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UAF Tapped to Research Rare Earth Processing

(Juneau, AK) – The Minerals Industry Research Laboratory (MIRL) at the University of Alaska Fairbanks will conduct primary research on techniques for processing rare earth minerals under contract to the Alaska Department of Commerce, Community, and Economic Development (DCCED). Dr. Rajive Ganguli, director of the MIRL, will serve as principal investigator.

The objective of the research is to identify the best sequencing of processing methods, such as froth flotation and direct leaching, to reduce processing costs, increase recovery rates, and other possible discoveries. The handling of waste rock will also be examined.

Governor Sean Parnell has said critical and strategic minerals are a priority development opportunity for the state. Rare earth minerals are classified as critical and strategic minerals because of the projected demand, level of domestic production, and current reliance on imports. The U.S. Geological Service classifies indium, manganese, the platinum group metals, niobium, and rare earth minerals as critical and strategic minerals.

In addition to DCCED, the Alaska Departments of Natural Resources and Transportation have been tasked with identifying the resources, infrastructure, and business development opportunities needed to bring the state's rare earth resources to market.

"With known rare earth prospects in southeast and Interior Alaska, and ongoing exploration, this research project will help the State of Alaska to better assess rare

earth mining activity, water mobility, and other questions that will arise when considering permit applications,” said Ed Fogels, deputy commissioner with the Department of Natural Resources (DNR). DNR is currently engaged in a multi-year assessment to better understand the locations, distribution, and quantities of high potential rare earth deposits.

“The research that Dr. Ganguli and his colleagues are undertaking will inform the state’s efforts as we continue to look at rare earth development opportunities,” said DCCED commissioner Susan Bell. “Alaska is well positioned to be a stable source of rare earth minerals. This research is another building block toward understanding and realizing that potential.”

According to Bell, research activities will begin this fall and continue through the upcoming academic year. Additional analysis and review will continue through project completion sometime in late 2013.

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