



Sierra Borealis *alaska report*

SIERRA CLUB ALASKA CHAPTER
SEPTEMBER 2021



Willow Project victory!

On August 18 I got the news that we won the court case against ConocoPhillips' massive Willow Master Development Plan! By "we", I mean the Northern Alaska Environmental Center, which joined the group Sovereign Iñupiat for a Living Arctic (SILA) and a coalition of other organizations who brought the legal case. I now work at the Northern Alaska Environmental Center, and I was in their Fairbanks office when the news arrived. As soon as my new co-workers and I heard the decision, we literally jumped up and down with joy!

The court ruling calls out major flaws in the review that was rushed through by the Trump administration, including leaving out the maximum protection alternative for Teshekpuk Lake, setting "arbitrary and capricious" incidental-take limits for polar bears, and skimping on the analysis of greenhouse gas emissions to downplay the severity of climate change. Ignoring some requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act skewed the results of the Trump-era Environmental Impact Statement and allowed ConocoPhillips' planned development to proceed.

As the crisis of climate change progresses, we know more than ever that we need to keep oil in the ground—to at least achieve carbon neutrality. The Willow Project would have pumped billions of barrels out of the ground, estimates around 100,000 per day at the peak with a project life of 30 years. Gov. Dunleavy's escalatory tweet in response to the court halting the Willow Project implied that our country will be forced to buy oil from terrorists. I can easily envision another alternative: local renewable energy! Plans are in place to invest in a just transition—"just" as in "justice" for oil, gas, and coal workers as well as BIPOC communities, a "transition" as economics shift

away from polluting fossil fuels and toward clean, sustainable lifestyles. The Democrats' climate-infrastructure bill makes investments in a just transition.

I cannot speak for our SILA (Sovereign Iñupiat for a Living Arctic) counterparts, but I saw their tears of relief at the court ruling and can only imagine how difficult and personal this fight is for them. I can imagine what a Living Arctic might look like, now and in the future. People hunting caribou as they have for generations. Ecological design for buildings so that they are climate resilient. Energy sources like wind, solar, hydro, that won't pollute or run out. And most importantly, sovereign Iñupiat people defending their way of life. ❖

-- by Christin Swearingen

Background: Federal Court blocks massive Western Arctic development

In mid-August a federal judge in Alaska blocked construction permits for a ConocoPhillips multibillion-dollar oil

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Teshekpuk Lake in Western Arctic Special Area of NPRA

photo: Florian Schulz, VISIONSOFHEMILDCOM/Earthjustice

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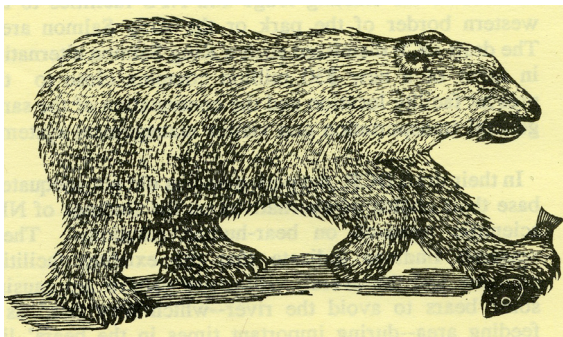
Court ruling blocks Willow project -- from page 1

drilling project on the North Slope, - the "Willow Project". Willow is located within one of the protected "Special Areas" in the Western Arctic's National Petroleum Reserve-Alaska, (NPRO). It was approved under the Trump administration and, as recently as May, had not been opposed by the Biden administration. Environmental groups, encouraged by President Biden's immediate January 2021 halting of leases in the adjacent Arctic refuge, chafed at the lack of action to help the Western Arctic and sued.

In August, the court ruling agreed with them. Judge Sharon Gleason faulted the Trump administration's analysis of the project's potential greenhouse gas pollution and contribution to climate change, as well as effects on wildlife, particularly polar bears. This analysis also failed to take into account legal protections in place for Teshekpuk Lake, an important subsistence and wildlife area on the North Slope in the vicinity of the Willow project. Teshekpuk Lake and its wetlands are one of the most important goose molting habitats in the circumpolar Arctic and are habitat for threatened species such as the spectacled eider, nesting shorebirds and waterfowl galore, and the 40,000-head Teshekpuk caribou herd. The ruling vacates a formal opinion by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service that said the project was unlikely to jeopardize polar bears' continued existence, and it makes moot the Biden Administration's May statement that the Willow Project was "in accordance with the rules at the time." (See *sierra borealis*, June 2021.)

