



Sierra Borealis

alaska report

SIERRA CLUB ALASKA CHAPTER
MARCH 2012



Arctic at Risk: the Refuge, Western Reserve, the Polar Bear Seas

"Where will it All End": that is the message spray painted on the Trans Alaska Pipeline in the photo that is pinned to the bulletin board behind my desk.

That picture was taken decades ago, but recent events made it seem as though that graffiti artist could have struck just yesterday.



photo: Richard Seifert

Only one day after a drilling well explosion on Alaska's North Slope on February 15, the House of Representatives voted to open the 1.5 million acre Coastal Plain of the pristine Arctic National Wildlife Refuge to oil and gas drilling.

The Refuge is home to the greatest diversity of wildlife of any protected area in the entire circumpolar region, including polar bears, caribou and birds that come here in summer from every state. For the past 50 years, since President Eisenhower established the Arctic National Wildlife Range, our country has remained committed to protecting this extraordinary area. Many Alaska Natives like the Gwich'in and

Inupiat people still rely on its wildlife for survival.

Opening this special area to risky drilling would not decrease the price we pay for gas or noticeably reduce our dependence on foreign oil. To understand what's at stake you need look only as far as Prudhoe Bay, where, less than 100 miles west of the Arctic Refuge, drilling has created one of the world's largest industrial complexes. Hundreds of spills occur each year -- polluting waterways, damaging the fragile land, and harming wildlife. A similar fate awaits the Refuge if the bill that passed the House becomes law. Fortunately the Senate and the President remain strong backstops to this happening, but we must remain vigilant.

As if this wasn't enough, just a few days later, with that North Slope blowout well still uncontrolled, the Obama Administration approved Shell's Oil Spill Plan for their proposed drilling in the Chukchi Sea. Sierra Club members have spoken loud and clear that we oppose drilling in the far northern Polar Bear Seas, in these waters, with their teeming diversity of life, where people rely on this natural bounty .

And the latest outrage: we just found out that Shell Oil is suing the Sierra Club and

-- continued on page 2

Featured in this issue

ACTION NEEDED

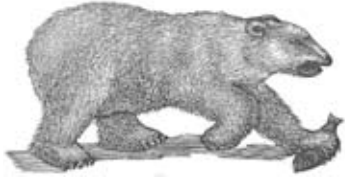
- ARCTIC P. 1-2
- IZEMBEK EIS P. 2
- WILDERNESS 50 P. 5
- PEBBLE MINE AND EPA P.10

ALSO

- ROAD TO UMIAT P. 3
- RAILROAD HERBICIDES P. 4
- WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT P. 6-7
- JUNEAU ROAD P. 8-9
- SUPERFUND SITE ? P. 9

several other environmental organizations to force them into court over Shell's plans to drill in the Chukchi and Beaufort Seas -- the Polar Bear Seas -- this summer.

Seems crazy, doesn't it? But it shows how nervous Shell is due to our many thousands of comments to the Obama administration saying America's Arctic is no place for oil drilling. So now they're grasping at straws to get into the Polar Bear Seas to drill.



Polar Bear Dale DeArmond © 1995

We're working to protect the Polar Bear Seas, home to 20 percent of the global polar

bear population because the risks are so great. In these icy seas, shrouded in darkness each winter and 1,000 miles from the closest Coast Guard station, clean up from a spill would be much harder than in the Gulf of Mexico--if possible at all.

From defense to offense

Into all of this pressure to play defense for our wildest lands and oceans, we are about to incorporate a little offense. In early April the Bureau of Land Management will release a DRAFT Integrated Activity Plan (IAP) for the National Petroleum Reserve--Alaska (NPR)--the Western Arctic reserve. We cannot keep the entire vast reserve free of development, but the plan gives us the chance to demand protection of the previously identified "Special Areas" in the Reserve. These key wilderness quality areas include the calving habitat of Alaska's largest caribou herd, the highest concentrations of grizzly bears and wolverines, and critical habitat for shorebirds and waterfowl.

I have been fortunate in my life to spend time in northern Alaska. This remote region is one of the wildest spots left on the globe. I have experienced first-hand the harshness and fragility of this special place which is unlike any other. I've watched walrus gather on ice floes, puffins "fly" through the water, and polar bears prowl the ice edge. While watching more than 100,000 caribou move across the tundra followed by wolves and grizzly bears, I felt an inkling of the awe that Lewis and Clark must have felt as they encountered the vast bison herds in the Great Plains. I have traveled with Alaska Native people, who have lived on these lands and waters for hundreds of generations, and listened as they describe their connections to this land and the importance of these animals to their culture and subsistence. *Some places are too special to drill, and the Polar Bear Seas, Special Areas in the Western Arctic, and the coastal plain of the Arctic Refuge are on the top of my list.*

Although the oil industry downplays its abysmal spill record, the most recent well explosion reminds us that drilling is a dangerous and dirty business. Our elected leaders should protect our treasured landscapes and expand our transportation choices, through investments in rail and other public transport, and make cars cleaner and more efficient, rather than make us more dependent on Big Oil.

