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# Sierra Borealis *alaska report*



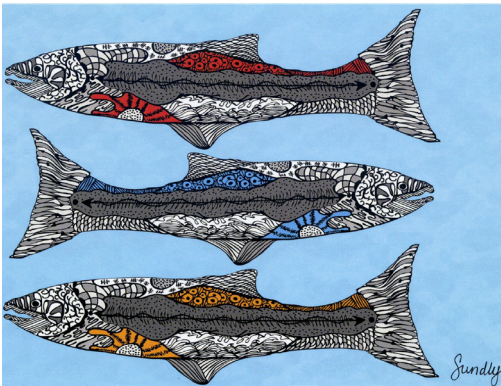
SIERRA CLUB ALASKA CHAPTER  
JUNE 2022

Update:

## The fight against Pebble Mine—*not over*: Comment to EPA -- now!

The U.S. environmental Protection Agency (EPA) announced on Wednesday, May 25, a proposed ban of the Pebble Mine Development, just five days ahead of the opening for the final comment period in what has been a long and taxing fight for Alaskans. This undoubtedly positive development has spurred some confusing feelings as the EPA appears to take steps toward closing the door on one of the state's longest conservation battles—but has not yet closed the door.

For some Alaskans, the effort to fight Pebble has gone on so long it has come to look like a lasting—even unwinnable fight. For many young Alaskans the grassroots movement to save the most productive salmon ecosystem in North America has been ongoing their entire lives. The movement against Pebble Mine shaped



Fish -- by Christine Sundly

and defined a pride in grassroots networking that has influenced Alaskan activism for nearly 30 years. The Bristol Bay fight has inspired, tested, and tired countless community members.

While the EPA's proposed ban may be a promising step towards the solution that fishermen and tribal entities want to see—a full veto—remember that our work as activists, concerned citizens, and lovers of the outdoors is not over.

Public comments are being accepted now through July 5, 2022. There will also be many opportunities for Alaskan voices to be heard at public hearings throughout June.

Please don't give up on the fight against Pebble Mine, we need as many Alaskans as possible to submit comments during June and show up for what could (we hope!) be the final stage in a long and arduous battle for Bristol Bay salmon and the key watershed that is their vital habitat. ❖

-- Heather Jesse

### Send YOUR COMMENTS TO EPA before July 5:

Comments on the proposed determination must be submitted on or before **July 5, 2022**.

Send written comments, identified by **Docket ID No. EPA-R10-OW-2022-0418**, by one of these methods:

**Federal eRulemaking Portal** (recommended method): Follow the online instructions at <http://www.regulations.gov> for submitting comments.

**Email:** Send an email to [ow-docket@epa.gov](mailto:ow-docket@epa.gov); include the docket # r EPA-R10-OW-2022-0418 in the email subject line.

### ➔ **Featured in this issue:**

- Time to stop Pebble for good!* p. 1
- A Just Transition from fossil fuels* p.2
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- Renewable energy* p.8
- Chapter Outing news: postholing* p.9
- Earth Day in Alaska* p.10

**Mail:** Send your original comments and 3 copies to: Water Docket, Environmental Protection Agency, Mail Code 2822T, 1200 Pennsylvania Ave. NW, Washington, DC 20460, Attention: Docket ID No. EPA-R10-OW-2022-0418. ❖

# A “Just Transition” – moving Alaska away from oil dependency

From May 20-22, interested people from around the state met in the Dena'ina Center in downtown Anchorage for the second Just Transition Summit to continue the conversation on what an Alaska that is not beholden to extractive industries would look like. Attendees included representatives from Alaska Native communities, environmental non-profits, and passionate citizens.

The summit was put on by The Just Transition Collective, a coalition of non-profit organizations, whose mission is to “build a shared visionary path for Alaska by addressing the growing political, economic, and ecological crises we face.” The goals of this community are to inspire and catalyze action, connect and elevate partnerships, and amplify the immediate needs of our communities.

The summit featured speakers who were diverse both in their culture and lived experiences, and who could offer hope for a better future for Alaskans. The principal extractive industries our state currently relies on for economic prosperity are harmful to the health of our planet and our communities, and whether our elected

officials want to face the reality or not, these industries will not be around forever. We need to ensure that our state keeps up with the modern global economic trend that is moving away from extractive development

toward renewable energy production. This trend is prioritizing the well-being of Alaskans in the process.

As Quinton Sankofa says, “transition is inevitable, justice is not.”

The summit shed light on some impressively innovative projects that are already taking place around Alaska. The Native Conservancy, founded by Duke Lenard, is utilizing traditional Alaska Native knowledge and subsistence culture to strengthen land and ocean conservation at the local level. For example, they have established kelp farms to restore habitats impacted by the Exxon-Valdez oil spill and revitalize local economies. <https://www.nativeconservancy.org/>

Herring Protectors is an Indigenous-led grassroots collective in Sheet'ká Kwáan (Sitka, AK) that works to protect the herring. They not only educate and organize their community on this issue, but they feed

their community by sharing harvests and protecting the subsistence way of life. This work is a perfect example of how justice, environmental preservation and economic prosperity can go hand in hand. <https://www.herringprotectors.org/>

A just transition for Alaska will require bold and creative solutions that begin at the grassroots level. It means prioritizing our neighbors, our lands and our waters—rather than high corporate profits. It means ensuring that folks who work in extractive industries are given the resources necessary to stay in Alaska and transition to new work. It means insisting to our energy co-ops and elected officials that we must support and promote renewable energy projects. It means recognizing the importance of Alaska Native knowledge and subsistence culture. It means deciding that the long-term health of our state and its people is more important than temporary monetary profit for a few.

