



Sierra Borealis

alaska report



SIERRA CLUB ALASKA CHAPTER
DECEMBER 2015

Double Arctic Victory--over Shell and offshore drilling leases

Mike Brune: "Joyous news for our climate"

The news broke in Alaska late on a Sunday night, September 27, 2015:

Shell Oil's fleet of drill ships, tugboats, and icebreakers would leave the Arctic Ocean "for the foreseeable future".

People who had spent the summer preparing for the worst Arctic news--a big spill--pinched themselves. Was this announcement true? What was the catch?

There was none. Shell abandoned its Arctic offshore drilling plans in part because stiff regulations covering requirements for drilling in the Arctic made it untenable. The

company had gambled *billions* of dollars and years of its time to find and drill for oil in the sensitive Arctic Ocean. The company's disaster-ridden equipment and activities record did nothing to inspire confidence in their ability to drill responsibly without a spill; other oil companies watched to see whether the expensive venture would pan out. It didn't. And now, it won't.

This tremendous success for the environment came after years of grassroots pressure that escalated to a fever pitch over the summer of 2015. "Kayaktivists" in Seattle and citizens across the country protested to keep dirty fossil fuel in the ground. In Portland, Oregon, activists suspended themselves from a bridge and delayed a key support vessel from moving north. (See *Sierra Borealis*, June 2015.)

These were activists fighting for Alaska because of what this state represents for wild places, wildlife, and indigenous culture.

They also stood up for Alaska because of what Alaska represents for climate change--the threat that truly unites all of us across the nation and

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Arctic Drilling Victory

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across the world: they are part of a new climate movement that has emerged nationwide.

Shell's massive Arctic drilling rigs have become national symbols for the antiquated, harmful legacy of fossil fuel extraction and greenhouse gas production that now threatens our very climate worldwide.

But even as Shell left the scene of the Arctic, we knew there was more to be done.

The morning of the momentous announcement, Michael Brune, Sierra Club Executive Director, said of the company's decision: "Shell's abandonment of drilling and cancellation of all exploratory activity in the Arctic is joyous news for our climate, communities along the Arctic Ocean, and the hundreds of thousands of people who have joined in public protests saying 'Shell No' to Arctic drilling.

"We hope this announcement leads President Obama to cancel the proposed 2016-2017 lease sales, remove the prospect of Arctic drilling from the 2017-2022 Outer Continental Shelf five-year leasing plan, and permanently protect the Arctic from the dangers of oil and gas drilling."

Then, victory #two—no more offshore leases

Incredibly, two short weeks later on October 16, President Obama announced that the Administration had cancelled upcoming offshore Arctic lease sales and would not prepare for any further lease sales during the next year and a half, ending Arctic leasing during the Obama Presidency. This effectively means no new leasing in the offshore Arctic in 2016 and most likely in all of 2017. (It takes lead time to prepare lease sales even under a new administration.)

The Department of the Interior also refused applications from Shell and Statoil to suspend their current offshore leases so that they could extend the life of these leases beyond their current termination in 2017 (Beaufort Sea) and 2020 (Chukchi Sea).

The "Shell No" movement has definitively shown that "People Power" can and will continue to overcome Big Oil. Shell's leaving the Arctic and the Obama Administration's cancellation of offshore lease sales were momentous victories on their own, and together they set us on a track to take the Arctic Ocean off the table for oil and gas development altogether.

As we celebrate, we continue to make sure our oceans will be protected from an industry with an unforgivable track record. We now focus on strengthening our opposition to offshore drilling in 2017-22 federal plans for the Outer Continental Shelf that include potential leasing of areas off the Arctic and the Atlantic coasts. We will make sure the Obama Administration hears from activists nationwide: we need to keep dirty fossil fuel in the ground to prevent the most catastrophic impacts of climate change.

In Alaska, in 2015, we certainly have made some tremendous progress toward that end. ❖

-- Alli Harvey



From an Alaskan in Paris

I'm writing you December 3 from Paris where the United Nations climate talks are underway. It's a long way from my hometown of Shishmaref, Alaska. But there's a good reason I felt compelled to be here.

