



# Sierra Borealis

## *alaska report*

SIERRA CLUB ALASKA CHAPTER  
JUNE 2012



## Mining Danger to Bristol Bay salmon highlighted

### EPA issues new report--*please comment*

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency released in May the draft of an extensive study of the potential environmental harm that large scale industrial mining in the Bristol Bay watershed would cause. This area in Southwest Alaska is home to a healthy ecosystem dependent on rich freshwater fisheries and salmon--with half the world's wild sockeye (red) salmon, as well as an abundance of the other four species of Pacific salmon.

During the first week of June, the EPA held public hearings on the new draft document in Seattle (home to nearly a thousand Bristol Bay commercial fishing permit holders), Anchorage, and Bristol Bay region communities. An estimated 800 people attended the Anchorage hearing, with several hundred people expressing passionate feelings on both sides.

The Bristol Bay watershed is the site of the proposed Pebble Project and at least seven other large and active mining claims. In light of the extraordinary significance of the area, and responding to the requests of nine Alaska tribes and the Bristol Bay Native Association, the Obama Administration took the unusual step of

using its authority under the Clean Water Act to evaluate the potential impacts of a hypothetical mine on the scale of the proposed Pebble Project, in advance of any mine permit applications, and therefore outside the normal regulatory process. The Pebble gold, copper and molybdenum mine would be North America's largest open-pit mine, producing billions of tons of toxic mine waste stored behind earthen dams.

The detailed study (338 pages plus appendices and bibliography) provides a comprehensive overview of information from 350 scientific studies conducted over 50 years about the environmental value of the area and the threats of mining. Certain mining threats, such as seismic fault lines, have previously

received little attention. The study concludes that the footprint of such a mine would likely result in the direct loss of 55 to 87 miles of streams and 2500 to 4200 acres of wetlands, with damage to still more wetlands from water withdrawals, even if there are no accidents. In addition, "Potential accidents include (1) the release of acid, metal, and other contaminants ...; (2) the failure of roads, culverts, and pipelines in the transportation corridor, including spills of copper concentrate; and (3) the catastrophic failure of a tailings dam." An accident could degrade salmon-producing rivers and streams for decades, according to the study. The EPA study considers

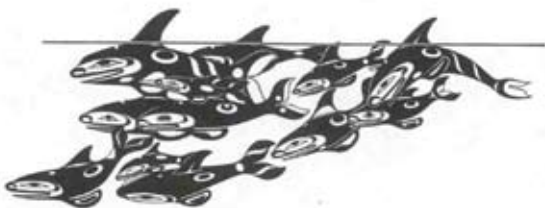
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*Alaska*

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the significant impacts to the entire region, not just to the immediate area.

Both Gov. Sean Parnell's administration and the Pebble Project proponents have fought the EPA plan to conduct this study, claiming the EPA lacks authority, but so far have filed no lawsuit. Under section 404(c) of the federal Clean Water Act, the EPA has the authority—which it has rarely used -- to prohibit the use of an area as a disposal site

for fill material if discharge will have unacceptable adverse effects on municipal water supplies, wildlife or fish.

### ➔ WHAT YOU CAN DO:

EPA is accepting comments on its draft report through July 23. Information about how to comment and a link to the report is available at [www.epa.gov/bristolbay](http://www.epa.gov/bristolbay). Please thank the EPA for conducting this comprehensive assessment of mining threats to the Bristol Bay watershed. ♦

-- Pamela Brodie, Alaska Chapter chair

## Last chance to save the Polar Bear Seas from Shell Oil

As Shell Oil's drill ships headed north and prepared in mid-June to begin drilling in the Polar Bear Seas, Americans from all walks of life were sending a strong and clear message to President Obama - **Protect America's Arctic!** The Polar Bear Seas (in the Arctic Ocean) are an amazing wild place, home to the entire population of US polar bears, as well as ice seals, whales and migratory birds. An oil spill here would be disastrous—to the wildlife and to the several Alaska Native communities that have lived in the area for thousands of years and depend on the sea's plentiful bounty for subsistence.