The Biden administration may now have to redo the Trump administration's environmental reviews, which would allow a more rigorous analysis of the project's impacts. The oil industry, at best, is seriously impacted by the gradual but steady global move toward renewable energy sources. ❖

(based on information from Alaska Public Media, Aug 18; the New York Times Aug 19; and Center for Biological Diversity.)



© Dale DeArmond

Chapter election is almost upon us!

The 2021 Sierra Club Alaska Chapter election is coming up to elect three volunteer positions to serve on the Executive Committee of the Alaska Chapter for 2022. This year alone, the Alaska Chapter has fought back against road building and development in Izembek, Ambler, and Willow to name a few; we've also continued to help our members navigate the new reality of the digital grassroots organization and partnered with a UCLA student group to help bring awareness to Alaska's many conservation battles.

None of the work we've accomplished in 2021 would be possible without the work of our Executive Committee. Simply voting in the elections lets you help decide policy indirectly, but choosing to run or to nominate someone you know that has an interest in conservation and grassroots organization puts the decision making power directly in your hands.

Help decide Chapter policy

The Executive Committee makes all the major decisions on how this Chapter allocates our resources (e.g., hiring staff, joining or filing lawsuits related to environmental protection, planning other major events such as trainings, educational sessions, outings, social gatherings, or submitting comments to government agencies such as the National Park Service). In other words, Executive Committee members make decisions on the future of the environment, conservation, and outdoor life in Alaska by influencing Sierra Club Alaska policies and activities in the next few years.

The Sierra Club is one of the oldest, largest, and most effective grassroots activist networks in the nation, but none of our efforts would be possible without the passionate and dedicated volunteers that serve on our Executive Committee.

If you are a Sierra Club member and would like to run for the Executive Committee, or would like to nominate another member who is willing to run, please contact our Director, Andrea Feniger, and she can put you in contact with a member of our Chapter Nominating Committee.

The Chapter Executive Committee will appoint an Election Committee at its regular meeting on Tuesday, November 30; no candidates may serve on the Election Committee.

Election to be held digitally

The Chapter Election this year will be held digitally and hosted on our website, similar to last year's elections. If you are located in an area with an unreliable internet connection or no connection please contact any current Executive Committee member or our Chapter Director to request a paper ballot mailed to you.

-- Heather Jesse, Alaska Chapter chair

Deadline for Objections to Kensington Mine Expansion Closes

This gold mine, which is located on a patchwork of leased private and Tongass National Forest land between Juneau and Haines, is likely to receive the necessary approval to increase its footprint, as the deadline to submit objections has closed, and the United States Forest Service has previously green-lit the expansion. The Final Supplemental Environment Impact Statement (“FSEIS”) and Draft Record of Decision (“DROD”) for the expansion of Kensington Mine were published on July 9, starting the clock on a 45-day window for those who provided input during previous comment periods to submit objections.

The proposed expansion is intended to increase storage for waste rock and tailings from gold concentrate produced by the mine and will extend the life of the mine by another ten years, to at least 2033. Currently, an 88-foot dam at Kensington holds back roughly

4 million tons of liquid mine waste that contains heavy metals from ore. This tailing treatment facility, formerly known as Lower Slate Lake, lies roughly nine miles upstream from nearby Berners Bay, which is part of the traditional and unceded territory of the Auk Kwaan people. Berners Bay also provides spawning and rearing grounds for herring and hooligan, feeding opportunities for marine

mammals and migratory birds, and intact and active habitat for mountain goats, brown bears, and moose. While Kensington’s tailings dam is the largest in Southeast Alaska, the expansion would further raise the dam and increase the tailing treatment facility’s capacity to 8.5 million tons of waste, which has raised concerns that the dam will fail and that tailings will spill into Berners Bay.