On March 16 the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service issued a Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) on a state-federal land exchange in Izembek National Wildlife Refuge proposed by the Alaska congressional delegation with support by the State of Alaska and an Alaska Native corporation. A 60-day public comment period ends May 18.

In 2009 Congress directed Interior Secretary Ken Salazar to prepare an EIS and make a final decision, now scheduled for the fall. If he approves the land trade, Izembek Wilderness acreage would be conveyed to the State of Alaska to build a state road connecting two remote Alaska Peninsula communities. In exchange, the refuge would get some State and Native land. ([alaska report/sierra borealis](#) May 2009, etc)

The DEIS analyzes five alternatives, but the Service has not select a preferred alternative/proposed action. After hearing from the public, the Service will select one and submit its recommendation to the Secretary.

Sierra Club vigorously opposes the proposed land exchange, as it is not in the national interest; it would damage refuge wilderness and wildlife resources and set a dangerous precedent for the future of our Wilderness System.

⇒ WHAT YOU CAN DO:

Please urge the Fish and Wildlife Service to reject the land exchange in favor of the existing access system or state ferry service. Recommend either of two alternatives:

- No Action**, under which a marine hovercraft system that Congress has already funded would be completed; or
- New ferry service** -- provided by the State's extensive major Marine Highway [ferry] System.

Send your comments by May 18, 2012:

By email to izembek_eis@fws.gov,

By fax to [907-786-3965](tel:907-786-3965) or

By mail to: Stephanie Brady, Project Team Leader,
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service,

1011 East Tudor Rd., MS-231, Anchorage, AK 99503.

An Executive Summary and full draft of the DEIS is available online by going to izembek.fws.gov. ❖

-- Jack Hession

⇒ WHAT YOU CAN DO for the Arctic:

President Obama needs to hear from you! He will decide whether or not to allow oil drilling in the Arctic Ocean and decide whether or not to protect nearly 15 million acres of wilderness-quality lands in the Western Arctic and Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. Such protection would be the most significant conservation actions in three decades and would safeguard the critical habitat of polar bears, our two largest caribou herds, and some of the most important bird nesting areas in America.

To help go to: www.chillthedrills.org.

Or go to <https://secure.sierraclub.org/site/Advocacy?cmd=display&page=UserAction&id=7695>. ❖

-- Dan Ritzman

The Road to Umiat: *If you build it, they will not come*

Fix it first is Alaska's new watchword

Opposition is mounting to the latest road boondoggle in Alaska—the proposed road to the remote Arctic site of Umiat at the Western Arctic Reserve from the “haul road that goes up to Prudhoe Bay. Local opposition for this road spans the entire North Slope. Villages, tribes, and committees throughout the Arctic have passed six resolutions opposing the road,. The communities include Anaktuvuk Pass's city and tribal council, Native Village of Nuiqsut, Native Village of Point Lay, and the Inupiat Community of the Arctic Slope (which has representatives from eight North Slope communities).

In February, seven residents from four villages took the long flight from the North Slope to the state capital to meet with legislators and share their stories and resolutions against the road proposal.

The biggest concern is the impact of the road itself and of subsequent development along it on caribou herd migration routes and on other subsistence resources. The Sierra Club has been working with Arctic communities to highlight problems with this road and the development it would bring and the lack of benefit to the villages, and they in turn have welcomed the Sierra Club's and our coalition partners' efforts to add to their opposition.

“Caribou herds are very sensitive to the kind of industrial energy development, noise and access the Umiat road would bring,” said Lillian Gordon Stone, representing the Naqsrarmiut Tribal Council in Anaktuvuk Pass. “We are caribou people. We want to ensure that our children and grandchildren have the opportunity to carry on our traditional, subsistence way of life. Without the caribou we lose our identity as a people.”

The village has a strong relationship with caribou, but that relationship is already changing with more human activities in the region. “With air traffic and other disturbances we already have to go further and further, up to 50 miles from the village, and sometimes we still don't find caribou,” lamented Andrew Hopson, subsistence hunter and member of the BLM NPR-A Subsistence Advisory Panel.

The widespread opposition has changed the dynamic of the debate and has called on Alaska to “fix it first:” we need to maintain the infrastructure that we already have that benefits Alaskans every day. We must stop this project and other corporate giveaways that permanently scar our wild places.

Background: Arctic villages are few and far between, but the landscapes they reside in are unique and cherished. No roads connect these distant villages, and villagers want to keep it that way. The proposed road to Umiat would slice through 100 miles of remote Arctic subsistence hunting and fishing grounds -- important resource-rich

areas for subsistence, affecting caribou, moose, brown bear, furbearers, fish, and edible plants. Vast wild lands would become disturbingly accessible, losing their remote wildness. The Road to Umiat would cross four major Arctic rivers including the Colville, the largest on the North Slope.

We are caribou people. ...Without the caribou we lose our identity as a people.”

