



# Sierra Borealis *alaska report*



SIERRA CLUB ALASKA CHAPTER  
JUNE 2021

## Conservation Easements to protect Bristol Bay area from proposed Pebble Mine development

The Pedro Bay Corporation is an Alaska Native group that owns land near Bristol Bay in Southwest Alaska, the site of the most prolific sockeye fishery in the world. Their land is located at Lake Iliamna, just where the backers of the proposed Pebble Mine hope to build a road to transport



Salmon: Evon Zerbetz © 1996

ore. Late last month, nearly 90 percent of the corporation's shareholders voted to let the Conservation Fund, an environmental nonprofit organization, buy conservation

easements on more than 44,000 acres and make the land off limits to future development — including a proposed mining road. (<https://www.conservationfund.org/projects/pedro-bay-rivers-project-alaska>)

For the small village of Pedro Bay on the shore of Lake Iliamna, the state's largest lake and a natural nursery for Bristol Bay's spawning salmon, the threat that in future the mine could damage this precious salmon habitat remains a chilling possibility.

The Conservation Fund, in partnership with the Bristol Bay Heritage Land Trust, has begun a fundraising effort to pay for the easement among organizations and individuals interested in preserving wild Alaska and the salmon population. They plan

to reach out to Bristol Bay's commercial fishing industry, which has been valued in recent years at more than \$2 billion, as well as other environmental organizations.

Under the Obama administration, the Environmental Protection Agency in 2014 took the rare step to veto the prospect of a mine on the grounds it could imperil the region's sockeye salmon fishery. But the agency reversed course during the Trump administration, allowing the Pebble Limited Partnership to apply for a federal permit. The company, a subsidiary of Canadian-owned Northern Dynasty Minerals, estimated its proposed 20-year operation would span more than 13 miles and require the construction of a 270-megawatt power plant, a natural-gas pipeline, an 82-mile double-lane road, elaborate storage facilities, and the dredging of a port at Iliamna Bay. EPA concluded the project would result in the permanent loss of 2,292 acres of wetlands and more than 105 miles of streams.

The Alaska Natives around Iliamna Lake have long relied on subsistence hunting and fishing, mostly for moose, seals, trout and salmon. The lake also has fishing lodges that attract anglers from around the world.

Nearly a decade ago, genetic studies of the salmon in the lake by University of Washington researchers indicated the northeast corner of Iliamna Lake and the rivers that fed it were the most productive breeding grounds for millions of salmon that in time make their way into Bristol Bay.

In 2017, the Bristol Bay Heritage Land Trust -- continued on page 2

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## Bristol Bay Conservation Easements -- from page 1

with the help of the Conservation Fund, negotiated an easement covering islands in the middle of the lake, more than 12,000 acres also owned mostly by the Pedro Bay Corp. That deal helped lead to the recent agreement to conserve three large parcels in the northeast portion of the lake where three rivers — Knutson Creek, Pile River and Iliamna River — feed into it. They plan to reach out to Bristol Bay's commercial fishing industry, which has been valued in recent years at more than \$2 billion, as well as other environmental organizations.

(--from *The Washington Post*, *Climate Solutions* section, June 8, 2021, and from *The Conservation Fund* website)

### Background (from Center of American Progress)

The Bristol Bay area's pristine streams and rivers support all five species of North American Pacific salmon: sockeye, coho, chinook, chum, and pink. But they are most famous for sockeye: About half of all the world's sockeye salmon come from Bristol Bay. Those fish, in turn, support 15,000 jobs and a fishery valued at \$2.2 billion. In 2018 and 2019, Bristol Bay comprised more than 50 percent of Alaska's total salmon value.

Discovered in 1988, the Pebble deposit contains gold, molybdenum, and copper. A Canadian company secured the rights to the deposit in 2001; then, in 2007, Pebble Limited Partnership—the current permit applicant—formed. After nearly two decades of tumultuous back-and-forth over permitting and protections, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers denied a key federal permit for the Pebble Mine in late 2020, stating non-compliance with Clean Water Act guidelines. This was a temporary reprieve, however, as Pebble Limited Partnership appealed the ruling in January 2021, and the mine's permit application continues.