Shishmaref (population: 650) is a barrier island that has been eroding and flooding for the past 50 years, even before climate disruption was widely recognized. Over the past 35 years, we've lost between 2,500 and 3,000 feet of land. Within the next two decades, our whole island is likely to erode away completely and become uninhabitable.

While in Paris, I am determined to speak up for my community of Iñupiaq and for all native peoples disproportionately affected by climate disruption around the world. In 2001, my people voted to relocate along the coast of mainland Alaska. It really hurts knowing that we won't hunt, fish, and carry on in our traditional way as our people have done for centuries.

Even though we made this decision, I don't think anyone is really prepared. The older generations want to stay on the island because they've lived here their whole lives and don't want to leave their homes. But we begin to realize that we have no choice except to relocate, and we need a strong climate agreement and government help to do that.

For me as a young person, it's important that a climate agreement not only correct for decades of persistent pollution, but also prepare us for the future. We can't afford to wait any longer. Paris is our best opportunity to act.

With hope from Paris,

Esau Sinnok

Sierra Student Coalition

Indigenous Environmental Network

Arctic Youth Ambassador ❖

(from Sierra Student Coalition: <reply@emails.sierraclub.org>)

National Park Service tightens sport hunting regulations in Alaska national preserves

In October the National Park Service issued final regulations that prohibit certain incompatible sport hunting practices the Alaska Board of Game (Board) has allowed in several of Alaska's ten national preserves. The Service accepts the Board's sport hunting and trapping regulations provided they are not in conflict with ANILCA wildlife protection standards and NPS policy.

Yet the Board, in implementing the State's intensive game management law of 1994, has routinely ignored the federal requirements. It has published regulations designed to increase moose, caribou, and deer populations sought by sport and trophy hunters by reducing predator species, chiefly bears and wolves, and by allowing excessively long seasons and too liberal bag limits for "predator" species, primarily wolves. (See article on wolves, p. 4.) Although the NPS objected to the Board's efforts and formally asked the Board to exempt the preserves, the Board rarely agreed, and the Service declined to overrule the Board. Now, with the Obama Administration's backing, the Service has finally asserted its authority.



Wendy Morgan, "brown bear and cubs"

A key decision for the Service was whether to ban existing black bear and brown bear baiting. (See *Sierra Borealis*, June 2014.) In draft form, the regulations banned brown bear baiting only, while asking the public to also comment on black

bear baiting. Sierra Club Alaska Chapter members, other Alaskans, and citizens in other states urged the Service to

ban this practice.

According to the Service, it "received about 70,000 comments, and three petitions with a total of approximately 75,000 signatures, and collected input at 26 public meetings held across Alaska." The final regulations suggest that the preponderance of pro-bear, anti-baiting comments was more than enough to convince the NPS to outlaw both black and brown bear baiting.

Quoting the public notice of the final regulations:

- The NPS will continue to adopt future and current non-conflicting State hunting practices, including the State's list of prohibited practices.
- Prohibit taking brown and black bears over bait.
- Prohibit taking wolves and coyotes (including pups) during the denning (sic) season.
- Prohibit the taking of any black bear with artificial light at den sites including cubs and sows with cubs.
- State law also prohibits using dogs to hunt big game, with an exception for using dogs to hunt black bears. The NPS will not adopt this exception on preserves.
- State law prohibits taking big game that is swimming. The exception allows a hunter to shoot a swimming caribou from a boat under power or otherwise, and it also allows the hunter to shoot a caribou that has emerged from the water onto the shoreline while the hunter is still in the boat under power. The NPS will not adopt those exceptions on NPS preserves. The practice primarily takes place on the Noatak National Preserve.



What you can do

You can express your appreciation for the Service's action: Bert Frost, Regional Director, National Park Service
540 W. Fifth Avenue, Anchorage, AK
[\(907\) 644-3510](tel:(907)644-3510) ❖

-- Jack Hession

Sen. Murkowski holds ANILCA oversight hearing

December 2, 2015 marked the 35th anniversary of the Alaska National Interest Conservation Act. One day later Sen. Lisa Murkowski (R-AK), Chairman of the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee, held an oversight hearing on the Act's implementation. Six of the seven witnesses were from the State, resource extraction industries, and other critics of the Act. Valerie Brown, legal director of Trustees for Alaska, a public interest law firm in Anchorage, ably represented the pro-ANILCA side.