Many Sierra Club members have been fighting the Juneau Access Road for years, but the equivalent Arctic boondoggle, the Road to Umiat, is less known. Its purpose is not to connect communities to each other but to connect extraction companies to oil, gas, and coal resources. To be paid for with public funds, this road would be a subsidy for wealthy corporations. (See **Sierra Borealis**, June 2011)

The state of Alaska has a long record of failing to complete major transportation projects. The state has already spent more than \$133 million on five road and bridge projects, allocated another \$205 million more, and has no plans to allocate the \$5 billion needed to complete them. Among these rash projects are the Juneau Access Road, the Road to Umiat, the Road to Nome, the Knik Arm Bridge, and more.

The state should spend our money on smart projects that benefit Alaskan communities instead of subsidizing industrial corporations. The Department of Transportation estimates it has nearly \$600 million in deferred maintenance on roads, bridges and other surface transportation. This should be our priority -- not the road to Umiat that would cost from \$400-500 million dollars—not including expensive bridges and yearly maintenance costs. Instead of investing in bad projects that hurt Alaskans and the land, we need to “fix it first” and pursue smart objectives. ❖

-- Lindsey Hajduk



Herbicides on the Railbelt

The Alaska Railroad has applied for permits to spray three stretches of track between Anchorage and Fairbanks with an herbicide mixture of glyphosate and a surfactant called Agri-dex. Just this year legitimate peer reviewed studies in the Lower 48 revealed offsite ground and surface water contamination from glyphosate applications, and even noted that glyphosate was found in rainwater in these areas up to 80 percent of the time that it was tested. Local opposition, long expressed, is as strong as ever, yet the Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) and the Railroad seem uninterested in our valid concerns.

Some history on railroad herbicide use

Prompted by the concerns of people about the harmful effects of herbicides on human health and the environment, Governor Jay Hammond in 1978 banned the use of herbicides (chemical formulations designed to kill unwanted plants) by state agencies. Community members along the railway – from Seward to the City of North Pole -- then initiated a lawsuit to stop herbicide use by the Alaska Railroad. A federal judge determined in 1983 that herbicides could not be used without preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement as mandated by the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). In 1985, the state assumed control of the railroad, and the state ban on the use of herbicides was applied and continues to apply to the present.

The moratorium imposed by former Governor Hammond gave railbelt residents some peace of mind. That is until now. Each republican Governor since Frank Murkowski has renewed efforts to resume herbicide spraying in spite of residents' continuing and justifiable concerns that run-off from sprayed chemicals could impact the health of fisheries or other wildlife and the safety of berry picking. In 2005 cities, boroughs, and village governments along the railbelt expressed their opposition through official Resolutions against any herbicide use within their boundaries. The state outright rejected the residents'



photo: Russ Maddox

Mile 18.2 of the railroad near Seward-- standing water 10 feet from tracks; in this spray zone the railroad claims there are no water bodies within 100 ft.

opposition.

In 2007 the state authorized a test spraying in the Seward rail yard at the southern terminus of the Railroad. The Railroad's contractor sprayed the mixture of glyphosate and Agri-dex between the rails to kill the vegetation growing there. They had placed shallow monitoring wells between the rails to monitor for migration of the chemical as part of a "study" to determine its mobility and any risk that it may pose to water supplies. Residents' concerns ranged from direct exposure to the varied impacts of the poisoned run-off. To quantify any off-site migration it would seem to have been logical to monitor for presence of the chemicals outside the rails, too.

Mechanical means of controlling weeds had been used successfully for decades with no de-railings or serious problems with vegetation. These are issues which the Railroad now touts as examples of the calamities we will certainly face without the use of herbicides. They further try to rationalize their desire by stating that the Alaska Railroad is the only railroad in North America where herbicides are not used. Most of us see this as a badge of honor, but not so in Alaska.

The Railroad commissioned the University of Alaska Fairbanks to conduct a "study" of herbicides in the Seward railyard. To this day we are told the study was never completed, nor have results of this study ever been released. The Railroad and Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) insist that preliminary data suggest the herbicide does not migrate but still offer no reports or analytical data to support this claim.

In spite of not having a report and the study being incomplete, in 2011 the DEC cited the Seward study when it issued a permit to spray between Seward and Indian. Since then, Sierra Club volunteers have monitored the recent spraying near Seward and found many water bodies within the spray zones that the DEC and Railroad had not noticed. It turns out they use aerial images to locate water bodies that may fall within spray-zones. By simply walking along the tracks we found dozens of water bodies well within the 100 foot buffer zone that the Railroad had overlooked and probably sprayed. Knowing that the Railroad is again using aerial images to locate water bodies between Anchorage and Fairbanks, we can only assume that many more bodies of water will be overlooked and unnecessarily threatened with chemicals.

For every industry generated report claiming glyphosate and Agri-dex pose no risks, there are several peer reviewed independent studies that claim the opposite. Considering the high foot traffic and traditional berry picking and healthy fisheries within these proposed spray-zones, we should err on the side of caution.

Governor Hammond had it right when he acted on behalf of Alaska's citizens so long ago. ❖

-- Russ Maddox

Alaskans to celebrate 50th Anniversary of Wilderness

Put 2014 on your calendar for a big birthday celebration. The Wilderness Act will turn 50 on September 3, 2014, and celebrations around the country will mark this major American cultural and environmental achievement..