Someday there will be an Alaska without the boom and bust economy based on oil. How soon? The choices we get to make *now* determine how quickly we begin the large-scale transition to a regenerative economy, and if we also prioritize justice as we do.

Thank you to Native Movement, Fairbanks Climate Action Coalition, The Alaska Center, Alaska Public Interest Research Group, Alaska Poor People's Campaign, Alaska Community Action on Toxics and Native Peoples Action for putting on the Just Transition Summit. You can read more about the Just Transition Collective at <https://www.justtransitionak.org/>. ❖

-- Andrea Feniger

Sierra Club Alaska Chapter Director Andrea Feniger is presently in Southeast to meet members and learn more about the local conservation issues of the region. From Sitka, Andrea has sent *sierra borealis* two photos showing features she doesn't get to see in Anchorage. Here's one: *find the other as you read through the newsletter!*

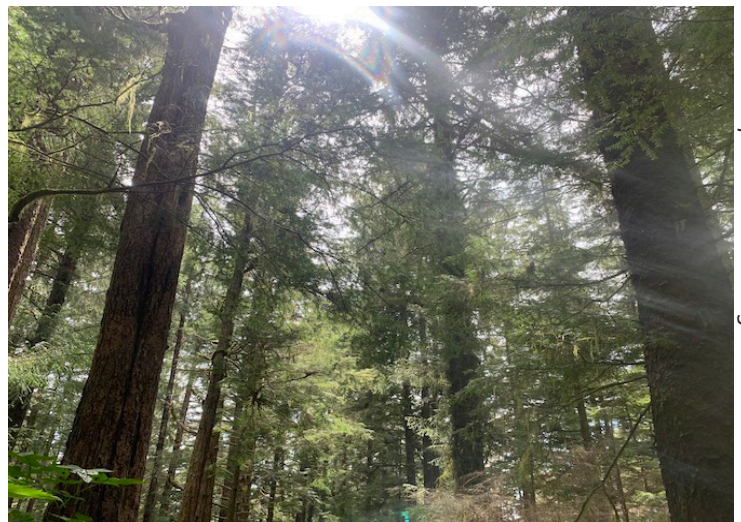


photo: Andrea Feniger

# May was National Bike Month -- let's cycle!

## It's good for YOUR health -- *it's good for the health of our urban environments*

The Alaska Chapter participated in events to mark National Bike Month in May. YOU can ride in Anchorage -- and elsewhere -- all summer long -- and then more!

Our Director riding to work along the Chester Creek Trail to celebrate "National Bike to Work" Day on May 20th. Thank you to the Parks Department and Bike Anchorage for putting on such a fun event.

selfie photo: Andrea Feniger

What matters for urban biking for transportation? See <https://usa.streetsblog.org/2022/06/03/study-cycling-is-10x-more-important-than-electric-cars-for-reaching-net-zero/>

**Correction:** in the March, 2022, issue of *sierra borealis*, the first two paragraphs of the page 2-3 article on "Ambler road controversy origins" contained some descriptive duplication, inadvertently put in by editor, that was superfluous.

### CAUTION!

Watch out for phishing scams claiming to come from our Chapter Chair, or other ExCom members. We've had a few members reach out to us reporting suspicious emails requesting that members purchase gift cards with the promise of future reimbursement. The Alaska Chapter will reach out to our members only for donations, using the proper channels- that means we'll never send you an unofficial email promising reimbursement or requesting emergency funds. If you receive such email, please notify Chapter Director Andrea at [andrea.feniger@sierraclub.org](mailto:andrea.feniger@sierraclub.org) or Chapter Chair Heather at [heather.g.jesse@gmail.com](mailto:heather.g.jesse@gmail.com).

photo: Andrea Feniger



Sierra Club Alaska celebrated "National Ride a Bike" Day on May 1st by riding about 12 miles from West Chester Lagoon to the edge of Kincaid and back.

## Special Campout planned for August

Register at: <https://act.sierraclub.org/events/details?formcampaignid=7013q00002H9LeAAK>



# WEEKEND OUTDOORS FOR MILITARY FAMILIES

Join us for a free camping trip and meet fellow conservationists! This event is open to active duty military members, reserves and veterans.