Critics of ANILCA recited the same old litany of complaints: the Federal Government has broken all the promises made to the State in ANILCA; access to state-owned resources is being denied; the federal government should not be managing subsistence on federal lands, a responsibility of the State, etc.

Murkowski summed up her and the State's position:

"It's the combination of all of those [federal actions]. It is the cumulative effect. It is the fact that the federal government, in ways large and small, is trampling on our state sovereignty over state lands and private sovereignty over private lands in Alaska."

After hearing additional testimony Sen. Murkowski may sponsor a bill to eviscerate ANILCA based on what the State and resource extraction advocates desire, including opening the coastal plain of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge to oil and gas leasing. Although such a bill would not pass in the next session, it would show her supporters and campaign contributors that at least she's trying to deliver what they want.

With this hearing the Chairman kicked off her 2016 campaign for a third full term. In 2002 her father, Frank Murkowski (AK) resigned his Senate seat to run for governor. Once in office he appointed his daughter to fill out the remainder of his Senate term, a decision that still irritates some members of her party. In 2010 she lost in the primary but returned to the Senate following a write-in campaign that gave her 39 percent of the vote. Next year she may face another primary challenge. Stirring up anti-ANILCA and anti-federal government sentiments will apparently be a major part of her re-election bid. ❖

-- Jack Hession

Pebble forced to back off from subpoenas to Environmental Organizations



Pebble Limited Partnership responded to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's proposed restrictions on large scale mining in the Bristol Bay watershed by suing the EPA for allegedly violating the Federal Advisory Committee Act (FACA), (see *Sierra Borealis*, June 2015, Sept and Dec 2014, and earlier for ongoing opposition to the proposed Pebble massive open-pit mine). In an effort to make its case, Pebble went beyond normal procedures, issuing subpoenas in October to more than 60 third-party interests, including the Alaska Conservation Foundation, Nunamta Aulukestai, Cook Inletkeeper, Ground Truth Trekking, and individual activists including Bob Waldrop and Tim Troll. In all these subpoenas, Pebble demanded documents, emails, research, and records of conversations dating back to 2004. The use of subpoenas against organizations and individuals leads to expensive legal bills and can effectively serve a purpose of intimidation.

The Alaska Conservation Foundation and Bristol Bay Regional Seafood Development Association objected, and on November 18, Judge H. Russel Holland ruled in a 14-page decision that Pebble had gone too far. "Both the District of Columbia District Court and the Ninth Circuit

Court have recognized that discovery such as that sought by plaintiff in this case has the tendency to chill the free exercise of political speech and association which is protected by the First Amendment," wrote Judge Holland. In response, Pebble dropped most of its subpoenas.

Pebble's case continues to move forward, but according to Judge Holland, it will be "more convenient, less burdensome, and less expensive" for EPA [rather than the third-party organizations and individuals] to produce the materials Pebble says are relevant to its case."

Meanwhile, EPA's proposed use of Section 404(c) of the Clean Water Act to restrict mining interests from depositing dredged and fill materials into salmon habitat in Bristol Bay uplands has brought national interests into the fight as interveners in the case. On the development side, groups opposed to the EPA itself now are funding much of Pebble's effort. Unfortunately, while the FACA case proceeds in federal court, Judge Holland has ordered EPA to halt further work on the preemptive restrictions of mining in the Bristol Bay watershed.

-- Pamela Brodie

The Outlook for Denali's Wolves

Denali National Park has long been known as one of the best places in the world to view wolves in the wild. More than 400,000 visitors come to Denali each summer, many citing their desire to see wolves as one of their main wildlife viewing objectives for visiting the park.

However, over the past five years, the state eliminated a protective buffer around Denali National Park, and the wolf population and visitor viewing success has declined to historically low levels. Wolf densities for the past three years have been the lowest in Denali since 1987. Park biologists counted fewer than 50 Denali wolves this spring. A visitor to Denali in 2010 had a 45 percent chance of wolf sighting. That was the last year before the buffer zone was eliminated. Now chances of a sighting have dropped to six percent.