Already, Sierra Club, other wilderness groups, and the four federal wilderness managing agencies are organizing to get ready for the 50th anniversary.

In Alaska preparations are briskly underway. Alaskans plan to have local celebrations in at least Juneau, Fairbanks, and Alaska, with community events – such as concerts, lectures, a fair and certainly outings -- walks in the local parks and outings to nearby Wilderness areas. We will keep you posted in the Chapter newsletter as plans for 2014 develop.

But, to make it all happen, we need lots of volunteers to help, so, if you care about wild places, you can be part of the action!

Let's make all of 2014 America's year for wilderness

Wilderness staffers in the federal agencies are a vigorous and significant part of the 50th anniversary planning effort. In Juneau, Steve Kimball, Alaska Wilderness Program Manager for the Forest Service in Juneau, convened two meetings of interested folks in Southeast – with representation from Sierra Club, Alaska Department of Fish and Game, Forest Service, Juneau Audubon, University of Alaska, Alaska Wildlife Alliance, Southeast Alaska Conservation Council, Earth Care, Rivers without Borders, Alaska Wilderness League, a local book store, photographers, and others. Tina Brown and Mark Rorick attended for Sierra Club.

As Steve Kimball reported, "We've had two meetings with about a dozen attending each. There is a lot of energy and enthusiasm. Juneau had several successful

events for the 40th, and the group here is eager to expand on those for the 50th. An interesting thing is that even with this modest size group there is a rich assortment of skills and resources. Collectively we'll have an impressive array of wilderness photos, skills for web, marketing, materials development, etc. Activities already being planned include an Alaska Art exhibit (traveling), public forums, panel discussions, a Tongass wilderness book and calendar."

Mark Rorick is working on a 2014 display about Wilderness for the Alaska Chapter's Juneau Group.

Tina Brown has volunteered to act as the Alaska Chapter's coordinator for the 50th anniversary; Tina says, "We're off to a good start, but we need more volunteers and more ideas. I invite you to get involved and be part of this big national celebration. *Let's make all of 2014 America's year for wilderness.* Please give me a call or email me if you can help."

➔ **Contact Tina to help the 50th Anniversary of Wilderness be a big deal in Alaska:** (907)523-5402 tmbrown@aol.com

And join the Sierra Club Wilderness50 team at http://connect.sierraclub.org/project/Wilderness_Act_50th_Anniversary.

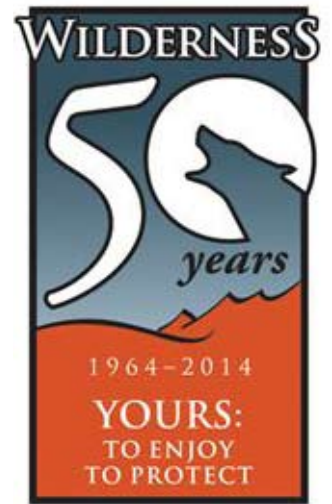
Background:

Signed into law by President Lyndon Johnson in 1964, the Wilderness Act established our National Wilderness Preservation System with 9 million acres to start with. There are now over 100 million acres nationwide in the system -- added by Congress over the years -- with more to come. Wilderness designation is the strongest and most permanent protection from development that our laws offer for wild

Federal public lands. And fully one half of the entire wilderness system in the nation is in Alaska! Wilderness areas include wild places in national parks, national forests, wildlife refuges, and western lands of the Bureau of Land Management.

Why is Wilderness significant? This uniquely American achievement is both an environmental and a cultural landmark. The American spirit of rugged individualism was born of wilderness—as settlers forged ever farther westward, ever farther from "civilized" communities. The Wilderness Golden Anniversary will celebrate our country's historic agreement to forego in certain special places the prevailing trend toward development and let nature dominate here – forever. ❖

-- Vicky Hoover, co-chair,
Wilderness50 National Planning Team



Nearly all the land area of Glacier Bay National Park is designated wilderness

photo: Bob McLaughlin

Alaska's Wildlife Management: Out of Control

Alaska's wildlife management programs are growing more and more contentious; in fact, every time the Alaska Board of Game meets, more controversy erupts.

In 2004, wolf reduction efforts, with the stated purpose of providing more moose for hunters, began in Game Management Unit (GMU) 16B, state lands approximately 40 miles southwest of Anchorage. Although wolf numbers have been reduced by more than 60 percent in this area, there has been no apparent increase in moose numbers.

In 2007, the Board of Game authorized a controversial baiting/snaring program for black bears in a 900 square mile portion of GMU 16B.

Last March, on a split 4-3 vote, the Board of Game expanded the black bear snaring program in GMU 16B by allowing brown bears to be snared as well as black bears, albeit in a smaller portion of the area. It is the first time since Alaska's statehood that grizzly bears can be legally trapped.

Regional Fish and Game supervisor Bruce Dale called the bear snaring program "an adaptive experiment," adding that "the effectiveness of reducing both bear species through harvest methods to increase moose calf survival has not been demonstrated."