On April 28, 2012, hundreds of people around the nation came together for Polar Bear Dance Parties – they danced to celebrate the Arctic and express their desire to protect the Polar Bear Seas from oil drilling. Together they established the World Record for "Largest Group of People Dressed as Polar Bears While Dancing in 24 hours!" More than 40 events were registered across the nation. These dance parties showed how passionate Americans are about protecting the Polar Bear Seas from offshore oil drilling.

Just two weeks later, on May 15 at a Million Mobilization march in Washington, DC, many DC residents saw a rare sight—arctic animals walking the streets of the capital. More than a hundred activists joined the ranks with

polar bears, a walrus, and even a sandpiper to send one heartfelt message to the White House: **do not drill in the Polar Bear Seas this summer!** Concerned citizens delivered more than 1.1 million comments saying just that, in the form of letters and petitions from across the country. Thousands who could not be at the rally took part from their own homes—they called the White House the same day and gave their message to the White house comment line—to protect America's Arctic.

In that week in DC, a delegation of Alaska Native leaders met with members of Congress to urge protecting the Western Arctic. For the first time ever, the entire 23.5 million acre National Petroleum Reserve-Alaska, an area most congressmen do not know enough about, is undergoing a Bureau of Land Management planning process. These Alaskan leaders spoke passionately for a plan protecting the entire Arctic ecosystem, the land and the seas. Leaders in DC included George Edwardson from Barrow, Willard and JoAnne Neakok from Point Lay, and Lillian Stone from Anaktuvuk Pass. They all relayed their communities' concerns and needs in the Arctic during a week packed with meetings, congressional receptions, and grassroots events. Their participation in the "Million Mobilization" bolstered the message to the White House. They were also able to attend a screening of a new IMAX movie "*To the Arctic*" --for an up-close look at the wildlife important for the communities. This movie has also reached thousands of families that may never visit the Arctic.

The BP oil disaster in the Gulf of Mexico provides an ongoing illustration of the long-term impacts of a big spill. An event like that in the Beaufort or Chukchi Sea off the northern coast of Alaska—the Polar Bear Seas—would be devastating. An oil spill would harm the fragile wildlife in the ocean and onshore, impacting polar bears, endangered beluga whales, migratory birds that fly to the Arctic from all fifty states, and other wildlife. The oil industry's track record belies its frequent and fervent assurances of safety. *There is no proven way to clean up an oil spill in the extreme Arctic conditions—it's as simple as that.* The thick sea ice,

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San Francisco polar bear dance party -- on the Embarcadero, April 28, 2012

which for a significant part of the year is broken up and unstable—a heaving, shifting mass impeding any sea-based ship maneuvers—is an incredible obstacle. Add to this darkness for two months every winter and a lack of infrastructure and people to support a clean-up effort: the closest U.S. Coast Guard station is a thousand miles away. Shell Oil has no business drilling in the Arctic!

⇒ **WHAT YOU CAN DO:** Shell will start drilling in the Arctic Ocean by the middle of July, or as soon as the ice allows, so ACT NOW to tell President Obama to safeguard the wildlife and the human communities of our fragile northern Arctic coast from dangerous dirty oil drilling—say “no” to Shell now. No drilling in the Polar Bear Seas this summer! Please call the White House Comment line (between 9 am - 5 pm Eastern time): 202-456-1111. ◆

## Point Hope leader Caroline Cannon awarded prestigious prize



Caroline Cannon: photo by Anne Raup

Imagine a small Arctic community standing up against one of the largest corporations in the history of the world. That's exactly what Point Hope is up against, and helping to lead the fight is Caroline Cannon. Caroline has long been a leading voice in the fight to protect her community's backyard—the Arctic Ocean. In the village of Point Hope, at the far western edge of America's Arctic, the people and culture revolve around the ocean and the land. The thought of an oil spill erasing that connection has driven Caroline to advocate for her people's rights for over 20 years. For her persevering efforts to speak out against corporate development, Caroline was awarded the Goldman Environmental Prize this year. This prestigious global award recognizes individuals around the world for sustained and significant efforts to protect their natural environment, often at great personal risk.