August 6th-7th

YMCA Campground at Peggy Lake

Scan QR Code to Register

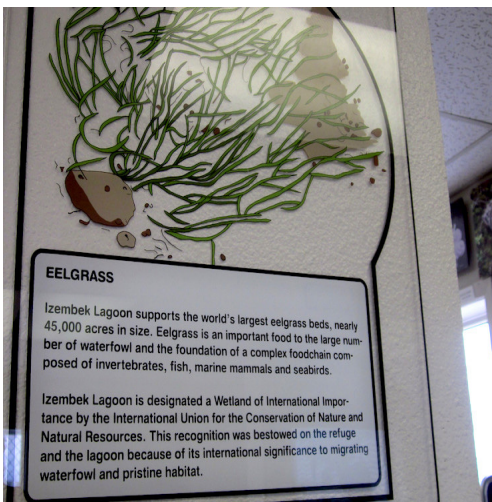


# Jimmy Carter and Bruce Babbitt join the fight against a road in Izembek Wilderness

In May, former president Jimmy Carter and former Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt along with former Interior solicitor John Leshy, filed *"amicus curiae"* (friend of the court) briefs in support of the ongoing lawsuit, filed by the Alaska Chapter and our allies, challenging the City of King Cove's effort to construct a ten-mile road through designated wilderness within the Izembek National Wildlife Refuge—near the end of the remote Alaska Peninsula.

Izembek's unique habitat, including wetlands, lagoons, and shallow bays, gives it "some of the most striking wildlife diversity and wilderness values of the northern hemisphere". The Refuge is a stopping place for millions of shore birds and other birds, and is known as a "Wetland of International Importance" and a "Ramsar site" (a wetland designated to be of global importance under the Ramsar Convention.)

It was Carter, during his presidency (1977-1980), who



Eelgrass exhibit in Izembek Refuge Visitor Center

worked hard to pass the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA) which he made his top environmental priority. ANILCA re-established this refuge and designated its wilderness.

The effort to build a road has been going on since the late

1990s—with the goal to connect the small coastal community of King Cove to another small community, Cold Bay, that has a long, paved airstrip—unlike most such small communities (the Cold Bay airstrip—third longest in Alaska—is a legacy from World War II when the area was a U.S. military base to repulse the Japanese invasion of the outer Aleutian Islands). King Cove is also home to the largest salmon cannery in Alaska—and those commercial interests wanted a road as a quicker way to bring its products to markets. More recently, King Cove residents assert that they need this road access to obtain faster emergency medical care. In 1998, Congress appropriated more than \$30 million to upgrade the King Cove clinic and provide a hovercraft for King Cove. (See **sierra borealis**, June 2020, June & Sept 2017, March 2013, March 2012, and earlier.)

Since it is illegal to construct any permanent road through designated wilderness, the Trump Administration tried to side step this prohibition by taking the strip of land in question out of wilderness via a land exchange with other lands owned by the state and King Cove Native Corporation. As an obvious

maneuver to get around the Wilderness Act and ANILCA, their effort has been under constant legal challenge. Trustees for Alaska represents the Sierra Club and half a dozen other environmental organizations in the ongoing series of lawsuits—now supported by the president who got ANILCA passed in the first place.

Two Trump administration attempts to orchestrate a land exchange to build the road were rejected by the district court, largely because they failed to address a 2013 Interior Department finding that the project would irreversibly damage the refuge and was not in the public interest.

Carter's and Babbitt's *amicus* filings came in response to a disappointing 2-1 ruling in March from a three-judge panel of the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals. The judges writing the majority opinion were Trump Appointees; this decision reversed earlier rulings and held that the proposed land exchange furthered economic purposes (although ANILCA does not consider economics) and that the Secretary was right to reverse the policy to now allow a road when all prior decisions had rejected the road. The Trustees for Alaska attorneys promptly asked for *"en banc"* rehearing—so that the entire court could review the majority decision.

## President Carter defends ANILCA and wilderness

In his *amicus* brief, President Carter points out how the majority's decision upholding the land exchange would violate the integrity of that wilderness and is an affront to the entire ANILCA law. President Carter begins by introducing himself and his role in negotiating and signing ANILCA and how: *"In that capacity, [as president] I signed into law the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act, ANILCA, the law whose meaning is the subject of this case."*

He underscores ANILCA's significance: *"ANILCA is no ordinary statute. As many scholars have recognized, it is one of the most exceptional pieces of conservation legislation enacted by our great Nation or any Nation. In sheer magnitude, it stands alone, establishing conservation mandates for more than 100 million acres of federal public lands..."*

He then cuts to the argument: *"My familiarity with and involvement in ANILCA's drafting and enactment, and my belief in the importance of this legislation are what impel me to file this friend-of-court brief... the decision of the panel majority in this case rests on a grave misunderstanding of the fundamentals of this vital law. In enacting ANILCA, Congress did not, as the decision concluded, vest the Secretary with 'discretion' to decide whether lands like the Izembek National Wildlife Refuge should be retained in their natural state or whether the economic and social benefits of road-building or other development outweigh the ecological and subsistence harms that such activities would inflict."*

*"That is precisely what ANILCA disallowed when it expressly designated particular lands for conservation and subsistence, legislative decisions that carry*

*—continued page 5,*

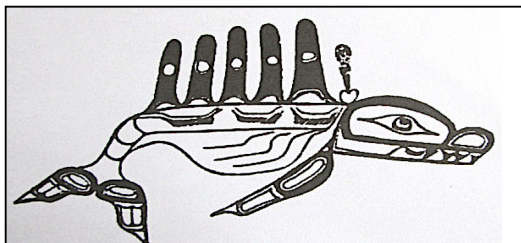
## University of Alaska Fiscal Foundation bill clears Senate Committee

On May 3 the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee approved S. 1128 by voice vote and sent it to the full Senate. Together with a bundle of bills that had unanimous consent in committee, S. 1128, is likely to pass the Senate. H.R. 2546, sponsored by the late Rep. Don Young (R-AK) is the House companion bill. A House hearing on H.R. 2546 has not yet been scheduled.