As part of the environmental review process, federal law requires the Forest Service to consult with National Oceanic & Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Fisheries. While NOAA Fisheries’ role is advisory, it has asked the Forest Service to consider alternatives, including filtering out water from the tailings so that they can be stored in a more solid form, something that is already being done at Greens Creek Mine. Kensington’s general manager Mark Kiessling has said the water treatment facilities currently in place at the lake would remain until the Forest Service and Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation determine that they are no longer necessary. Kiessling also dismissed the possibility of filtering tailings, saying that high rainfall on Lynn Canal could make it a “muddy, soupy mess.”

The Forest Service’s own analysis has suggested that, regardless of whether Kensington’s mine waste is liquid or

solid, it presents an equal danger, which it characterized as “very low risk.” Earl Stewart, forest supervisor for the Tongass National Forest, stated that, “...the overall operations would be virtually the same as their current operations...This carries some weight because the mine is experienced in operating this project and meeting environmental requirements and has refined their processing to be efficient.” However, Alaska’s head dam safety engineer, Charlie Cobb, wrote in technical comments submitted on behalf of state permitting agencies that, “Effectively stating that the dam safety and geotechnical stability of all alternatives are essentially the same and all are subjectively considered as ‘very low risk’ prevents an effective and defensible comparison.”

In January 2021, Southeast Alaska Conservation Council (SEACC), along with Lynn Canal Conservation, Women’s Earth and Climate Action Network (WECAN), Alaska Rainforest

Defenders, Audubon Alaska, Alaska Clean Water Advocacy, and the Center for Biological Diversity, jointly submitted comments on the FSEIS, raising concerns, in part, about dam safety, climate change-related precipitation increases and flooding events, habitat degradation, the Forest Service’s failure to adequately monitor what is happening both on the ground and to the waters at the mine site, and the FSEIS’s failure to analyze a reasonably available alternative providing environmental advantages. SEACC previously, in

2005, filed a lawsuit against Coeur Alaska, which operates Kensington Mine, to prevent the company from creating the wastewater facility but lost in a decision before the U.S. Supreme Court in 2009.

Now that the 45-day objection filing period has closed, as of August 24, a 45-day objection review period has begun. The review period may be extended up to 30 days at the discretion of the Reviewing Officer. ❖

— by Traci Bunkers

Background (from Southeast Alaska Conservation Council (SEACC):

Kensington is the only mine in the U.S. allowed to dump chemically processed mine waste into a natural lake, destroying fish habitat and the lake’s natural character. The tailings dam has caused an acid rock drainage problem at the site.

In addition to its value as traditional territory of the Auk Kwaan, whose tribal leaders have called for the protection of its land and waters, Berners Bay is also heavily used by Juneau residents and visitors for recreation, sport, and subsistence hunting and fishing, birdwatching, weekend outings, and simply as a place to get away from it all. Berners Bay provides spawning and rearing grounds for herring and hooligan, feeding sites for marine mammals and migratory birds, and intact and active habitat for mountain goats, brown bears, and moose. ❖



photo: Pat Costello, LightHawk, from Earthjustice

Slate Lake before and after

Action Alert

Update: Alaska Native Vietnam-Era Veterans Land Allotment Program New threat to Alaska's national wildlife refuges

Senator Lisa Murkowski's S. 1951, introduced in May of this year, would require the Interior Secretary to make a 3.66 million acre pool in the national wildlife refuges available for allotment selections by Alaska Native veterans of the Vietnam War era (1964-1975). A hearing on the bill has yet to be scheduled. (see *Sierra Borealis* June 2021.)

According to the Bureau of Indian Affairs, approximately 2,500 veterans may be eligible to select allotments of up to 160 acres. Currently, veterans can select allotments only in 1.6 million acres managed by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), which adjudicates and conveys federal land selected by the State, Alaska Native corporations, Alaska Native allottees, and others. BLM currently plans to make another 28 million acres available for allotment selections.

Sen. Murkowski's new bill would thus add an additional 3.66 million acres to the present 1.6 million acre pool available for Native Vietnam-era veterans' lands selections, plus the additional 28 million acres planned by the BLM.

Background

S. 1951 follows a 2019 law sponsored by Sen. Murkowski that allows the veterans and their heirs to apply for allotments of up to 160 acres from vacant, unappropriated and unreserved BLM-managed federal land. Murkowski had proposed to make national wildlife refuges available for allotments, except the Arctic Refuge and designated refuge wilderness areas. Sen. Maria Cantrell (D-WA) objected, and the senators reached a compromise. Refuges remained closed to allotment selections, and the Interior Secretary was directed to determine and report to Congress whether the refuges should be open to allotment selections.