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This October, the federal government finalized a rule banning hunting practices meant to manipulate predator populations in national parks and preserves. (See related article, p. 3.) The new rule will go into effect in January, 2016. Some of the practices banned include taking wolves when they have pups and using bait. Many argue that the rule will not have the impact intended, since wolf packs often roam outside of the park boundaries.

There have been several public proposals to expand the existing buffer zone for wolves. However, when the Alaska Board of Game eliminated the buffer in 2010, they also established a moratorium on future consideration of Denali buffer proposals from the public for at least six years. That moratorium ends soon.

Activists are meeting with Rick Steiner and Marybeth Holleman in Anchorage on December 10 to discuss the matter more. (**DENALI WOLVES FIRESIDE CHAT** 5 pm Dec. 10 at the Snow Goose Restaurant & Sleeping Lady Brewing Company, 717 W. 3rd Ave. RSVP to laura.comer@sierraclub.org.) Holleman is an Alaskan author and wildlife photographer; her latest book is *AMONG WOLVES: Gordon Haber's Insights Into Alaska's Most Misunderstood Animal*. Steiner was a marine conservation professor with University of Alaska for 20 years and now works as a consultant, advising governments and NGOs internationally on the environment.

Wolf advocates are asking Governor Walker to consider permanent protections for Denali's wolves.

-- Laura Comer

Arctic Refuge Wilderness bill introduced in U.S. Senate

On December 2 (the 35th anniversary of President Carter's signing the landmark Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act), U.S. Senators Michael Bennet (D-CO) and Ed Markey (D-MA) introduced a bill to designate the Coastal Plain of Alaska's Arctic National Wildlife Refuge as wilderness. This bill had 34 Senators as original cosponsors.

The Senate legislation is a companion to the Arctic wilderness bill introduced in the House of Representatives in January of this year by Rep. Jared Huffman, (D-CA2), H.R.239, the Udall-Eisenhower Arctic Wilderness Act.

Praise came at once from many environmental organizations. Alli Harvey, Alaska representative for Sierra Club's Our Wild America campaign, extolled the new bill: "For more than half a century Americans from all walks of life have advocated for the protection of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. This effort by Senators Bennet and Markey sets the right course to permanently protect the wonder of the region, the wildlife, and the future of our wild places."

"The Gwich'in Nation has been working tirelessly to protect 'The Sacred Place Where Life Begins' – the coastal plain of the Arctic Refuge, for more than 25 years now," said Bernadette Demientieff, Gwich'in Steering Committee. "We are so grateful to Senators Bennet and Markey."

Alexander D. Baumgarten, Director of Public Engagement and Mission Communication, The Episcopal Church, stated, "The Episcopal Church gladly welcomes the introduction of this bill that would permanently protect the Coastal Plain of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. We thank Senators Bennet and Markey for working to safeguard both the ecological integrity of this sacred landscape and the Gwich'in Nation's subsistence practices."

"The Arctic National Wildlife Refuge is one of the last ecosystems left in the world where wilderness and culture remain intact," said Jessica Girard, Northern Alaska Environmental Center. "We are a nation that understands and appreciates the myriad of values in this remote wilderness, not simply the economic value."

Rue Mapp, founder and CEO of Outdoor Afro, who visited the Refuge last year with Mike Brune, explained, "I've been lucky enough to feel the elemental connection between people and nature that exists in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. This symbol of the wild is an inspiration for what's possible, even for those who may never get to visit."

The House champion, Rep. Huffman, emphasized last summer, "My commitment to protecting our planet was renewed and reenergized by a recent trip to the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, where, a few weeks before President Obama himself toured the Alaskan Arctic, I was able to explore some of the last remaining untouched and undeveloped pieces of land in the U.S. While climate

change is bringing devastating drought and sweeping wildfires to California, the Arctic region is feeling even greater climate impacts -- permafrost thawing, shorelines and entire islands washing away, Arctic sea ice disappearing.