Sponsored by Sen. Lisa Murkowski (R-AK), the Senate bill authorizes the University of Alaska to select 360,000 acres from state land selections not yet tentatively approved or patented—which total about 5.2 million acres—and from reserved public lands under BLM's jurisdiction. Reserved federal lands are those set aside (withdrawn) for a public purpose by executive order or public land order from unreserved (BLM) public lands, to retain the lands in federal ownership. (See **sierra borealis** Sept 2021)

For the past several years the Alaska Legislature has underfunded the University as low oil prices led to reduced state revenues. S. 1128 is the University's response to this inadequate support. If S. 1128 is enacted, the University could select valuable public lands and then sell or lease them to raise revenue.

An example of reserved BLM public land is the Dalton



### Jimmy Carter joins defense of Izembek -- from page 4

corresponding, enduring protections.... When Congress characterized ANILCA as striking an 'adequate' balance between conservation and utilization, see 16 U.S.C. § 3101(d), it was not, as the panel majority's decision assumed, licensing future Interior ... Secretaries to trade away lands with irreplaceable ecological and subsistence value for economic benefit. . .

"This brings me to the principal reason for filing this brief. The understanding adopted by the panel majority here is not only deeply mistaken, it is also dangerous. The decision upheld the building of a road on congressionally designated Wilderness land through a drastic reinterpretation of the foundations of the statute. The secretarial powers the decision recognized would apply equally to National Parks, National Forests, National Wildlife Refuges, as well as Wilderness Areas and other conservation lands, and to all manner of development and extractive activities, not just road building. Congress's landmark action—the culmination of years of study and struggle—to designate for permanent preservation specific unrivaled national interest lands would be negated. In view of the national importance of ANILCA, and the serious impairment of the statute's integrity that the panel decision threatens, I ask respectfully that the full Court reconsider the case and reinstate the legal regime that Congress plainly enacted."

Highway and Transportation Corridor north of the Yukon River through the central Brooks Range. Flanked on the west side by the Gates of the Arctic National Park & Preserve and on the east side by the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, the corridor is exceptionally scenic, has high wildlife and recreation values, and deserves permanent protection in federal ownership. If S. 1128 is enacted, the University could select corridor land with high real estate value, then sell and lease it for commercial use, private land ownership, and other development, an outcome that would severely compromise the quality of the corridor.

The University's bid to select public lands is unprecedented. States are responsible for financially supporting their publicly-funded universities, not Congress. Congress has authorized state and Native selections of unreserved public lands in the Statehood Act of 1959 and the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act( ANCSA) of 1971 respectively, but it has not let any other group or organization select public land, reserved or unreserved, in Alaska. For this reason alone, Congress should take no further action on S. 1128.

This year, with oil at \$100 and more per barrel and expected to remain high in the foreseeable future, the State is flush with oil revenue. This has let the Alaska Legislature give the University what it needs to restore full operations. This turnaround in the University's fortunes is the context in which the House Committee will review S. 1128. ❖

### Secretary Babbitt reinforces the defense of ANILCA

Bruce Babbitt, Secretary of the Interior under President Clinton, together with Emeritus Law Professor John Leshy, who served as Interior Department Solicitor during the Clinton presidency, also submitted an *amicus* brief. They argue "that this Court should review this case *en banc*. ANILCA authorizes the Secretary of the Interior to acquire lands within congressionally protected area.... The panel majority read this acquisition provision as a divestiture provision that authorizes the Secretary to trade away lands for development. Left uncorrected, the panel majority interpretation empowers the Secretary to shred these protections by creating new non-federal inholdings that can be developed for commercial purposes without any further action by Congress. The stakes are high: ANILCA governs more than 104 million acres in Alaska. Congress protected these lands because they have 'global importance,' because we are losing 'natural habitats . . . at an alarming rate,' and because 'their permanent protection is a reasonable and attainable national objective.' ...But the panel majority has now converted ANILCA from a constraint on over-using Alaska's natural resources to a rubber stamp for any land exchange that the current Secretary may desire.... This Court should grant rehearing *en banc*, interpret ANILCA in line with its plain text, and ensure ANILCA can serve its protective purpose."