Opposition to bear snaring proposal

At the beginning of March, the Board of Game met in Fairbanks. Perhaps the most controversial issue the BoG addressed at this meeting was an Alaska Department of Fish & Game (ADF&G) proposal for bear snaring in six game management units. The Game Board unanimously voted down a proposal to allow bear trapping in parts of the Interior, but not before several board members said they hope to see it used as a "tool" in the future and asked the Alaska Department of Fish and Game to do more evaluating and experimenting to that end.

Opposition to the bear snaring proposal was overwhelming from every segment of Alaska's population, as well as from down south and abroad. In just a little over two

weeks, the Alaska Center for the Environment collected 3,300 signatures opposing bear snaring. During a longer period, the Alaska Wildlife Alliance collected more than 4,200 signatures opposing bear snaring.

Former Department of Fish & Game bear researcher John Schoen, who has spent 20 years with ADF&G, presented a statement backed by 78 biologists, all with Alaska wildlife experience, opposing snaring. Former Governor Tony Knowles spoke before the BoG last January in Anchorage, calling snaring "unscientific," "unethical," and "a train wreck" of wildlife management policy.

Former ADF&G Commissioner Frank Rue sent comments to the BoG opposing bear snaring, as did professor emeritus at the Institute of Arctic Biology and the Department of Biology and Wildlife at UAF, Dr. David Klein; Dr. Klein also submitted a letter to the editor of the Fairbanks *News Miner* on the issue.

Former ADF&G wildlife biologist Rick Sinnott has written articles opposing bear snaring. In one, he stated that "when politicians force scientists and managers to allocate resources for a select few - in this case some hunters and guides - and ignore the majority of the public, it seems as though the pendulum has swung too far." Wildlife biologist and former BoG member Vic Van Ballenberghe said that such indiscriminate killing is incompatible with scientific principles of modern wildlife management. Former BoG member Joel Bennett sent comments to the BoG opposing bear snaring.

Native leaders such as Maxine Franklin oppose bear snaring. Bear hunter and big game hunting guide Karl Braendel wrote a piece for the *Anchorage Daily News* opposing bear snaring. The president of Safari Club International's Alaska Chapter, Terry Holliday, told the Los Angeles *Times* that he disagrees with bear snaring. There is plenty more opposition, but you get the picture.

Why do so many folks from so many different walks of life oppose bear snaring? Bear snaring is inhumane. It's possible that a bear can sit with its foot snared for several days. Snared sows with cubs cannot care for their cubs, and the cubs are put under a great deal of stress until they are shot by the trapper or until they run off by themselves and probably starve to death. Biologist Larry Aumiller, who managed the McNeil River brown bear sanctuary and helped snare bears in the 1970s for radio tracking, stated that he still suffers from the images he recalls. He said that "when snared, brown bears go absolutely crazy with fear..." Alaskan writer Bill Sherwonit put it succinctly: "the snaring of bears is brutal and inhumane."

Furthermore, bear snaring is an unscientific method of controlling populations. Sterling Miller, a longtime ADF&G bear researcher, explains that "they (state wildlife managers) have no data anywhere in Alaska that efforts to reduce brown bears have resulted in more



graphic by Behnken

moose available to hunters....they need to have baseline data on brown bear abundance (which they don't) and the ability to track trends in brown bear numbers." John Schoen states that "basically there's no conclusive data" indicating the need for a bear snaring program in Alaska. He says that officials are operating "largely by the seat of their pants with anecdotal information and the strongly-held (never proven) belief that fewer grizzly bears will result in more moose and caribou for hunters." But fewer bears may not equal more ungulates.

In spite of the BoG vote against bear snaring in Fairbanks, bear snaring is alive and well in the state of Alaska. This is not true for the trapped bears and their cubs.

Wolves and moose: targets and connections

At its January, 2012, meeting in Anchorage, the Board of Game approved two controversial aerial wolf control proposals that would allow aerial shooting of wolves in GMUs 15A and 15C, which comprise the majority of Alaska's Kenai Peninsula. The goal was to increase moose populations.

This approval came despite the fact that ADF&G did not support the proposals. ADF&G's wildlife managers on the Kenai point out that wolves are not the problem. In GMU 15A, in the northwest corner of the Kenai Peninsula, both the population and harvest levels were set unrealistically high, but the BoG refused to set more realistic objectives. In 15A there is no longer enough browse to sustain higher moose populations; data show that the moose in the area are in poor nutritional condition. Because of wildfires in the 1990s, moose had a large supply of excellent winter browse. Now that the browse has grown, the moose population has naturally declined. There are no more wolves in this area now than when moose populations were higher. "We have habitat issues in 15A. Everybody admits that we have habitat issues in 15A," states Jeff Sellinger, area wildlife biologist for ADF&G. Andy Loranger, manager of the Kenai National Wildlife Refuge, stated, "We concur with (ADF&G) that habitat is the major factor influencing moose populations on the northern Kenai Peninsula. This relationship has been well documented in the scientific literature, and the recent moose population decline in GMU 15A was predicted in the absence of fire."