"Protecting our wild Arctic lands is something we must do for future generations. We can ensure that the vast deposits of fossil fuels in that area are left in the ground – not extracted, burned and sent into the atmosphere to further warm our planet. We can ensure a place of refuge to help the Arctic's unique and fragile wildlife survive the stresses of climate change. If we don't do this, no one will."

Background: Earlier this year, President Obama announced an historic wilderness recommendation for the Refuge that includes its biological heart – the Coastal Plain – as well as the Brooks Range and Porcupine Plateau. This was the largest wilderness recommendation ever made for a single unit of public land.

The sensitive Arctic Coastal Plain provides crucial habitat for muskoxen, wolves and migratory birds, calving grounds for caribou, and denning areas for polar bears. The Coastal Plain is threatened because the oil and gas industry has targeted it for industrial development. The new Senate bill and H.R. 239 offer a sensible alternative to several drilling bills in this Congress—that disregard ecological, cultural and spiritual values.



photo: Massachusetts Chapter



photo: Massachusetts Chapter

Sierra Club's Massachusetts Chapter cheers Ed Markey's championship for the Arctic

The Arctic Refuge, our country's largest national wildlife refuge, was first established as the Arctic National Wildlife Range on December 6, 1960, by President Dwight Eisenhower for its "unique wildlife, wilderness and recreational values." In 1980 ANILCA designated wilderness for most of the original Range, renamed the entire area the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, and expanded the acreage to the south.

ANILCA specified conservation purposes for the new refuge, as well as protecting subsistence opportunities. *It is time for Congress to act and finally pass wilderness legislation for the Arctic Coastal Plain for once and for all.* ❖

Supreme Court takes major ANILCA case

State seeks control of navigable rivers in national conservation units



In October the U.S. Supreme Court agreed to consider a challenge to the National Park Service's authority to regulate activities on certain navigable rivers within Alaska's national parks, preserves, and monuments. At stake is the integrity of the free-flowing wild rivers and river-lake systems in the park system units and within units of the wildlife refuge, wild and scenic rivers, and wilderness systems.

The initial lawsuit in federal district court was filed by John Sturgeon, an Alaska moose hunter, who had been found driving his hovercraft on the Nation River within Yukon-Charley Rivers National Preserve. NPS rangers informed him that he would be arrested if he continued to use his hovercraft, in this case for hunting. Under NPS regulations, hovercrafts are prohibited in all national park system units, including in Alaska.

Sturgeon lost his case in federal district court and then in the Ninth Circuit of Appeals. At issue is the interpretation of Sec. 103(c) of the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA), which Sturgeon claims prevents the NPS from regulating uses on the Nation River and other navigable rivers within conservation system units where the river bed and banks (up to the ordinary high water mark) are owned by the State of Alaska. (If federal



"The Journey" by Darrel Amos, Haida, 2009

land beneath navigable rivers and lakes was not reserved or withdrawn for various purposes by the federal government when states were

admitted to the Union, ownership of the submerged lands passed to the states.)

Sec. 103(c) provides that "No lands which, before, on, or after enactment of this Act, are conveyed to the State, to any Native Corporation, or to any private party shall be subject to the regulations applicable solely to public lands within such [national conservation system] units."

The Ninth Circuit found that the section does allow the NPS to regulate activities on the Nation River within the preserve, notwithstanding state ownership of the submerged land. Furthermore, the Service's regulation "could be enforced on both public and non-public lands alike within [national] conservation system units." Non-public lands consist of state, Native corporation, and private inholdings.

Ninth Circuit staff summarized the court's reasoning:

"The panel rejected

Sturgeon's contention that § 103(c) of the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act precluded NPS from regulating activities on state-owned lands and navigable waters that fell within the boundaries of National Park System units in Alaska. The panel held that Sturgeon's interpretation of § 103(c) was foreclosed by the plain text of the statute. The panel held that even assuming that the waters of and lands beneath the Nation River had been "conveyed to the State" for purposes of the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act § 103(c), NPS's hovercraft ban was not a regulation that applied solely to public lands within conservation system units in Alaska; and given its general applicability, the regulation could be enforced on both public and nonpublic lands alike within conservation system units."