Stay tuned as this long battle continues. ❖

-- Vicky Hoover, (with thanks for assistance to Aaron Isherwood, Deborah Williams, Brook Brisson of Trustees, and Jack Hession)

# Endangered Species Day highlights extinction risk for wildlife species

May 20, 2022 was Endangered Species Day. It was not marked by cheering. One-third of all U.S. wildlife species are already imperiled or vulnerable--and nearly one million species are at risk of extinction. More than 1,600 U.S. species are listed as threatened or endangered under the federal Endangered Species Act (ESA). More than 150 U.S. species have not been seen in recent decades and are regarded as possibly extinct.

**BIRDS** - One-third of bird species in North America are declining and are in need of urgent conservation action.

**FISH** - More than 40 percent of freshwater fish species are threatened or declining in the United States.

**AMPHIBIANS** -Approximately 42 percent of amphibians are at risk in North America.

**REPTILES** - In the U.S. 33 percent of turtles are threatened and five percent of other reptiles are threatened.

**BUTTERFLIES** - Of the roughly 800 butterfly species in the U.S., 17 percent are at risk of extinction.

**BUMBLEBEES** -More than one-quarter of North American bumblebee species are facing some degree of extinction or risk.

**BATS** - An estimated 18 percent of bat species are at risk of extinction, with an additional 13 percent potentially at risk.

The rate of extinction of species has accelerated. This acceleration is caused primarily by human activities. Sprawling cities, more and more roads, clearing land for farms, clear cutting forests, new industrial-scale energy facilities on previously undisturbed lands --have all resulted in loss of habitat. Increased pollution of air, land and water from human activities has caused declines of fish, wildlife species, etc. Overexploitation of natural resources--overfishing, careless hunting, poaching of wildlife species--has caused a decline of many species.

The dramatic increase in extinction rate from 1,000 to 10,000 times due to human activities is being called the 6th mass extinction. Previously, there were five other big extinction periods caused by changes of weather, volcanic eruptions, etc. One of those mass extinctions may have been caused by a large asteroid colliding with the earth and creating a dust cloud that blocked the sun. This killed many plants, and animals such as the dinosaurs could not find food.

An example of human caused decline is the decrease in bird species. Many cat owners allow their cats to roam outside. Outdoor cats, mainly domestic cats, kill approximately 2.4 billion birds per year. Outdoor cats have contributed to the extinction of 63 species of birds, mammals and reptiles ([abcbirds.org](http://abcbirds.org)).

In the past two decades, American bumblebee populations have dropped 90 percent. Two decades ago, bumblebees inhabited the USA from coast to coast, but due to global warming, disease and habitat loss, bumblebees have disappeared entirely in eight states.

A class of pesticides known as neonicotinoids weakens the bees' immune system, disrupts their ability to communicate, and diminishes their ability to find their way home. These pesticides also affect honeybees. Bee keepers notice their colonies collapsing when a neighbor's yard is sprayed against mosquitos.

The American bumblebee plays an important role in pollinating many crops and wildflowers. Out of 100 crops that supply 90 percent of the world's food, 71 are pollinated by bees (*Environment America* by Carson Kahoe January 30, 2022). Threatened bumblebee species need to be placed under the protection of the federal Endangered Species Act (*Center of Biological Diversity* February 1, 2021).

## Harm done by predator control programs

In the USA, state Fish and Game and Board of Game agencies target predator species like wolves and bears in predator control programs. In Alaska, the ADF&G spends millions of dollars per year killing bears and wolves from helicopters, fixed-wing airplanes, and by paying trappers for wolf pelts. This scientifically questionable program is done to increase moose populations. The Alaska Department of Fish & Game often does not have accurate surveys of wolf and

bear numbers so cannot judge if these programs help. They sometimes have no previous surveys of bear and wolf numbers in game units.

Wildlife biologists agree that bears and wolves are important keystone species and help maintain natural ecosystems. But many Fish & Game and Board of Game agencies, pressured by hunters, trappers and agriculture businesses to increase the numbers of wolves and bears for hunting, ignore the consensus of biologists.

In Alaska members of the Board of Game--nominated by the Governor and confirmed by state legislators--are trappers, big game hunting guides, and an owner of a taxidermy business.

## Lower 48 rulings against wolves

In the Lower 48 states, wolves became nearly extinct from poisoning, trapping and shooting. -- continued on page 7



## Federal Subsistence Board weakens brown bear protection in Gates of the Arctic National Park

### Federal agency disarray featured

At its April meeting to adopt subsistence regulations for the 2022-2024 regulatory period, the Federal Subsistence Board, over the objection of the National Park Service, voted to increase the bag limit for brown bears from one to two bears per year in Gates of the Arctic National Park.

The office of Subsistence Management in the Fish and Wildlife Service, which evaluates proposed regulations for the Board, recommended the increase. The Interagency Staff Committee\*, which also evaluates proposals, submitted a statement by the National Park Service in opposition to the increase. Noting that "adoption of the [proposed increase] would provide additional opportunity for Federally qualified

### ESA and species extinction -- from page 6

The gray wolf was placed under ESA protections in January 1974. In 2020, President Donald Trump removed gray wolves in the Lower 48 from ESA protections. President Biden has not restored these federal protections, leaving trapping and hunting regulations with state Fish & Game and state Board of Game agencies.