The solution for the habitat problem in 15A is not aerial gunning of wolves, but habitat enhancement. Fire is a good generator of nutritional moose browse, so the obvious solution is controlled burns; however, there are no current plans for that or any other form of habitat enhancement.

In GMU 15C, in the southwest corner of the Kenai, the moose population is already meeting population objectives set by the BoG. The problem in 15C is that there are not enough bull moose to sustain a healthy population. Wolves do not single out bull moose for their prey; but hunters do. Too liberal moose hunting regulations in GMU 15C have led to a low bull to cow ratio. The BoG has taken action by amending the definition of a legal bull moose on the Kenai, making fewer

bull moose legal game; this should help the bull-cow ratio in about two years. Nevertheless, wolves have been targeted yet again.

Aerial wolf control in 15A and 15C is further complicated

by the fact that most of the land used by the wolves is within the Kenai National Wildlife Refuge, and officials there have stated that they will not allow wolf gunning in the refuge. "The answer is no," stated Andy Loranger, the refuge manager. National wildlife refuges operate under federal law, which supports multi-species management; that means that wolves are just important as moose (unless moose were endangered, which they are not). Loranger has asked the BoG to proceed more slowly.

One-sided decision making

With so much credible opposition to bear snaring, aerial wolf control on the Kenai, and other wildlife actions, why are they being implemented? The answer might well be the lack of diversity on Alaska's Board of Game, the decision making body for wildlife issues. In a 2009 letter written by former BoG member Joel Bennett, a dozen former BoG members asked Governor Sarah Palin to consider broader representation on the Board of Game to include "nonconsumptive users" such as wildlife viewers. "Nonconsumptive users of wildlife in Alaska include tens of thousands of residents and nonresidents alike who contribute significant revenue to the state through their activities," stated the letter. "We strongly urge you to appoint future board members who can effectively represent both consumptive and nonconsumptive wildlife users."

Governor Palin and current Governor Sean Parnell ignored this letter. The Board of Game is composed entirely of hunters and trappers, all of whom are either commercial hunting guides or have strong ties to that industry. All have repeatedly expressed support for extreme predator control. Such "control" is seldom supported by accepted science and has been objected to by literally hundreds of independent scientists. The State Constitution mandates that Alaska's wildlife be managed for all Alaskans, yet only 14 percent of Alaskans even hold a hunting license. Wildlife viewers, photographers, writers, and members of the wildlife tourism industry are not clearly represented on the BoG. The inevitable result of this lack of diversity on the BoG is that wildlife decisions are made solely to support the hunters, trappers, and guides, without sound scientific management policies. ❖

*-- Tina M. Brown,
Alaska Chapter Executive Committee
and President, Alaska Wildlife Alliance*



On the Juneau Access Road

Five tries – enough, stop

The Juneau road project has raised its head again for the fifth time. It is technically known as the “Juneau Access Improvement Project”. (See *sierra borealis* June 2011).

The first try for this project was in the early 1980s. The proposed road would go down the west side of Lynn Canal and connect to Admiralty Island National Monument by boat and then plow through Admiralty Island and connect to Juneau by boat; it would also give access for logging on Admiralty Island.

The 1990s saw two separate tries to have the road built on the east side of Lynn Canal -- connecting the town of Skagway to Juneau. The first of these was stopped because the cost estimate was over \$500 million, and the next try was put on hold by then Alaska Governor Tony Knowles because of political considerations as well as costs. Both plans would go through Berners Bay, a coastal inlet of unparalleled beauty just north of Juneau, home of abundant wildlife, both terrestrial and marine.

The fourth try started in the year 2002, to be built on the east side of Lynn Canal, but it would not connect to any town or city by road. Going north from the existing Juneau ferry terminal for more than 60 miles, it would connect to another ferry terminal at the Katzechin Delta. Thus the infamous name, “The Juneau Road to Nowhere”. Several environmental groups, including the Sierra Club, litigated this project. We won the case on the issue that in the planning process the Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (DOT) did not consider improved ferry service as a reasonable alternative to a road for improving access to Juneau.

This brings us to the fifth try. The court mandated that a new planning process be done, called a ‘Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement’ (SEIS). This is in process. The SEIS has to update both the cost estimate and the wildlife studies, among other things, because they are outdated. And take a very hard look at an improved ferry system alternative. In the first step of producing the SEIS, DOT asked for comments from groups, agencies, and the public. The Sierra Club’s comments can be accessed by this link.