The court's decision is available at <http://www.scotusblog.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/13-36165.pdf>

Plaintiff Sturgeon is supported by friends-of-the-court briefs from the State, which intervened in the case, plus several Native corporations and Safari Club International.

Although the Ninth Circuit decision broadened the issue to all national conservation system units (CSUs), the high court is not obliged to do the same. It could narrow the issue to the NPS's regulation of the Nation and other state-owned rivers flowing within Yukon-Charley Rivers National Preserve, and by extension to other NPS units.

If the court rules in favor of Sturgeon and his supporters, the result would be substantial damage to the purposes and values of the CSUs. There would be unrestricted access on navigable waters for operators of hovercrafts, boats equipped with jet outboards, jet boats, air boats, jet skis, and float, wheeled, and amphibious planes. Some operators would take care not to damage river resources and values, but there is a yahoo element, "motorheads" as they are known in Alaska, who would not be so responsible. Park managers would be hard-pressed to control illegal off-river motorized access, such as four-wheelers and other off-road vehicles brought in by boats.

Even in the unlikely event the State imposed some speed and other limits to protect in-stream and riparian habitats on these rivers, there would be little or no enforcement in such remote areas. The State does not manage its unclassified lands.

The Alaska Chapter is joining other conservation organizations in a friends-of-the-court (*amicus*) brief supporting federal regulatory authority. Oral arguments have been scheduled for January of 2016. ❖

-- Jack Hession

Alaskans face Increasing risks over gas pipeline

One of the biggest political questions in Alaska as the Legislature heads into its 2016 session in January appears to be the proposed natural gas pipeline across the state. There are environmental issues to a gas pipeline, but the issues most likely to be considered in the decision are its cost and how it would be paid for.

Based on cost alone, the project no longer makes any sense. In 2007, when Governor Sarah Palin signed the Alaska Natural Gas Inducement Act (AGIA), the gas line might well have been an economically rational decision. Gas prices vary depending on location and transportation costs. The standard price for comparison purposes is the "Henry Hub" price (where numerous pipelines hit tidewater in Louisiana.) This price hit its peak in 2008 at \$13.50 per million BTU (British thermal units). As of this writing (Dec. 1) it is \$2.20 -- a decline of around 80 percent in seven years.

Alaska's failed partnership with Transcanada has already cost the State at least \$500 million. The capital cost of the currently-planned 800-mile, 42-inch pipeline is now estimated to be \$45 - \$65 billion (and could, of course, go much higher with cost overruns). But at current natural gas prices, we now face an additional loss on every cubic foot of gas we would sell. And we would not even have the option of stopping selling the gas if we were under contract at low prices...and we would have such contracts in order to be able to finance construction. (It's like the old joke about retail sales: 'we lose money on every sale, but we make up for it in volume.')

To move forward on such a boondoggle would be an economic catastrophe for Alaska. And there would be only one way to pay for the error: the Permanent Fund.

It may seem to make no sense for the governor and legislative majority to continue to support a project that will bring only loss, not gain to the state ... but alas, people in love often act irrationally. And Alaskans have long been in love with the idea of a gas pipeline bringing us cheap natural gas for our own consumption, as well as bringing a new income stream to replace depleted oil reserves. We don't want to hear that the object of our love and longing for all these years will in fact bring us only poverty, not wealth. Add to that the fact that elected officials are desperate to find a replacement for oil revenues rather than face the politically costly choice of budget cutting, new taxes, and/or permanent fund dividend cuts. Add further that understanding the costs is complex and involves a lot of numbers that make our eyes glaze over ... and we now have a juggernaut rolling toward an irrational decision from which Alaska will never recover.