During the Committee's consideration of the 2019 bill the Sierra Club joined other conservation groups in defending the



refuges.

On November 10, 2020, the Fish and Wildlife Service submitted its report. Concluding that the refuges should be open, the Service identified 3.66 million acres for selections in 14 of the 16 refuges, except the Arctic Refuge, Izembek Refuge, and designated refuge wilderness areas. S. 1951 follows up on that Trump Administration report by requiring the Secretary to make the 3.66 million acres available.

Interior Secretary Deb Haaland can reject the report as obviously contrary to refuge purposes in the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA), other applicable laws, and Service policy. She can tell the Committee that the Administration opposes S.1951. . Sufficient BLM lands are being made available for this purpose, as required under the 2019 law.

-- Jack Hession

Please take action:

- Urge Secretary Deb Haaland to oppose S. 1951.
- Let Senator Murkowski and co-sponsor Senator Dan Sullivan know that you want the refuges protected, not burdened by thousands of acres of new private landholdings.
- Thank Senator Cantwell for her defense of the refuges, and urge her to oppose S. 1951.

Addresses:

The Honorable Deb Haaland, Secretary,
Department of the Interior

1849 C Street NW,
Washington DC 20240

Email: <https://www.doi.gov/contact-us>

The Honorable Lisa Murkowski
United States Senate,
Washington, D.C. 20510

Email: <https://www.murkowski.senate.gov/contact/email>
(Same mail address for Senators Cantwell and Sullivan)

<https://www.cantwell.senate.gov/contact/email/form>
<https://www.sullivan.senate.gov/contact/email>

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--we'll never send you any unofficial email promising reimbursement or requesting emergency funds. If you receive such an email, please notify Chapter Director Andrea at andrea.feniger@sierraclub.org or Chapter Chair Heather at heather.g.jesse@gmail.com.

Illegal rock quarry in Talkeetna outrages residents:

Indigenous traditions ignored

Early this summer, a group of Talkeetna residents reached out to Sierra Club Alaska Chapter about disturbing quarry activity that had been going on in their community. This quarry has been unpermitted, unregulated and disruptive since its beginning several years ago. The community members have been doing all they can to get answers and action from The Alaska Department of Natural Resources with no luck. The quarry, and all of its activity, is can be clearly seen and heard from Talkeetna's parks and residential areas. The article below details some of the egregious activities that have been going on. We will write letters to DNR in late September to let them know Alaskans are paying attention.



photo: Rebecca Cozad

Close-up view of Talkeetna quarry site

➔ **Please take Action**

Send a letter based on this article to:
Alaska Department of Natural Resources,
Division of Mining, Land and Water ;
ATTN: Marty Parsons
550 West 7th Avenue, Suite 1070,
Anchorage, Alaska 99501.

Take a picture of your letter and send it to
Alaska.chapter@sierraclub.org

-- Andrea Feniger

Anemone richardsonii (Richardson's anemone)

Beth Blattenberger photo, from "Some plants seen on national Alaska Sierra Club Kivalina backpack, August 17-27, 2018."



DNR Should Be "Ashamed of Themselves"

The State of Alaska has been operating a rock quarry illegally and carelessly in Talkeetna. Residents have been fighting for years to protect our community from this quarry, but have been met with only contempt from state officials.

This site has substantially impacted public park lands, wildlife patterns and our beautiful lakes. The rock crushing and processing disrupts the adjacent parkland by leaving clouds of diesel fumes hanging over the area and blasts ringing in the ears. The parks are home to miles of groomed trails beloved by participants in Talkeetna's famous Oosik Classic ski race as well as snow-bikers, snowshoers, hikers, swimmers, paddlers, bird watchers and lovers of well-planned natural spaces.

This quarry is surrounded by Mat-Su Borough parks and the Christiansen Lake Special Land Use District, which prevents even light industrial use. Proper permitting and safety measures have been bypassed. The quarry has ignored the EPA's industrial permitting process that prevents pollution to air and water. There have been instances of leaking equipment, and there is no storm water pollution protection plan to contain contamination from storm runoff into lakes and wetlands. The land was never classified or subjected to the required public processes that must precede use as a quarry.