<http://alaska.sierraclub.org/issues/tongass/Juneau-Group-JAIP-comments.html>

-- Mark Rorick, chair
Juneau Group of the Sierra Club

A reason to fight

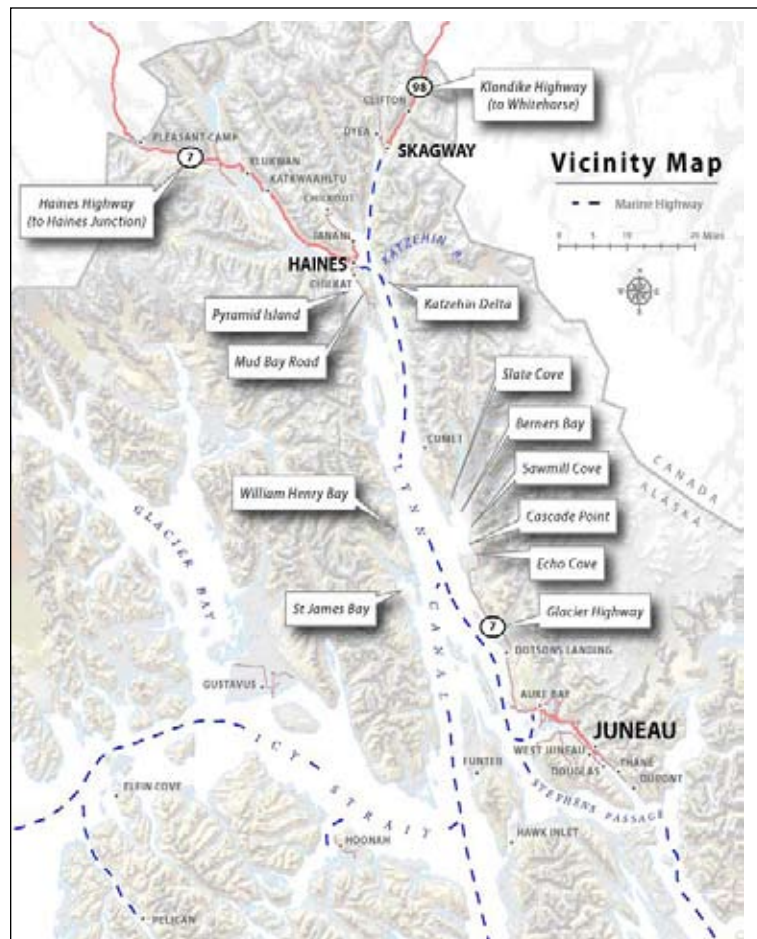
Within our system of law, the defining of value is the basis for the prioritizing of almost all cases. The value of a life, of a crime, of property, of a disturbance, even of an idea is the foremost consideration. Why is it then that so little value is being placed upon the critical wildlife currently being threatened by the Juneau Access Improvement Project? No matter what monetary value you place upon a wilderness area, currency cannot account for the plethora of species found in abundance in that place. Eulachon and pacific fish and salmon are numerous within Lynn Canal, thus leading to exemplary habitat for marine mammals, such as the endangered Steller sea lion and water birds. It is one of the leading gathering sites for Thayer’s gulls, as well as having been observed hosting over 850 bald eagles feeding off of Eulachon in the head of the bay. In this day and age such a rich ecosystem is not expendable.

Our money has no place in this poisonous idea. We have a reliable, safe, and cleaner alternative in the form of our marine transportation system. This road has the potential to become so expensive to maintain that even if it’s built the amount of time in which it is closed for safety purposes largely kills any use it may have had. Ferries are swift, have relatively less impact, and are very

safe for passengers all year around. Truly, we have cheaper alternatives, especially relative to the multiple values we are trying to protect.

Every environmentalist has a reason they fight for our planet. Mine is 4 a.m. I was in a cabin and I woke up looking out the miniscule window, only to see the most beautiful sight of my young life. With the pale gold light gently caressing the blooming lupines, clouds that seemed to glow with their own brilliance, and absolute silence, I was mesmerized. For that moment, the world was just me and the trees growing towards the crisp, blue sky. Fighting to protect Berners Bay won’t

-- continued page 9



Potential Superfund Site in downtown Fairbanks

Coal use has a long history in Fairbanks, but concern over its problems is relatively new. The smoke, particulates and ash were not considered hazardous until recently, and concerns are still minimized to this day. Coal ash was routinely used for traction on ice and to fill in low-lying areas for construction and road beds. Having a constant supply of a dry material was considered a good thing until just recently.

The Interior's forests fueled the gold rush and provided fuel for heat until trees were literally denuded from river banks and near settlements by 1915. By 1920 the railroad had been completed from Fairbanks to Nenana's coal fields, providing fuel for steam dredges, steam boats on the rivers, locomotives, heating, and by the 1950s coal also provided fuel for energy to power the region's lights and military installations.

In 2008 when a coal ash slurry dam burst in Tennessee authorities and residents across the nation began examining how they stored and reused coal combustion wastes. Alaska Chapter volunteers began investigating this waste stream in the Fairbanks area. Three coal fired power plants are within a few miles of each other in the greater Fairbanks area. They all share the same view-shed, air-shed, and water-shed. They are too small to be covered by most regulations designed for larger power plants even though collectively their emissions are substantial. In an area prone to persistent air inversions this has proven to be problematic. We quickly learned that most coal ash generated from the power plants was still being used as fill all around town without concern for soil and groundwater contamination.