As for the environmental issues of a gas line, they are also complex. All fossil fuel use causes global warming. Gas puts out less carbon dioxide than oil for the amount of energy it provides, and oil puts out less than coal. The switch by power plants across the country from coal to gas has been made easier by the drop in natural gas prices. That

Chapter Outings Update

The Alaska Chapter will keep its Outings program going into 2016. We're gearing up for a big planning meeting early next year to schedule the Outings program for the first half of 2016. Look for future details and a schedule in the first Sierra Borealis of 2016 and on our Facebook page, www.facebook.com/SierraClubAlaska

In the meantime, think about where YOU would like to see the Chapter offer hikes or other outings next year. What type of outings? Do we need some family-kid-friendly hikes? Let's hear from Chapter members: email your ideas to laura.comer@sierraclub.org. ❖



Chapter hike along Campbell Creek-

drop has been caused by the new technology of fracking, which has greatly increased the availability of natural gas. Unfortunately, fracking not only has its own environmental problems, such as water pollution, but it also leaks a lot of methane gas into the atmosphere, and methane is 34 times more potent than carbon dioxide for trapping heat. So, much of the environmental benefit of gas over oil and coal is lost with fracking. Because natural gas from Alaska's North Slope does not involve fracking, it is more environmentally benign than most other fossil fuels. But it is still a fossil fuel and still contributes to climate disruption.

In years past, the Sierra Club saw natural gas as a potentially helpful transition fuel from coal to renewable energy. Unfortunately, because global warming has proceeded so much more quickly than older models predicted, there is no longer time for such a gradual transition.

Reasonable minds might differ on the environmental question of building a natural gas pipeline. Reasonable, rational minds should be able to agree that building it does not make economic sense. Unfortunately, Alaskans have a rich history of supporting boondoggles. We used to have the money to afford them. We no longer do. And the natural gas pipeline would be the biggest boondoggle of them all. ❖

-- Pamela Brodie

Finalizing the national Clean Power Plan

In November, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) hosted a series of four hearings on the Federal Implementation Plan for the newly finalized Clean Power Plan (CPP). The CPP is the first-ever national set of protections that will curb the carbon pollution that disrupts climate, threatens communities by causing extreme weather, and is linked to life-threatening air pollution—such as the smog that triggers asthma attacks. It will also spur the economy by motivating innovation, creating thousands of jobs and billions of dollars in new investments in clean energy sources. The four EPA hearings took place in Washington, DC, Atlanta, GA, Pittsburgh, PA; and Denver, CO.

The CPP gives most states a carbon reduction goal to help cut national carbon pollution from power plants by 32 percent from 2005 levels by the year 2030. However, if a state refuses to prepare a plan, drafts a plan that doesn't meet EPA's standards, or would rather have the federal plan, EPA may issue a Federal Implementation Plan for that state. Alaska, Hawaii, Guam and Puerto Rico are excluded from emissions rate reductions because they are noncontiguous; however other parts of the plan apply to them.

"EPA must take into consideration the needs of tribal communities when drafting a Federal Implementation Plan for the Clean Power Plan," said Carol Davis, coordinator of Diné Citizens Against Ruining our Environment. "In order for tribes to



photo: Matthew Diaz

Carol Davis of Diné C.A.R.E. speaks up for tribal rights in the Clean Power Plan

be full partners in this work, we should retain the ability to work with states to trade and sell credits, whether we are included in the Federal Implementation Plan or not. In addition, tribal communities must not be left out of the significant benefits that are available under the Clean Energy Incentive Program (CEIP), which should include guidelines for how the proceeds from selling credits obtained through the CEIP will be allocated. Without these guidelines, private developers who profit from the CEIP will have no incentive to share those profits with local communities, setting up tribes for a familiar pattern where outside forces come onto our land and profit from our natural resources without giving back to the community."

World leaders are gathering in Paris at this moment in December to negotiate carbon pollution reductions (see "from an Alaskan in Paris", p. 2), and the key to ensuring there is a strong international climate agreement is a strong and just Clean Power Plan.

The international community needs to see that the United States has a real, enforceable Clean Power plan to curb dangerous carbon pollution and that we are truly committed to combatting climate disruption.

➡ What you can do:

Send a comment to the EPA that we need a strong, effective, enforceable Clean Power Plan. The comment period on the Federal Implementation Plan is open through January 8: <http://bit.ly/CPPcomment>. ❖

-- Laura Comer



Sierra Borealis / alaska report

is the newsletter of the Alaska Chapter of the Sierra Club

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