The rich history of the Dena'ina, Athabascan, Ahtna and Upper Kuskokwim People is outlined in *Shem Pete's Alaska The Territory of the Upper Cook Inlet Dena'ina* (by J. Kari and J. Fall). The park and quarry area both have traditional Dene place names and uses. Despite this recognized history the quarry parcel has yet to undergo state and Federally mandated Historical Preservation and Archeology reviews. We and many in the Talkeetna Community respect Indigenous People, places, and non-renewable natural, cultural and archeological resources.

The brazen disregard for the community and lack of compliance with rules is not the precedent the state should want to set for itself. The community of Talkeetna will do all it can to protect wild places. ❖

-- Dan and Jill Adamson, Talkeetna

The Sixth Great Extinction -- and Alaska wildlife

Scientists say that planet Earth is in the sixth extinction crisis. *One million plant and animal species are predicted to "go" extinct in the next decade!* Mass extinction is defined as a rapid and widespread loss of biodiversity on earth. This extinction crisis is unique in that the cause this time is a result of human activity--not from Nature-based causes beyond human control—such as an asteroid.

Human pressures on the biosphere are growing rapidly. A recent example is the current coronavirus disease 2019 (Covid-19) pandemic, likely linked to wildlife trade. Selling wildlife in wet markets (as in Wuhan, China), can result in transmitting viruses from stressed wildlife to humans."

The current extinction rate has soared at a rate too fast for most animals and plants to evolve with it.

For example, 50 million years ago many different species of elephants lived on several continents. 4,000 years ago elephants remained only in Africa and Asia. Today we have only 1 million elephants, and we lose 1,000 elephants per month due to poaching for their ivory tusks. The poaching of tusks has resulted in some elephants evolving with no tusks or small tusks.

Only five species of crocodiles remain out of a previous 14 million crocodile species. It took only two centuries of hunting whales to reduce humpback whales to 10 percent of their population. Today in Alaska several species of whales are endangered--the humpback, the bowhead, Cook Inlet beluga, North Pacific right whale, fin, Sei, and sperm whales. Although the whaling industry--the first big threat to whales--has been greatly reduced, present threats to whales include loss of food sources, climate change, vessel strikes, entanglement in fishing gear, offshore oil and gas development, contaminants from waste water, noise pollution, and predation (killer whales kill many bowhead whales).

Humans are also impacting birds. Forty percent of bird species globally are in decline. In the U.S., the Endangered Species Act (ESA) signed by President Richard Nixon in 1973 has brought back many endangered species such as the bald eagle, the gray wolf, the whooping crane, etc. But recent changes to implementing the ESA by former president Trump in late 2020 eliminated climate change as a reason to consider for protecting species (such as the polar bear) and also allowed economic reasons to be considered in the listing of endangered species. Thus, if the oil and gas industry wishes to drill for oil or mining interests wish to mine for gold the industry can overrule the needs of endangered species.

Trump also removed the gray wolf in the Lower 48

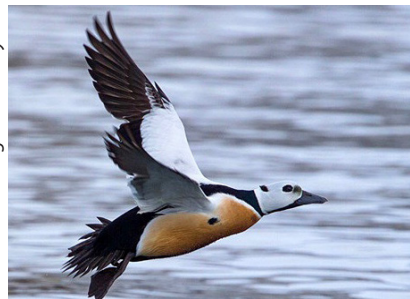
from ESA protection. Right away, state agencies in Wisconsin, Idaho and Montana reinstated harsh hunting and trapping regulations that endanger wolf populations in all these states. The agencies in these states are run by hunters and trappers as well as ranching and farming interests. Functionally wolves are extinct in most of the Lower 48. Unfortunately, President Biden has so far followed his predecessor's lead and refused to put Lower 48 gray wolves back on the Endangered Species list.

See "*Extinction: the Facts*", a 2020 documentary from the BBC hosted by David Attenborough.

<https://www.pbs.org/show/extinction-facts/>

Alaska's wildlife at risk

In Alaska, endangered bird species include the short-tailed albatross. Many of these birds were "harvested" (killed) by feather hunters prior to and at the turn of the 20th century. Later the short-tailed albatross became "bycatch" in longline fisheries when the birds got caught on fishhooks. They were listed as endangered under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) in 2000. The ESA protections created regulations for west coast longline fisheries and required use of "streamers" that scare away albatross from being caught by baited fishhooks. Another endangered bird is the Eskimo curlew. It has not actually been seen since 1987, and thus, it is critically endangered or possibly extinct.