A healthy ecosystem is essential to the well-being of Alaska Natives in Bristol Bay. The Yup'ik, Dena'ina, and Alutiiq people have lived in the region for thousands of years, and their cultures are tied to the land, the watershed, and the fish and wildlife that live in it. Bristol Bay is the ancestral homeland for 31 federally recognized tribes, who depend on the region's fisheries for their economic, physical, and cultural sustenance. Salmon is a critical food source in Alaska, and Bristol Bay provides nearly 30 percent of the subsistence harvest in the state. In 2010, six tribes, deeply concerned about the threat that large-scale open-pit mining poses to their way of life, petitioned the EPA for permanent protections for the region.

Today, the United Tribes of Bristol Bay consists of 15 federally recognized tribes and represents more than 80 percent of the region's population. In addition, these tribes have been joined by commercial fishermen, sportsmen, conservation advocates, and scientists to form a strong coalition of people that depend on a healthy, abundant Bristol

Bay fishery.

The people of Bristol Bay have called for the EPA to issue a permanent veto of Pebble Mine through the Clean Water Act's Section 404(c). A regulatory action under 404(c) allows the EPA to withdraw a region from consideration as a disposal site for an activity such as mining if the discharge will have "unacceptable adverse effects" on fisheries or wildlife. The EPA must act now to permanently protect this irreplaceable region for the sake of the people who depend on it--and indeed, for all Americans.

President Joe Biden has made an overarching commitment to improve consultation and coordination with tribes and to provide them with a "greater role in the care and management of public lands that are of cultural significance to Tribal Nations." The protection of Bristol Bay provides a clear opportunity to honor tribal sovereignty and support tribes in executing their conservation vision.

The Biden administration's America the Beautiful campaign, and its goal of conserving 30 percent of lands, waters, and ocean by 2030, calls for ambition in addressing



Source: Environmental Protection Agency

THE WASHINGTON POST

the climate and conservation crises. Its principles prioritize tribal sovereignty, strong climate action, job creation and locally led conservation. Protecting Bristol Bay invests in all these key goals. Permanent protections would be a win for tribal-led conservation, Alaska's economy, climate resiliency, and one of the world's last pristine wild places. ❖

-- based on a report from Jenny Rowland-Shea, Deputy Director, Public Lands; Center for American Progress (CAP)

<https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/green/news/2021/06/03/500181/permanent-protections-bristol-bay-win-tribes-climate-action-alaska-economy/>

# Governor Dunleavy asserts state management control of Alaska navigable rivers and lakes



In a March letter to President Joe Biden, Governor Mike Dunleavy said the State intends to take over management of navigable rivers and lakes that contain state-owned submerged lands (the beds and banks up to ordinary high water). The governor claims the State owns more than 800,000 miles of navigable rivers and 30 million acres of navigable lakes, including rivers and lakes within national conservation system units.

In a press release the governor complained that, "To date, the federal government has acknowledged Alaska's clear title to only 16 percent of state-owned lakes, and to submerged lands under only 9 percent of state-owned rivers. By retaining management of the rest, federal authorities block Alaskans from legitimate recreational and commercial use of these resources generally allowed under state law. Federal agents have exceeded their authority by wrongfully ticketing or fining Alaskans lawfully using state waters or using gravel bars or other state submerged lands in accordance with state law."

He offered no evidence of widespread ticketing or fining, or of blocking Alaskans' access to rivers the State claims it owns. And if the State owns the submerged lands in only 16 percent of lakes and nine percent of rivers it says it owns, then these are the only water bodies the State can legally manage while seeking clear title to submerged lands in other rivers the State claims.

## Background

Governor Dunleavy's assertion of state control is based on the U. S. Supreme Court's decision in *Sturgeon v. NPS* (2019) that found that state ownership of submerged land in navigable rivers gives the State exclusive control of uses of the water as well, provided that the submerged land and waters were not reserved for federal purposes prior to Alaska statehood. (*sierra borealis* June, Dec 2017, Mar 2016, Dec 2015.) Submerged land in navigable rivers reserved prior to statehood remains in federal ownership with uses of the land and water subject to federal regulation.