In February 2022, a judge put some of the Lower 48 gray wolves back on the endangered species list (*February 11, 2022 Backpacker magazine, article by Adam Roy*). Unfortunately the court's decision did not apply to wolves in Montana, Idaho and Wyoming. Both Montana and Wyoming were criticized for the number of Yellowstone National Park wolves killed--after crossing the park boundary.

By the end of the hunting season in March of 2022, 25 Yellowstone National Park wolves had been killed, most by Montana hunters--including one Yellowstone gray wolf trapped by the Montana governor near the northern boundary of the national park (*Smithsonian Magazine February 9, 2022*).

The killing of National Park wolves is also a problem in Alaska. A piece of state land that juts into northeast Denali National Park is the Stampede Trail. Here, in winter Denali wolves follow caribou out of the park and onto the Stampede Trail, where during wolf hunting season, they are trapped and shot there. This has decimated Denali's northern wolf packs.

Yet, the Alaska Board of Game refuses to ban trapping and shooting of wolves along the Stampede Trail. As a result the prospects of wolf viewing by hundreds of thousands of visitors to Denali Park--the top value tourism destination in Alaska--have fallen. (*Outdoor News "Emergency order closes wolf season along Alaska's Stampede Trail" April 3, 2018 Associated Press*).

The Yellowstone National Park gray wolves are endangered by the Montana, Idaho and Wyoming wolf hunting laws that authorize widespread killing of wolves. Please send an Action Alert to Deb Haaland, Secretary of Interior regarding the relisting of Northern Rocky Mountain's gray wolves. Go to <https://earthjustice.org/action/restore-protections-for-northern-rockies-wolves-0?ms=drupal>. Thank you. ❖

-- by Susan Hansen, Alaska Chapter conservation chair

subsistence users," the NPS also said: "Conservation concerns exist for this brown bear population:" [separated into bullet points for ease of reading]:

- "Brown bear densities and reproductive output within Gates of the Arctic National Park and Preserve (GAAR) are among the lowest in Alaska. Limited food resources and a short growing season are likely major factors contributing to these demographic patterns;
- Based on reported subsistence use within the region, there does not appear to be a subsistence need to justify doubling the harvest limit from 1 to 2 brown bears within the GAAR portion of Game Management Unit (GMU) 24B;
- According to harvest survey reports within Anaktuvuk Pass, only 4-10% of households use brown bears, and across GMU 24, on average, only 15 bears were harvested per year between 2016-2018 and on average only half of the harvest was by Alaska residents;
- Reported brown bear harvest has remained consistently low (2.5%) over the last 20 years, not reflecting an increasing subsistence need, and low density and recruitment within the brown bear population across GMU 24B increase[s] the risk of overharvest."

Separately, the Interagency Staff Committee "...acknowledges the concern for the conservation of the brown bear population within GAAR. This proposal contradicts the affected land management agency's mission where harvesting



"Big Brownie" - by Dale DeArmond

predators is not permitted when there is no documented subsistence need."

Wildlife proposal 22-46 covered roughly the southern half of the park, and the identical Wildlife proposal

22-56 covered the northern half. WP 22-46

was approved 6-2. The NPS and BLM voted nay; the Fish and Wildlife Service and the Forest Service joined the BIA and the three subsistence representatives in supporting the increase. Had the Fish and Wildlife Service and Forest Service backed the NPS and the BLM, the proposal would have failed. The Board voted 7-1 to approve WP22-56; the NPS was the Nay vote.

A precedent for the two-bears bag limit was set in the 2018-2020 regulatory period. When the Board considered a two-bears increase in GMU 23 to the west of the park, the NPS, FWS, and the BLM opposed it, but not the Forest Service in the 5-3 vote to adopt the rule.

\* "Senior staff from the National Park Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Bureau of Indian Affairs, Bureau of Land Management and U.S. Forest Service. The Alaska Department of Fish and Game also participates to provide the State's perspective on proposals." (Board quote.) ❖

-- Jack Hession

# Renewables at scale can strengthen Alaska's economic and energy security

This article by [Andrew McDonnell](#) and [Matt Perkins](#) first appeared in the Alaska Journal of Commerce, posted December 15, 2021 <https://www.alaskajournal.com/authors/matt-perkins>

If you're like us, you might feel that the pace of technology breakthroughs is astounding. The phone you're holding in your hand was scarcely imaginable 20 years ago, and continues to relentlessly advance in performance, reliability, and usability. Remember flip-phones and family feuds over who was to blame for such a high bill from texting? Today, paying per text is obsolete, with waterproof smartphones now commonplace.

When Matt first entered the energy industry in the mid-2000s, renewable energy was like those old flip-phones — clumsy and with limited capabilities. Solar was just for off-grid cabins, wind power cost more than coal, and batteries were not cost effective for balancing the times when the wind didn't blow. The bottom line was that these new technologies still had unresolved component issues that got in the way of critical reliability. And such reliability is required, since electricity is more foundational for human society than ever before. But now, thanks to billions of hours of engineering and hard work by the 11.5 million people who work in renewable energy around the world, we've achieved what many once thought was impossible: Renewable energy is the cheapest, fastest-growing source of power globally — and the most reliable.