Steller's eider

Birds in Alaska listed as threatened include the spectacled eider and Steller's eider. The spectacled eider is a large sea duck, and between the 1970s and the 1990s its breeding population declined by over 96 percent in the Yukon-

Kuskokwim Delta. While the decline was not well understood, on the breeding grounds and along migratory corridors, recovery teams determined that lead poisoning, predation and illegal hunting have restrained the recovery of this eider. Lead shot became illegal for waterfowl hunting in Alaska in the 1990s.

The Steller's eider is the smallest eider and exceptionally agile in flight. Its distribution in the arctic and subarctic is centered in the Bering Sea. Causes of its population decline are not well understood.

The best known and most threatened mammal in Alaska is the polar bear, which was listed as threatened in 2008. The current population in Alaska is 4000. One of Alaska's two populations is located along the Beaufort Sea and is shared with Canada. The other population along the Chukchi Sea farther west is shared with Russia.

Polar bears evolved over thousands of years to life in a sea-ice environment. They use sea ice as platforms to hunt ringed seal, bearded seal, walrus, etc. They mate -- *continued page 7*

photo: Ron Knight,
Center for Biological Diversity

Wildlife and the extinction of species -- from page 6

and breed on sea ice. The females will move to terrestrial areas near the coast and dig dens in the snow—from which they can continue to hunt for seals.

Climate change and the melting of sea ice, along with oil and gas development are the most obvious threats to polar bears. Seismic activities by oil and gas industry disturb maternal polar bear dens and may harm or kill polar bear cubs. The Biden administration released

One million plant and animal species are predicted to "go" extinct in the next decade!

a so-called "incidental take" regulation in response to a request from the Alaska Oil and Gas Association. This U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service authorization allows oil and gas operators to harass polar bears and walrus in the Beaufort Sea while exploring for oil and gas, extracting or transporting fossil fuels, and when building ice roads, etc. Trustees for Alaska and others objected to this "incidental take" regulation, but they were ignored by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

The rapid rate of extinction is caused by the rising rates of carbon dioxide and methane which are warming the seas and melting shorefast ice. The increase of CO₂ emissions causes the acidification of oceans. Growth of cities and draining of marshlands reduces essential wetland habitat for waterfowl. Overexploitation of wildlife by hunters, trappers and poachers is an important reason for extinction or near extinction. The increase of pollution and chemical toxins in our air and waste water negatively affects both humans and wildlife, marine and terrestrial.

In Alaska the Board of Game (BOG) regulates hunting and trapping. All seven members of the Alaska State Board of Game represent extractive industries, They own taxidermy businesses or are hunting guides for big game or are trappers. None of BOG members represent wildlife watchers, photographers, tourists who travel to Alaska to see living wildlife, or Alaskans who appreciate watching living wildlife.

The Alaska Governor appoints nominees for the Board of Game, and state legislators vote on these nominees. The Alaska State Constitution in section 8 says that ALL Alaskan residents have a stake in our natural resources. But Alaskans' voices are silenced on the Board of Game unless they represent the extractive sports of hunting, guiding, trapping and taxidermy.

The BOG creates excessive (large) bag limits for wildlife in the game units. For example in game unit 20C a block of state lands juts into Denali National Park (the Wolf townships.) During hunting and trapping season

for wolves (August 10 - April 15), trapping is unlimited, and each hunter is allowed to take ten wolves during the season. Wolves from Denali National Park follow caribou herds during the winter and spring wandering on to these state lands, where they are shot and trapped. This has decimated the wolf packs that denned in Denali National Park. It has also reduced the number of wolves seen along the road that goes into Denali National Park. No (zero!) Denali wolves were seen from buses driving along the road into Denali National Park during the summer of 2020.

Conservation groups in Alaska have asked the Alaska State Board of Game to ban hunting of wolves along the Stampede Trail in the Wolf Townships, but the BOG has refused. Conservation of these wolves is important to Alaskan residents, the tourism economy, and to science. Denali wolves have been extensively studied by Dr. Adolph Murie, Dr. David Mech, Gordan Haber and others.