Unreserved navigable rivers and lakes within the conservation system units established in Alaska National Interest Lands Act of 1980 (ANILCA) thus have submerged lands owned by the State. However, until the *Sturgeon* decision, federal management agencies could regulate uses of these navigable rivers —notwithstanding state ownership of the submerged lands—in order to protect the values and purposes of these key resources. The decision eliminates that regulatory authority and exposes the rivers to incompatible and destructive uses.

With the *Sturgeon* decision in hand, the state Department of Natural Resources in 2019 and 2020 looked at rivers and river-lake systems in the 13 national park system units, found scores of rivers and river segments

that in its opinion are navigable, and put online detailed maps of them in time for the governor's announcement. (DNR next moves to the Tongass National Forest, the wildlife refuges, and the Bureau of Land Management lands.)

After considering the DNR's evidence for its findings, the Park Service may agree with the DNR in some cases and disagree in others. If agreement cannot be reached, a federal court makes the final determination of navigability.

In the meantime, the readily available DNR maps, and with the governor waving the starting flag, the rivers and lakes in the parks will likely see the arrival of heavily motorized visitors who happily believe that thanks to the governor anything goes on the rivers and the gravel bars.

Associate Supreme Court Justice Sonia Sotomayor, while concurring with the opinion written by Associate Justice Elena Kagan, wrote separately that the Court did not consider whether its decision extended to the designated wild rivers in parks and preserves, and she observed that Congress surely did not envision the State taking management control of them. She concluded that resolution of the state-federal conflict over management control rests with Congress:

"One final note warrants mention. Although I join the Court's opinion, I recognize that today's decision creates uncertainty concerning the extent of Service authority over navigable waters in Alaska's parks. Courts ultimately may affirm some of the Service's authority over out-of-park areas and Wild and Scenic Rivers. But that authority may be more circumscribed than the special needs of the parks require. This would not only make it impossible for the Service to fulfill Congress' charge to preserve rivers, made plain in ANILCA itself, but also threaten the Service's ability to fulfill its broader duty to protect all of the parklands through which the rivers flow.... Many of Alaska's navigable rivers course directly through the heart of protected parks, monuments, and preserves. A decision that leaves the Service with no authority, or only highly constrained authority, over those rivers would undercut Congress' clear expectations in enacting ANILCA and could have exceedingly damaging consequences. In light of the explicit instructions throughout ANILCA that the Service must regulate and protect rivers in Alaska, I am convinced that Congress intended the Service to possess meaningful authority over those rivers. If I am correct, Congress can and should clarify the broad scope of the Service's authority over Alaska's navigable waters.

Congress also needs to clarify the authority of the Fish and Wildlife Service, Forest Service, and the BLM, whose wildlife refuges, national forests, and public lands contain unreserved navigable rivers and river-lake systems. Providing the necessary authority is the next stage in the never-ending effort to protect the integrity of ANILCA. ❖

-- Jack Hession



# Administration defends Willow Development Project in NPRA— *Biden contradicts his own “America the Beautiful” 30 by 30 campaign*

On May 26, the Biden administration submitted legal briefs demonstrating that it will undermine its own climate goals and allow harm to local Indigenous communities by continuing to defend in court the flawed Trump-era approval of the Willow oil project, a massive oil and gas proposal in the National Petroleum Reserve-Alaska that is supported by congressional leaders like Alaska Republican Sen. Lisa Murkowski.

“The Biden administration had a chance to stand with Indigenous communities in how it responded to our lawsuit, and to stop a project that will further harm our people and our climate, but they chose not to take that opportunity;” said Siquiñiq Maupin, director of Sovereign Iñupiat for a Living Arctic. “This is especially disappointing coming from a president who promised to do better, but we’re not backing down and we will see them in court.”

Law firm Trustees for Alaska filed the lawsuit in November 2020, charging the Interior Department, Bureau of Land Management, and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service with unlawfully authorizing ConocoPhillips’ massive Willow Master Development Plan despite the project’s known harms to people and wildlife. In February, the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals ordered a halt to construction of the project after finding it likely that BLM had underestimated the impacts from Willow’s greenhouse gas emissions, and determining that Willow was likely to irreparably harm the community of Nuiqsut. (See *sierra borealis* March 2021 for news of the lawsuit.)