By this time it became known that the air quality in the Fairbanks area was often non-compliant with EPA

A reason to fight

-- from page 8

be easy. For every time we win, developers can just try again later, and eventually they will bypass every defense we can place. Does that mean we will stop? No matter how things look now there is always a chance that we can save what is truly important, but only if we remember why we won't fear defeat. Beauty is worth conserving, for every person who has yet to reach their 4:00 in the morning. Even if we fail, we will have tried our hardest. That in itself is worth something. As environmentalists, we will all do our part to stop this Juneau Access monstrosity. When something is precious, the hope of passionate people can find a way. Let's be those passionate people, with our moments of silence keeping us together. ❖

-- Medora Rorick, age 13, the founder of Earth Care, and a new member of the Sierra Club

standards and created unhealthy situations for residents, especially dangerous for the young and elderly. Our investigation revealed haphazard transporting, storage, and use of coal combustion wastes. We found trails of spilled and tracked ash on the city's streets left by the dump trucks leading from the power plants to the various "fill" sites. We learned that Alaska is the only state that does not require any engineering of coal ash fill sites, much less the use of liners that could prevent leaching of the many heavy metals found in this material.

During our investigation we learned of many concerns in the community regarding fallout from the power plants, the power plants contribution to the poor air quality, and valid questions regarding potential water and soil contamination. We are especially concerned with the blackened snow in the vicinity of the power plants, which indicates cumulative effects of the fallout from the smokestacks. Recently local conservation organizations sponsored a lecture series with Dr. Alan Lockwood of Physicians for Social Responsibility. He shared stories of patterns he had discovered in Appalachia which clearly indicated that coal dependent communities suffer a higher rate of disease, miss more work and school days, and generally have a poorer quality of life than communities that do not embrace coal.

Residents of Fairbanks filed a Citizens' Petition for a Preliminary Assessment with the Environmental Protection Agency's Superfund Office in Seattle in the summer of 2010. The EPA conducted an inspection of a residence across the street from the downtown coal fired power plant and then of the power plant itself. They found enough compelling evidence to warrant further investigation. The EPA is now planning a Full Site Inspection this coming summer to determine if this site needs to be placed on the National Priorities List as a Superfund Site.

The only coal mine in Alaska has done such a great job at promoting its inferior coal as "clean" that for a long time little concern was given to the potential hazards of relying on coal for nearly a century of heat and energy and what this could mean to the health of the community. Until natural gas can be brought to Fairbanks we will continue to rely on dirty coal as a primary fuel for energy development. For the sake of the community's health and welfare we must move beyond coal. ❖

-- Russ Maddox



Tell the EPA: time to stop the Pebble Mine

As the Food & Drug Administration stands poised to approve the first genetically engineered animal, a salmon-like Frankenfish, the Environmental Protection Agency could take action to protect wild salmon by stopping the proposed Pebble Mine in Alaska's Bristol Bay.

The EPA recently completed a year-long scientific assessment of how large scale mining might affect the Bristol Bay watershed. The agency is forming a panel of experts in metals mining, salmon biology, hydrology, aquatic ecology, biogeochemistry, seismology, ecotoxicology, wildlife ecology and Native Alaska cultures to review and critique the assessment.

This open-pit mine would generate up to 10 billion tons of toxic mine waste that will have to be treated for hundreds of years. Mine waste disposal in the Bristol Bay watershed is a direct threat to the tremendous wild salmon habitat that supports the Bristol Bay fishery, and supplies the world with a healthy and sustainable source of wild salmon. The salmon fishery is the economic engine of the region, generating an estimated \$450 million in revenue each year, and supplying some 10,000 jobs.

✉ What you can do:

This is your chance to weigh in on EPA's Pebble Mine assessment. Please write to the EPA!

Sample letter -- use some words of your own.:

Lisa Jackson, Administrator, Environmental Protection Agency
Ariel Rios Building, 1200 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, DC 20460 (202-564-4700)

Dear Administrator Jackson:

I urge you to use your authority under the Clean Water Act to take a hard look at how this proposed mine will impact our nation's biggest wild salmon fishery, the commercial fishermen and Alaska Natives who depend on it, and the local businesses who make their living off of this wild landscape in Southwestern Alaska.

If built, Pebble mine will produce between 2 and 10 billion tons of toxic waste that will have to be treated for hundreds of years. This waste will threaten Bristol Bay, an area widely recognized as one of the last remaining strongholds for healthy salmon populations in North America and the world. The pristine spawning grounds for trophy rainbow trout and all five species of Pacific salmon, including the largest sockeye salmon runs on Earth, and many other fish and wildlife species depend on clean water, and undisturbed habitat.

I ask that you initiate a Clean Water Act 404(c) process in Bristol Bay immediately. Alaska Natives, sportsmen, commercial fishermen, churches, and conservation organizations deserve a public and science-based process to determine if the Pebble Partnership's plans to build the biggest open pit mine in North America will harm one of our nation's greatest fisheries.

Sincerely, (your name and address)

Thanks for helping the Alaska Chapter in its firm opposition to the proposed Pebble Mine. ❖

-- Irene Alexakos

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Check the Alaska Chapter's website <http://alaska.sierraclub.org/> for environmental news, background on issues, action alerts and newsletters.

Many thanks, Pam