Another group of wolves that lives on Prince of Wales Island in Southeast Alaska is nearly extinct. These wolves, known as the Alexander Archipelago wolf, are a subspecies (*canis lupus ligoni*) surrounded by large bodies of water preventing interbreeding with other wolves. They are dark and smaller than the gray wolf. High levels of legal and illegal trapping threaten this subspecies with extinction. (see **sierra borealis**, March 2021).

Threats to Alaska wolves and other predators have escalated since 2016 due to inadequate federal and state management and enforcement. The Alaska Department of Fish & Game (ADF&G) policy of "intensive management" or the killing of predators has had costly and punitive effects on wildlife. ADF&G spends millions of dollars per year killing bears and wolves from helicopters, fixed wing airplanes and paying hunters and trappers for their carcasses.

Alaska residents need to find, ask and support strong conservationists to run for the state of Alaska legislature in order to safeguard Alaska's wildlife. ❖

-- by Susan Hansen

* To see a complete list of Alaska's Endangered and Threatened species look for them under Alaska Dept. of Fish and Game - <https://www.adfg.alaska.gov/> or under U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service/Alaska - <https://www.fws.gov/alaska/>.

Nature beckons!
Get Outside

The big 50th anniversary celebration for Chugach State Park--delayed a year due to COVID cautions, finally took place this summer in a popular Chugachfest held at the Arctic Valley Ski Area on July 30 and 31st. We finally were able to gather and celebrate the 50th (and now 51st) anniversary of our beloved state park. The State Parks Department did a wonderful job putting on a week-end full of music, beer and stories of The Chugach! The photo shows the Sierra Club table at the event.

-- Andrea Feniger

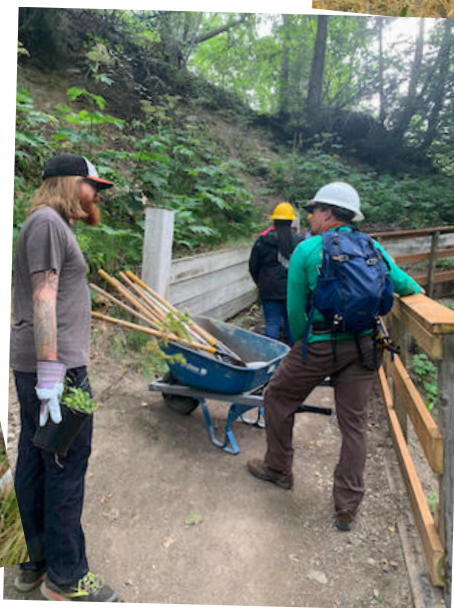
Chugachfest--a big celebration



photos on this page by: Andrea Feniger

McHugh Creek Tree Planting

In early August, the Alaska Chapter partnered with The Anchorage Parks Department to begin replenishing the McHugh Creek Recreation Area wilderness, which was victim to a man-made wildfire in 2016. Our volunteers were taught how to plant trees by the students in the Youth Employment in the Parks Program, who have been taking care of our parks and wild spaces all summer while exploring careers in outdoor industries. If you're hiking around McHugh Creek, look out for newly planted trees beginning to grow. We are so excited to see this wilderness thrive again! ❖



Hands on! Thank you, volunteers; you make all the difference! ❤️

Please visit us on Facebook:
<https://www.facebook.com/SierraClubAlaska/>

Nature beckons!
Get Outside

July outing: rafting in Wood-Tikchik State Park

In July, two Alaska Chapter volunteers--Jack Hession and Vicky Hoover, along with two other friends-- enjoyed a 12-day raft trip on one of the two extensive lake-and-river systems in western Alaska's Wood-Tikchik State Park. Directly east of the adjacent Togiak National Wildlife Refuge and its considerable

Jack Hession steers our raft on Lake Beverley



photo: Vicky Hoover

designated Wilderness, this largest state park in the U.S. has two "wilderness zones" and is

remarkable for its spectacular mountains. We were flown in by small charter plane from Dillingham to the northernmost lake in the system, Kulik Lake--in the wilderness zone. After Kulik Lake came Beverley, Nerka, and Aleknagik

Lakes. Our rented raft's outboard motor was useful on these huge lakes; we limited paddling mostly to the short rivers connecting the lakes.