“This administration’s defense of Willow goes completely against its stated promises to take immediate and effective climate action, protect biodiversity, and take environmental justice concerns seriously,” said Bridget Psarianos, attorney with Trustees for Alaska. “This most recent action further erodes public trust since the Ninth Circuit has already paused the project due to Interior’s faulty and illegal environmental review. Yet, the Biden administration is continuing to defend the... Willow project [due to] relentless pressure from ConocoPhillips and Alaska’s congressional delegation.”

ConocoPhillips applied for permits to drill and rights-of-way in December 2020. The Trump administration gave the final green light and authorization for Conoco to begin construction on January 20, hours before President Biden signed an executive order directing all agencies to review and act on any decisions at odds with the administration’s climate goals, specifically including the Willow project.

## **Willow project contrary to 30 by 30 national directive**

On January 27, 2021, one week after taking office, President Biden issued an important executive order to address the climate crisis—as well as tackle the twin crises of species extinction and biodiversity loss. President Biden

set ambitious goals to help America and the world meet the urgent demands of the climate crisis, while empowering American workers and businesses to lead a clean energy revolution that achieves a carbon pollution-free power sector by 2035 and puts the United States on an irreversible path to a net-zero economy by 2050,

The order commits to the goal of conserving at least 30 percent of our lands and oceans by 2030 [known as “30 by 30”] and launches a process for stakeholder engagement from agricultural and forest landowners, fishermen, Tribes, States, Territories, local officials, and others to identify strategies that will result in broad participation.

The order clearly establishes climate considerations as an essential element of U.S. foreign policy and national security and affirms that, in implementing – and building on – the Paris Agreement’s objectives, the United States will exercise its leadership to promote a significant increase in global ambition and action.

In April, the President followed up on this order with his “America the Beautiful” pronouncement; this recognized that many uses of our lands and waters, including of working lands, can be consistent with the long-term health and sustainability of natural systems. It seemed to limit climate-mitigating actions to voluntary actions, no doubt responding to some strongly stated opposition by Senate leaders who claimed that implementing 30 by 30 could be a big “land grab” and hamper the economy.

Sierra Club and other environmental organizations are working to make the president’s climate and biodiversity efforts as strong as possible: the need, for the future of humanity, is urgent.

Many people ask just what exactly does “conserved” mean in the 30 by 30 context? What areas count? No simple, clear one-size-fits-all definition has yet been found for what constitutes conserved areas in this context. Clearly, protective designations—such as wilderness or national parks, play a big role, but it also matters how an area is managed—whether its management really enhances biodiversity. A problem example often cited is a designated wilderness where cattle grazing is allowed to degrade water sources: that should not count. Connectivity is important, and large protected areas linked by migration corridors count more than small isolated chunks of land. Private lands may count where significant efforts are made to enhance habitat for native species. Conserved areas also need to be durable or permanent.

It is generally thought that approximately 12 percent of the U.S. now qualifies as “conserved”; most western states, with extensive public lands, have more; California has about 22 percent conserved. Eastern -- continued p. 5, bottom



## Arctic Refuge rides high -- no more leasing now--or any time soon But Administration should permanently cancel drilling leases

— The Biden administration on June 1 suspended oil and gas leases in Alaska's Arctic National Wildlife Refuge issued in the final days of the Trump administration, reversing a drilling program approved by the Trump administration and reviving a political fight over a remote region that is home to polar bears and other wildlife—and a potentially rich reserve of oil.

The order, formally signed by Interior Secretary Deb Haaland, follows--and in essence extends--a temporary moratorium on oil and gas lease activities imposed by President Joe Biden on his first day in office (see **sierra borealis** March 2021). Biden's Jan. 20 executive order suggested a new environmental review was needed to address possible legal flaws in a drilling program approved by the Trump administration under a 2017 law enacted by Congress.

After conducting a required review, Interior said it "identified defects in the underlying record of decision supporting the leases, including the lack of analysis of a reasonable range of alternatives--required under the National Environmental Policy Act, a bedrock environmental law.

Bernadette Demientieff, executive director of the Gwich'in Nation Steering Committee, said in a statement that tribal

leaders are heartened by the Biden administration's "commitment to protecting sacred lands and the Gwich'in way of life." She thanked Biden and Haaland "for hearing our voices and standing up for our human rights and identity."