Caroline could not deserve the much-admired prize more. We hope recognition and appreciation of her efforts will inspire more people. Caroline has served as president of the Native Village of Point Hope and the board of the Maniilaq Association, and throughout her tenure her voice has become stronger. Though Shell Oil has passed the hurdles of the permitting process, this is still the beginning and Caroline knows it. Caroline has laid the groundwork for continued efforts to protect important areas in the Arctic for members of her community and their way of life. ◆

-- Lindsey Hajduk

## Wet Dog Race takes Jet Skis to new extremes

“This is not just another event, it's a new industry” claim the promoters of the proposed 2013 Alaskan Wet Dog Race, a 2,062 mile personal watercraft race across Prince William Sound, around the Kenai Peninsula, up and down Cook Inlet, along the Kodiak archipelago, down the Alaska Peninsula, around False Pass, up to Bristol Bay and then upriver to Lake Iliamna. In May, the Alaska Department of Natural Resources granted a land use permit to hold the race.

Promoters call it “a new era of extreme events,” the world's longest personal watercraft endurance race. They expect participation from 1000 racers, with an entry fee of \$35,000 and a million dollar prize. (The name of the event shows that it is a take-off on Alaska's annual Iditarod sled dog race and Iron Dog snowmachine race, and promoters seem to intend another annual event.) Personal watercraft are tiny, fast powerboats ridden like motorcycles and snowmobiles (known in Alaska as snowmachines), and are often known by the brand name Jet Ski. The races are usually closed loop courses on lakes and rivers, although there have been long distance races held abroad.

The Sierra Club Alaska Chapter and numerous other conservation organizations have joined the Alaska Quiet Rights Coalition's appeal of DNR's land use permit. The appeal charges that DNR has failed to undertake an in-depth, comprehensive analysis of the impacts of the race on state waters, lands, wildlife, and on affected coastal communities and concurrent users of the state waters, including kayakers, subsistence and commercial fishermen.

Of particular concern are the effects on seabirds, marine mammals, fish and other mammals due to the noise, air and water pollution, and visual disturbance. Racers will enter Cook Inlet beluga whale critical habitat, creating noise disturbances that could deflect the endangered whales from feeding areas, scare off prey and disrupt whale communications, according to the appeal. In addition, an estimated 500,000 gallons of gas would be consumed by 1000 racers, not counting the more than 100 support vessels that are planned to assist, requiring tens of thousands of re-fuelings at sea, with a danger of oil spills.

At the federal level, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Association (NOAA) has opposed the race and the permit. In addition, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Chugach National Forest and two national parks (Kenai Fjords and Lake Clark) have raised many concerns in their comments to DNR. Race promoters have promised racers will not come ashore on these federal lands, although it is hard to see how this could be enforced. ◆

-- Pamela Brodie



# Wild Rivers of Alaska under attack

## Can NPS regulate boating on ANILCA rivers and lakes?

National Park Service (NPS) regulations governing boating on navigable rivers within Yukon-Charley Rivers National Preserve are being challenged in federal court by a motorboat owner, a hovercraft owner, and the administration of Republican Governor Sean Parnell.

Sen. Lisa Murkowski (R-AK) backed the plaintiffs with an appropriations bill rider that blocks for one year--until 9/30/12--enforcement of the NPS's boat safety regulations. She also promised to introduce a comprehensive bill--so far not in the hopper--to rule out any federal agency regulation of uses on navigable water bodies within the national conservation system units, including additions to existing units, established by the 1980 Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA).

If the plaintiffs win despite the legislative and judicial record, the protected navigable rivers and river-lake systems of ANILCA would be vulnerable to hovercrafts, air boats, large inboard jet boats, and jet skis. These loud high-speed vehicles scare off wildlife, endanger and anger non-motorized river and lake users, alter stream dynamics by eroding river banks with their wakes, damage fish spawning beds and rearing habitat, and degrade wild river and wilderness experiences.

Free-flowing rivers and river-lake systems within the national parks, wildlife refuges, wilderness areas, and wild and scenic river corridors established by the Act provide pristine habitat for spawning salmon, other fish species, and migrating waterfowl; sustain wildlife, subsistence users, and Alaska's sport, commercial fishing, and recreation industries; and offer superb wild/wilderness river float trips.