According to the U.S. Energy Information Administration, solar, wind, and batteries together will account for more than 80 percent of power plant capacity additions this year. Meanwhile, not a single coal-fired power plant is under construction in North America. Instead, wind and solar have become "firm" — where the intermittency of the resource is balanced out by smart system engineering and enabled by massive declines in the cost of batteries. Economies of scale and manufacturing consistencies have enabled downtime of just a few hours per year, which is ten times less than a typical gas or coal power plant. And the same software advances on your phone and computer have transformed the controls for renewables so that operators can monitor the plants from the comfort of the control room, and head out for maintenance on their own timetable.

The dollars and cents of renewable energy speak for themselves: It's now the cheapest source of power in nearly every part of the globe, including Alaska. And best of all, there's no variation in fuel pricing month-to-month, meaning that projects can offer a fixed, low rate of power for the entire 40-year life of today's equipment, without unpleasant surprises due to global economic forces. Put simply, renewable energy offers Alaskans more affordable and reliable

energy resulting in more money in their pockets.

Right here in Alaska, those advances in reliability and cost are manifesting in real time. Recently, Homer Electric Association installed a grid-stabilizing, 93-megawatt-hour battery. It's one of the largest in the U.S., and both Golden Valley Electric Association and Chugach Electric Association have released visionary calls for renewable energy proposals to help the community achieve the goals of low-priced, zero-carbon sustainable power. These are all signs that the electric co-ops are listening to the persistent requests from their members for the smart implementation of renewables. At the same time, it's important to note that there is a well-established and diligent permitting process at both the state and federal level that's required for these large projects, covering every angle of analysis from aviation to wildlife.

A renewable power plant is an upfront investment that eliminates typical recurring costs such as fuel and emissions controls and drives down the long-term energy cost of energy with stable, fixed prices that beat out inflation. It's an investment in the future of our state that enhances our economic and energy security while protecting land and air quality for generations to come.

Alaska's future is intertwined with renewable energy; we invite you to join us in working to make that future happen today. The immediate financial benefits to communities of today's proven technologies like wind and solar are now clearer than ever, and taking action to accelerate this industry sector today positions our state to become the future leader in new energy technologies, from green fuels to tidal power and beyond. ❖

(Andrew McDonnell and Matt Perkins are the founders of Alaska Renewables, a renewable energy development firm based in Fairbanks, Alaska. <https://www.alaska-renewables.com/>)

*Wind towers on the hill above city of Kodiak, Kodiak Island, 2017*



photo: Vicky Hoover



Nature beckons!  
Get Outside

## Chapter outing news for summer

### Early Summer hiking and post-holing conditions throughout the State

Don't let the good weather and high temperatures we've seen the last two weeks of May fool you. We experienced a true Alaskan winter last year with slightly higher than average snowfall (about 8 inches). There are going to be all of the usual implications of heavy snowmelt, but some will be felt more than others. This hiker has already taken note of a large number of run-off streams that are making most trails a bit muddier than usual. Some river crossings are already much deeper and more difficult than the average for this time of year. Established creeks are lapping at their bridges with a mighty fervor, and I've already come across one bridge, normally dry throughout most of the summer, that was slightly flooded--but still passable.

An especially grueling part of hiking in the Turnagain Arm area this spring and early summer has been the post-holing conditions. Even with the great weather and sunshine we've had, trails predominantly shaded,

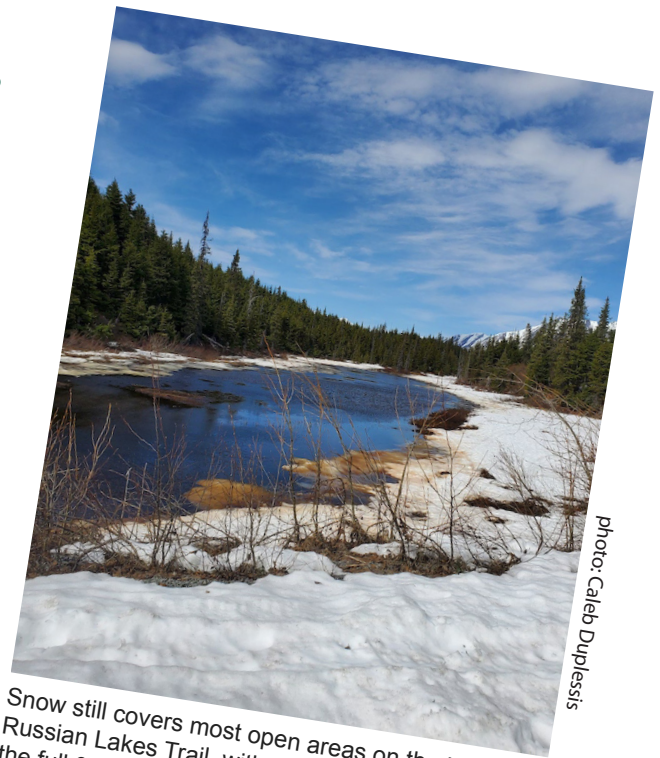


photo: Caleb Duplessis

*Snow still covers most open areas on the Upper Russian Lakes Trail, with post-holing conditions the full 9 miles to Upper Russian Lake cabin*

Most of the Cooper Landing Area, especially around Cooper Lake and the Russian River, is still heavily covered in snow with intense post-holing conditions.