She hopes Biden goes even farther and cancels the leases completely; and she also stated, "We were expecting more. But, we'll take what we got. And we do understand that they have to follow their laws, something that the former administration refused to do."

Permanent cancellation of drilling leases would comply with the president's "30 by 30" directive and his goals of uplifting native communities.

In a joint statement, Alaska Sens. Dan Sullivan and Lisa Murkowski, along with Rep. Don Young and Gov. Mike Dunleavy, criticized the Interior Department action. Dunleavy said the leases sold in January "are valid and cannot be taken away by the federal government. Sen. Sullivan, who praised Biden last week for backing the Willow oil project, said suspending the Arctic leases "goes against the law, facts, the science and the will of the Native communities on the North Slope. It is nothing more than a naked political move by the Biden administration to pay off its extreme environmental allies." Sen. Murkowski called the order expected "but outrageous nonetheless."

Biden, on the campaign trail, had vowed to adopt permanent protections for the refuge. And then, on his first day in office, he ordered a "temporary moratorium" on oil and gas leasing in the refuge's coastal plain.

All activities related to the program — including the first-ever oil leases for the land, approved under Trump — are suspended until the review is complete, the Interior said. The department will then decide whether the leases (which are placeholder leases not issued to actual oil companies) should be "reaffirmed, voided, or subject to additional mitigation measures." ❖



photo: Marion Klaus

Polar bears are gravely threatened by Arctic development

### Willow defense goes against Biden's goals -- from page 4

states may always be below a national average. Alaska should have the most land conserved. What matters most is to keep getting more land protected and stronger management--there's no risk we'll protect too much land!

So, how does approval of the Willow project fit into the Presidential order on climate and biodiversity?

Clearly it is contradictory and goes against the strong goals voiced by President Biden. Industrial development of a pristine area is incompatible with enhancing biodiversity and preserving at-risk species.

Thirty-by thirty should also preclude some other current Alaska developments:

- The Central Yukon Plan by the BLM that would open new areas of natural landscapes to vehicle travel and other incompatible uses. (**sierra borealis** March 2021)
- Trump-era regulations harmful to wildlife during hunting in national preserves.
- Trump administration removal of Tongass National Forest from Roadless Rule protections.
- A road construction proposal across designated wilderness in Izembek National Wildlife Refuge

(A few examples--no doubt there are more--such as--mining near Bristol Bay--see Pebble article pp 1-2. ) ❖

(Compiled by editor from material from Trustees from Alaska and various 30 by 30 sources.)



Update:

## Alaska Native Vietnam-Era Veterans Land Allotment Act *Sen. Lisa Murkowski's latest proposed giveaway of the public lands*

On May 27 Alaska's Senator Lisa Murkowski introduced S. 1951, "A bill to make additional Federal public land available for selection under the Alaska Native Vietnam era veterans land allotment program, and for other purposes. As this newsletter goes online, the source and amount of additional lands are unknown as the bill's text is not yet available.

### Background

In a 1998 Act, and again in 2002, Congress enabled Native veterans of the Vietnam War era (1964-75) to submit allotment applications if they may have missed the opportunity to apply for allotments before the 1906 Native Allotment Act was revoked as part of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act. Dissatisfied with the outcome, Nelson Angapak Sr., a former vice president of the Alaska Federation of Natives, asked the Alaska congressional delegation to introduce his bill to award allotments to all Native veterans of the era and their heirs.

No action was taken on this bill in subsequent years



because Congress had earlier solved the problem and there was no basis in law and policy for his proposal. Finally, with the election of Donald Trump and Republican control of Congress, the bill became law. Sponsored by Sen. Murkowski when she chaired the Energy and Natural Resources Committee, the law lets the Native veterans and their heirs select up to 160 acres from Bureau of Land Management lands not reserved for other federal purposes. (**sierra borealis** March 2019.)