The lawsuits are a reaction to NPS law enforcement on the Yukon River as it flows through the Preserve. When park rangers attempted a boat

safety inspection of the motorboat, the owner refused to cooperate, assaulted the rangers, was arrested and briefly jailed. On a tributary of the Yukon, park rangers informed the hovercraft owner that under NPS regulations hovercrafts are prohibited in the preserve. Issued during the Clinton-Gore Administration, the regulations prohibit hovercraft and jet skis in national parks in Alaska and throughout the nation.

The plaintiffs' main argument is that the Service has no regulatory authority on the Yukon or on the other navigable rivers in the preserve and elsewhere in Alaska because the State owns the water and the land below mean high water -- pursuant to the Alaska Statehood Act of 1959 and the "equal footing doctrine" (under which states entering the Union automatically become owners of navigable water bodies provided these water bodies were not reserved for public purposes by the federal government at the time of statehood). As owners they claim that therefore the State has sole jurisdiction and is exempt from federal regulations.

Their argument suffered a setback when a federal magistrate who heard the motorboat owner's appeal of his arrest upheld the NPS's regulatory authority on the Yukon. The owner is appealing the decision to the federal district court.

### Legislative and judicial record

Federal courts have also affirmed federal agency authority. For example, in a case involving a non-federal road in Washington's Lake Chelan NRA, the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals held that the NPS's proprietary jurisdiction enabled the agency to regulate non-federal property. A well-known federal court decision affirmed the U.S. Forest Service's authority to regulate motorboats on the navigable water bodies owned by Minnesota in the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness.

Moreover, Congress has provided the NPS with regulatory authority over non-federal property when regulation is necessary for safeguarding the values and purposes for which Congress established the park system units in the first place. In the National Park Service Administration and Improvement Act of 1976, Congress gave the agency authority over navigable waters within national park system units, regardless of submerged land ownership.

In ANILCA Congress clearly intended that all rivers and river-lake systems within the new conservation units be managed to protect their special values. In many of the Alaska units the rivers and river-lake systems are within designated wilderness, and in recognition of their outstandingly remarkable values, several are designated wild rivers as well. ♦

-- Jack Hession

photo: Bob Hartman



A 2002 Alaska Chapter outing rafts the Yukon River in Yukon-Charley National Preserve; passing Tahoma Bluffs

# Kids and Coal: Can we keep Alaska's students from being exploited?

In February 2011, 65 third and fourth graders in Seward were thrilled to take a field trip to highlight their recent studies on various forms of fuel and energy. First they toured the City's new diesel generators, which are used as a back-up source for power during Seward's frequent power outages. Next they inspected Alaska Vocational and Technical Institute's new wind turbine, and last they went to the Alaska Railroad dock to tour the state-owned coal export facility, leased and operated by Aurora Energy, a subsidiary of Usibelli Coal Mine.

Of course the students were impressed with the three stops on their field trip, even though they had to stand in a covered area out of the rain and couldn't get close to the coal operations. As the children lined up to get back on their buses, Alaska Railroad and Aurora Energy employees handed each of them a bag of goodies that both companies had prepared for the occasion. This happened without teachers and chaperones having been informed, so they had no chance to screen the contents of these "goodie bags", as they were called.

As it was late in the day when they returned to school, many students simply got off of the field trip bus and onto another to go home, so again there was no chance for screening. When the students made it home, their parents saw and heard of the contents. Each bag contained a lump of sub-bituminous coal in a sandwich bag, a piece of hard black candy made to look like coal--in thick plastic with only the Usibelli Coal Mine logo on it, a packet of a mix of seeds "specially formulated for Usibelli Coal Mine for replanting mined areas" complete with planting instructions; lapel pins, bumper stickers, and refrigerator magnets emblazoned with "I Love (heart) Alaska Clean Coal" on them, and an obviously photo-shopped postcard of their mine.

Having been given zero instructions as to what they were supposed to do with the coal, many students were confused. Was this a "pet rock"? Were they supposed to burn it?

What possessed the employees to send this coal package home with 7-9 year old school children with no explanation? The US Occupational Safety and Hazard Administration's Material Safety Data sheet for coal in the work place considers coal ultra-hazardous because it is combustible and also can spontaneously combust. Coal dust's tendency to explode in confined spaces is well known. As it contains a litany of heavy metals, coal is also toxic by ingestion, inhalation, and absorption. All of these are real risks as children reflexively touch, smell, and even taste things.

