receive a minimum of 20% of the HPF each year, while directing the National Park Service to review if THPO funding is keeping pace and subsequently adjust funding levels to reflect the annual increase in the number of THPOs.

### III. Conclusion

In conclusion, the proposed AHMR Tribal Grant Directed Announcement was seeking feedback regarding the substance of the announcement itself. The proposed guidance incorporated feedback from current Tribal members of the National Association of Abandoned Mine Land Programs (NAAMLP) during its initial drafting stage. These stakeholders will continue to be important allies as the Department works to stand up the Tribal Grant portion of the AHMR Program.

While DOI did not receive input to the seven framing questions posed during the consultation sessions, we are addressing the general comments received. In response to the comment submitted by the Kawerak, Inc. requesting an opportunity of the tribal consortium to apply for hardrock mine grants, the definition of "Indian Tribe" applicable to AHMR Tribal Grant funding does not include Tribal consortia, non-profits, and other groups affiliated with Tribes. However, any of the Tribes within those groups may apply as individual Tribes and receive grant funding.

The Department also acknowledges that the comments submitted by the NATHPO are important and encourages Tribal Nations involvement in decision-making about activities occurring on their lands, and on lands that are culturally important or sacred to them. However, these comments are not within the purview of the grant Directed Announcement.