If planning a day trek in this area, be prepared to bring snowshoes, or estimate that your trip may take over twice as long in these conditions. Be sure to consider these implications while packing and planning your trip as well; with burn bans active throughout the state, you'll need to come prepared to combat the snowmelt and nighttime chill using creativity and ingenuity rather than the traditional open fire.

Fairbanks is in true green-up season so snow is melting fast and may even be gone by the time you read this. With nowhere near as many high elevations, trails are warming up quickly. Many of the trails are still slushy and muddy so be prepared for some light trudging depending on where you choose to hike.

South facing slopes at the Birch Hill Recreation Area are great right now, reports one Sierra Club member. In general, south facing slopes around Fairbanks and the interior are looking better this year, with many already dried out. If you're looking for a mess-free hike, trails are good enough to simply wait a few days after a rainfall. The Interior Alaska Land Trust trails in Gold Stream Green Belt and Chena Flats are closed to ATV and snow machines until the ground dries but should be opening up soon.

Want to share your Alaskan outdoor adventures or hiking expertise with our readers? Contact our Chapter Chair or Chapter Director at [alaska.chapter@sierraclub.org](mailto:alaska.chapter@sierraclub.org) to become a newsletter contributor. It's easy! ❖

-- Heather Jesse, Alaska Chapter chair

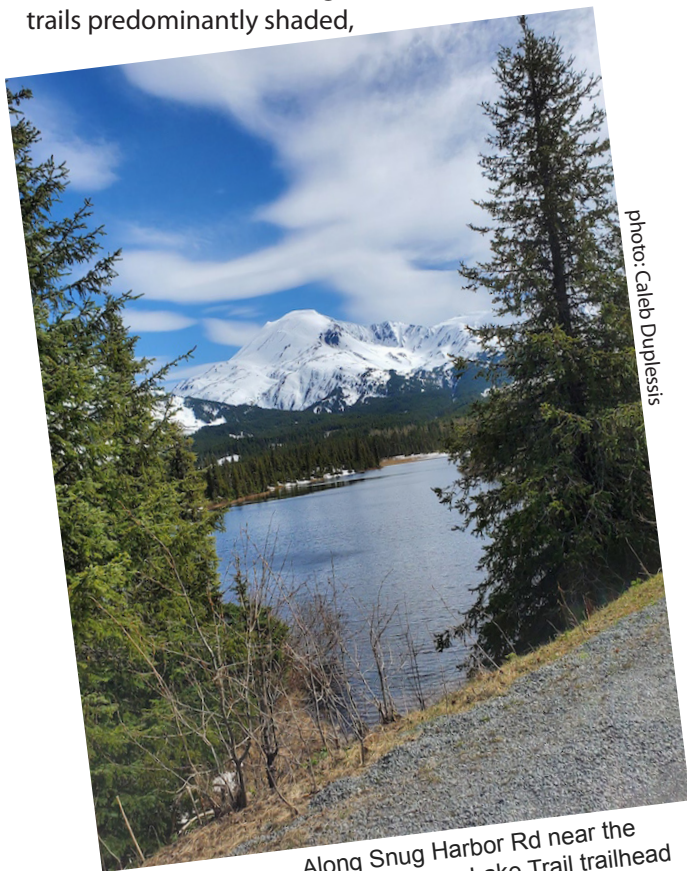


photo: Caleb Duplessis

*Along Snug Harbor Rd near the Upper Russian Lake Trail trailhead*

either by mountains or dense treetop coverage, are going to be plagued by post-holing conditions through most of the early and mid-summer. Adding to that are many areas, like the Crescent Lake Trail, that experienced avalanches this past winter which have blocked areas of trail, making treks slightly more difficult than usual.

## Alaska Chapter and Earth Day!

This year Earth Day was a big celebration for Sierra Club in Alaska--and for many partner environmental groups too. Recognizing Earth Day in late April reminds us that although we celebrate festively only once a year--we can and ought to live our lives so that every day is Earth Day!



Photo: Tanner Johnson

Posters, photos, frolicking art and fun! The more we show how we enjoy caring for Nature--the more others will join us. And--of course on Earth Day we're out tabling.



photo: Tanner Johnson



photo: Tanner Johnson

## Sierra Borealis / alaska report

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photo: Andrea Feniger

Here's another Sitka scene from Andrea--she was here June 4, and she will visit Juneau on June 11th and Ketchikan on June 15th--if you're there, in Southeast -- you can catch up with Andrea there.

"There is just one hope of repulsing the tyrannical ambition of civilization to conquer every niche on the whole earth. That hope is the organization of spirited people who will fight for the freedom of the wilderness."

-- Bob Marshall