The candy was found to be hard black licorice made to resemble coal; packaged in industrial thick plastic, it had nothing printed on the package to even indicate that it was food, much less candy. Nor did it have any ingredients listed, no expiration date, no country of origin or any of the information one would expect on a food product, especially one targeting young children. Lack of labeling was especially problematic for children with food allergies or their younger siblings and

Puffin  
Dance

© Dale  
DeArmond



pets who tend to put any small items in their mouths.

Upon examination of the plant seeds listed on the packet of the company's special mix, we learned one of the plants was Rangeland Alfalfa (*medicago sativa*) which is an officially recognized invasive plant in Alaska and a specific problem in the Seward area, where the Park Service and local non-profits have been trying to eradicate it from Alaska's prized Kenai Fjords National Park -- as it had taken hold along the road and trail to Exit Glacier. Two other species in the mix are being considered for official invasive status as well. This packet of seeds was the only item in the goodie bags that came with any instructions. The directions on the bag encouraged students to dig up a patch of the lawn in their family yards and plant the seeds.

The pins and stickers and magnets were of special appeal to 7-9 year olds who were unlikely to realize how this messaging was designed to alleviate any concerns about the dangers coal presents to both human health and to the environment. In the world of political campaigns, gifts with such messages are called "campaign chum". Such items should not be aimed directly at our impressionable and vulnerable children.

After receiving a flurry of complaints from angry parents, the principal did send a letter apologizing for the incident and instructed that the seeds be burned and the coal be placed in the garbage outside. He suggested the candy and campaign chum be returned to the school if parents so chose. He assured parents that it would never happen again.

Some parents took it upon themselves to seek legal counsel and to learn if any laws were broken and what could be done to prevent any recurrence. They learned that there are no laws that apply to giving children coal, or requiring labeling on "free" candy, nor is it illegal to give children invasive seeds with planting instructions, campaign chum, or doctored images. Illegal no, but many found this both immoral and despicable to blatantly attempt to exploit our children by promoting such

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## Kids and Coal

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weeks for a response from the coal mine company as to the origin and ingredients of the coal candy, parents opted to have some analyzed for themselves. This candy was found to contain trace amounts of many heavy metals, but we learned that there are no laws or thresholds for contaminants in single servings of food products. Food dyes, especially the cheap varieties found overseas, commonly contain heavy metals. To make candy as black as coal takes different colors of dye in high concentrations -- so the dye is the most likely source of the heavy metals detected.

Imagine the parents' surprise to learn that not only were these sinister gifts not illegal but that there was nothing in school district policy to prevent this from happening again. We will continue to try to compel the US Food and Drug Administration to develop limits of dangerous contaminants for candy in bite size portions. We will also continue to urge the Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation Food Safety Division to develop labeling requirements for food products that are given away free --just like requirements for food products to be sold --including ingredients, expiration date, country of origin, and nutritional values.

We seem to have no legal means to prevent industry from giving our children messaged items or even invasive seeds, but we can develop school district policy that requires comprehensive screening of any items given directly to our students. Parents recently introduced draft policy to the Kenai Peninsula Borough School District Board of Education to require pre-screening by district staff. The proposed language was actually copied from existing school district policy regarding gifts, bequests, and grants given to the district, which requires that gifts not be harmful or hazardous and not promote any specific industry or business. It seems reasonable to apply the same precautions to gifts given directly to students as to gifts given to the school district. We hope the Board of Education will see the value of implementing this simple policy to better protect our children.

It is bad enough that the coal industry is allowed to pollute our planet and compromise our health but our children's minds should be off limits.