### Chugach State Park marks 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary

*Like many of us, Alaska State Parks celebrated a big birthday in quarantine last year. But luckily that won't stop the celebration! The incredible Chugach State Park turned 50 in 2020. To commemorate, Alaska State Parks is hosting "50fest!" in the Arctic Valley Ski Area July 30-31. Barring any safety concerns, Sierra Club Alaska will be there with our famous "I ♥ the Chugach" stickers. Follow Alaska State Parks on social media for the latest event updates, or celebrate on your own by recreating in Chugach all summer long. -- Andrea Feniger*

According to the BLM, as of May of this year 1.6 million acres of BLM land are available for allotment selections with another 28 million acres "potentially available." "Potentially available" refers to BLM-managed lands currently reserved under various public land orders that are being reviewed by the BLM. If the orders are revoked, the lands would become available. In the meantime, the BLM is encouraging eligible veterans to file selection applications on these lands. BLM's invitation is a sure sign that further millions of acres are likely to soon become available.

Sen. Murkowski's 2019 bill would have made national wildlife refuges, except refuge wilderness areas and the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, also available for allotment selections. Sen. Maria Cantwell (D-WA), then ranking minority member of the committee, opposed the provision. A compromise emerged: the Fish and Wildlife Service was to decide whether refuge areas should be made available, and report its findings to Congress.

In its November 10, 2020, report the Service determined that refuge acreage should be made available and identified a pool of 3.6 million acres from which allotments can be selected. "Based on current estimates from the Bureau of Indian Affairs, approximately 2,500 veterans may be eligible for allotments." If all eligible veterans and heirs select 160 acres in the refuges, 400,000 acres of new private inholdings would be created.

The Service calls its report a "draft." That allows the Service, now free of the Trump Administration's yoke, to find that its earlier determination is incompatible with refuge purposes as set forth in the 1980 Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA) and other applicable law, and that therefore refuge acreage should not be available for privatization.

Now Sen. Murkowski, possibly anticipating Biden Administration defense of the refuges, is upping the ante with her S. 1951. ❖

--Jack Hession



photo: Andrea Feniger

In Chugach State Park

Nature beckons!  
Get Outside

As many of you know, sadly, all Sierra Club Outings nationwide were put on an indefinite hold when the COVID-19 pandemic began last March. This was unfortunate since Outings are one of the best ways to enjoy the outdoors and connect with Nature and with like-minded community members.

Today, we have exciting news: We will be able to hold Outings again as of July 4, 2021! The Sierra Club Alaska Chapter is currently working on scheduling in-person Outings for the summer including hikes, trash clean-up events, and more. Please check [sierraclub.org/alaska](https://sierraclub.org/alaska) and the Sierra Club Alaska Chapter's Facebook page for Outings announcements—coming soon!

In the meantime...

No need to wait until July to experience Alaska's amazing great outdoors! Here are some ways to get outside and make a difference in June.

- This may be an obvious one but-- go for a hike or bike ride! The AllTrails app is a great place to start if you aren't sure where to find trails in your area, or what their difficulty level is:

<https://www.alltrails.com/mobile>.

- Alaska Trails in Anchorage has two volunteer opportunities coming up--on June 12 and June 19! Learn more at <https://www.alaska-trails.org/volunteer-opportunities>.

- Make Alaska even more beautiful by cleaning up trash on your own or with a group of friends! Collect data about the trash you are collecting with Ocean Conservancy's Clean Swell app. <https://oceanconservancy.org/trash-free-seas/international-coastal-cleanup/cleanswell/>

The data you collect will help inform and create

### 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 any 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).

## June Outings Update

### Chapter Outings to resume soon

long term solutions to the global ocean plastics crisis.

Do you have a great idea for an Outing? Do you want to become an Outings Leader and plan hikes and other outdoor activities in your area? Please contact Alaska Chapter Outings Chair, Alyssa Schaefer, at [alyssaschaef@gmail.com](mailto:alyssaschaef@gmail.com). ❖

-- Alyssa Schaefer



photo: Alyssa Schaefer

Reflections Lake (Palmer Hay Flats)-on a late-May hike

## June is Great Outdoors Month

President Joe Biden officially declared June 2021 as "Great Outdoors Month." This annual recognition began in 1998 and has since expanded into a month-long celebration of America's outdoors. This year's celebration comes with the additional recognition of the importance of the outdoors in promoting mental and physical health and protecting the outdoors and our landscapes as we work to address the climate crisis and the extinction crisis.