We enjoyed 11 nights camping out at eight different camps--some on islands. A few two-night stays allowed leisurely explorations up several breathtakingly scenic fjords. Salmon were very visible swimming near the lake shore-- but our group of four included NO fisherfolk. We saw countless birds-headed by the loons with their plaintive call--and--from a distance -- admired grizzly bears walking lake shores in search of salmon.

On Kulik Lake, looking west



photo: Chris Wilson

The trip was planned and organized by Jack Hession, who has 40 years of experience in exploring remote wild Alaska.

During the trip we learned of a conservation issue of much concern to local lodge operators and fishermen: Jack has studied this issue further, and tells us:

"The Federal Energy Regulatory Commission is currently preparing an environmental assessment of a proposed 10-megawatt run-of-the-river hydroelectric power facility on the Nuyakuk River in the park. At an estimated cost of \$125 million, the project would replace costly diesel power used by

Dillingham, the regional center, and some surrounding Alaska Native villages.

During FERC's scoping sessions, many issues were identified by local residents, mainly the potential adverse effects on salmon and other fish. As for alternatives to the

project, FERC says, 'Commission staff will consider and assess all alternative recommendations for operational or facility modifications, as well as protection, mitigation, and enhancement measures identified by the Commission, the agencies, Alaskan Natives, NGOs, and the public.' This statement should persuade fisheries advocates to insist that the Environmental Assessment include an evaluation of alternatives such as wind, solar, and tidal power." ❖

--Vicky Hoover



At first camp, Lake Kulik

photo: Jack Hession



photo: Chris Wilson



Vicky and Jack at Camp 7

photo: Chris Wilson



photo: Chris Wilson

Sierra Borealis / *alaska report*

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University of Alaska to select federal land? *Reserved federal lands would be vulnerable*

State oil revenues have been declining due to low world oil prices and reduced production of oil on the North Slope. Increasing deficits--\$1.3 billion in the fiscal year ending in July--are causing reductions in state programs and agency budgets. The state-funded University of Alaska has been forced to reduce programs and faculties.

With no relief from the Legislature in sight, the University is asking Congress for permission to select federal lands with revenue-producing potential. Senator Lisa Murkowski is sponsoring S. 1128, the University of Alaska Fiscal Foundation Act. Rep. Don Young is sponsoring an identical House bill, HR 2546.

The bills would authorize the University and the State to jointly identify 500,000 acres of "available State-selected land" from which the University could select 360,000 acres. Available State-selected land is defined as (a) state selections not tentatively approved or patented; and (b) federal land upon which the State has filed a "future selection application". A future selection application, also called a top-file, is for federal land reserved by public land order or executive order for various purposes.

The State has selected about five million acres not tentatively approved or patented. An example of reserved federal lands the State has top-filed is the transportation and utility corridor for the trans-Alaska pipeline and related



facilities. In the Brooks Range the corridor adjoins the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge and Gates of the Arctic National Park and Preserve and includes the Middle Fork of the Koyukuk, a potential national recreational/scenic river, and the exceptionally scenic Dalton Highway.

BLM is currently reviewing the public land order that established the entire Valdez-to-North Slope corridor. If the Brooks Range segment remains federally owned, Congress could consider permanently protecting the land. In University hands the land could be sold or leased to produce revenue for the University.

University selection of state selections not tentatively approved or patented is a matter for the Alaska Legislature to consider, not Congress. But the University would need Congress to authorize the selection of state top-filed land.

Under existing law, the State can receive title to top-filed reserved federal land if the Interior Secretary revokes or modifies the public land order or executive order that reserved the land. In S. 1128, when the State and the University jointly identify top-filed land for University selection, the Secretary's discretion vanishes; the Secretary is required to convey the federal land to the University. In effect, the State and the University revoke the public land order or executive order.

In testimony on S. 1128 in June a BLM representative supported the goals of the bill and said the bureau would like to cooperate with Sen. Murkowski and the Energy and Natural Resources Committee in clarifying the bill's intent and definitions. The key issue, the bill's intent to let the University select important federal lands, was not mentioned.

Putting the University on a sound fiscal footing is a worthy goal, but this is the State's responsibility, not that of Congress.

-- Jack Hession