Sierra Club Outdoors for All Campaign Director Jackie Ostfeld responded to the Biden declaration with the following statement:

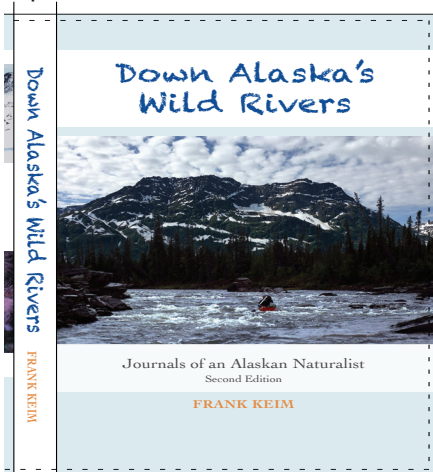
"As we celebrate Great Outdoors Month, the Sierra Club recognizes the important role the outdoors plays for us as individuals, for our communities, and for our planet. The outdoors is a powerful place. It can heal us in body and soul. It can put people back to work. And it can help us build resilient communities. The last year has made it clear that the outdoors is not just a nice thing to have -- it's essential to everything from individual physical and mental health to ensuring communities can resist the most damaging effects of climate change.

And more than ever, we recognize that the outdoors is not equally accessible to all in this country. **The best way to celebrate America's outdoors is to protect it.** We must work toward a just, equitable, and sustainable future where all people benefit from a healthy thriving planet and a direct connection to the outdoors [with that] access to the outdoors guaranteed as a human right." ❖



## Down Alaska's Wild Rivers: Journal of an Alaskan Naturalist, by Frank Keim

Frank Keim, poet, educator, environmentalist, naturalist, lives in Fairbanks, and has written several books of poetry, plus a previous book describing Alaska river trips—*White Water Blue*, from 2012. In this new book, Frank describes 11 different trips on wild Alaskan rivers—all but one being up in the Arctic; the last is in Wood Tikchik State Park



in south central Alaska—a vast compendium of connected lakes and rivers. At least one trek described is not actually on a river, but backpacking in the Sadlerochit Mountains in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge.

When I began reading Frank's new

book, I was amazed at the level of detailed day-by-day description: do we really need this much detail? I mused. But what at first seemed excessive quickly became the

“meat”, the crux of the trip descriptions—the daily journal format made me feel as though I was right there really sharing the venture with Frank and his family members or friends—different companions on the trips. As I read, I felt absorbed into the day-by-day account, including exceptionally detailed identifications and descriptions of many kinds of birds and plants—their appearances and (at least for birds) their movements and activities. Frank Keim has a truly thorough knowledge of bird species and also of the many flowering plants encountered. In time, as I seemed to be headed toward finishing the book too fast, I rationed myself to follow along—reading one day per day.

Rivers traveled include the Sheenjek, Kongakut, Yukon, Birch Creek, Spring Creek to Marsh Fork, Canning, Ivishak, Delta, and the Wood-Tikchik lake systems near the Agulukpak River.

To hint at the “flavor”—a few short quotes—selected more or less at random—this from the Spring Creek to Marsh Fork Chapter (Marsh Fork of the Canning River, western refuge):

“As we ate, we watched the herring gulls as they cruised up and down the river, hovering and swooping to the river's edge to catch insect larvae.... Our tattler showed up again, tweedling sweetly as it earnestly picked among the stones for its own food.... I wandered off to photograph the many species of wildflowers in bloom, especially rhododendrons, sweet pea, and northern yellow oxytrope that offered a profusion of fragrance and color everywhere....”

And on Birch Creek: “On the stretches of calm water, I kept my eyes peeled for birds. I wasn't disappointed. Red-breasted mergansers and common golden-eyes were busy escorting their young to hiding spots under the banks, several small flocks of Bohemian waxwings flew over, and a merlin complained in a tall spruce. High above us three Harlan's hawks and two bald eagles soared in the updrafts, and in the willows Wilson's and yellow warblers competed in song with the strident calls of northern waterthrushes....”

Overall, an easy enjoyable “virtual” Alaska experience.

Paperback, 354, pp. © 2020. \$28.50; contact author re purchases at frankkeim@gmail.com.

-- reviewed by Vicky Hoover



“The health of people and the health of the planet are one and the same.”

— Maryland Chapter Natural Places committee

— Maryland Chapter Natural Places committee



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### Sierra Borealis / alaska report

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