*End note:* Aurora Energy is a subsidiary of Usibelli Coal Mine, the only operating coal mine in Alaska. By national standards the mine's output is small with approximately a million tons being burned in state to produce electricity and another million tons exported through the small port of Seward—Alaska's only coal export facility. This export facility has received a number of violations for coal dust blown from the site over the adjacent small boat harbor and community, which are directly downwind of the prevailing north winds. This facility has been a point of contention ever since Aurora Energy took over in 2007, at which time the coal dust problems began. Sierra Club is currently suing this facility as its unpermitted discharges of coal and coal debris into Resurrection Bay are Clean Water Act violations. ♦

-- Russ Maddox, Seward

## Two Sierra Club 2012 Western Arctic outings with conservation focus

The Alaska Outings of the Sierra Club National Outings program annually include one or more backpack trips in the northwestern Brooks Range. Unlike the eastern Brooks Range (the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge), there is no abrupt mountain front overlooking a low coastal plain. In the west, a seemingly endless series of foothills and ridges extends towards the northern horizon. In fact, these long ridges prompted early petroleum geologists to identify this landscape as tantalizingly similar to that of the Zagros Mountains in the Iranian oilfields. The little drilling subsequently completed suggests that petroleum potential is very limited. The "big sky" country of northwest Alaska would be far better served by preservation in its pristine state.

It's no coincidence these trips occur at a time when oil and coal threats to the National Petroleum Reserve-Alaska and the Bureau of Land Management's new planning process are in the news. The entire north slope is virtually one immense coal deposit. Development pressure caused by these vast coal reserves is mitigated by absence of a harbor, and difficulty of transporting coal to far markets. Mineral extraction offers some real threats.

My 2012 trip is entitled "Foliage, Fish, and Berries in the Western Brooks Range". This is its third year and follows a number of earlier trips in the same general area. Our timing coincides with the peak of the tundra fall foliage when the dwarf birch forming the basic fabric of the shrub tundra turns a blazing orange-red. The colorful tundra mosaic is dotted with alleys of yellow willow in the drainages and patches of deep red and purple where blueberry and bearberry hold forth on the drier slopes. These hues are offset by the silvery gray of frost-shattered rock outcrops. The jagged peaks and rocky spires lining ridges often remind the viewer of a stegosaurus backbone. This is the unexpected result of the arctic climate, where the most recent glacial advances could not



Tents on the tundra--western Arctic

photo: Fred Paillet

## Two Trips -- “Western Brooks Range Ramble” and “Foliage, Fish, and Berries”

erode these features for lack of moisture from a permanently ice-covered sea. Our route takes us along the base of the high mountains with the peaks to the south and the coastal foothills to our north. Three lay-over days let us explore the slot-like canyons or climb the tempting ridges.

The sheer remoteness of the western Brooks Range location is breathtaking. There is a spate of mineral exploration activity right around the Red Dog mine, but we have no indication of mining claims or other intrusion to the northeast where we hike about 20 miles farther north along the headwaters of the Kivalina River. Last year we saw absolutely no sign of other humans once we left the gravel fan where our bush pilot landed. We did not see a single airplane overhead or even a higher jet contrail. Here we don't have to strive to find wilderness. We are already there!

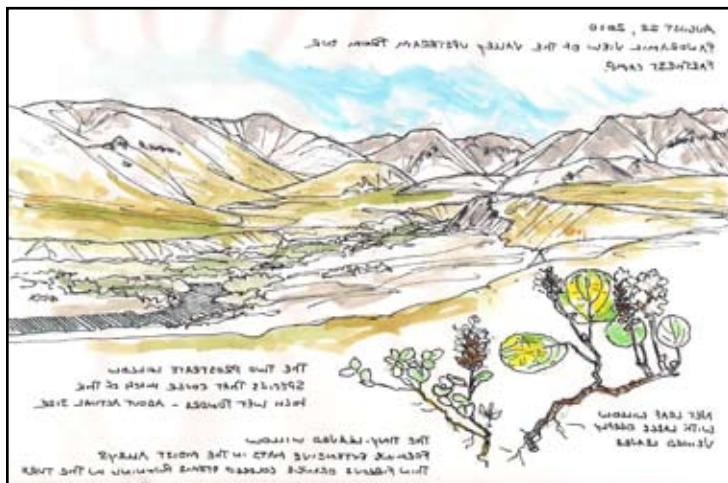
The Kivalina and Wulik run parallel to enter the Chukchi Sea at the village of Kivalina (where climate change has removed the former sea ice barrier that gave shelter from winter storms.--about half the village has been washed away; the rest is going fast.) While most of our trip is on the Kivalina, we plan a day hike into the head of the Wulik River. The Kivalina runs north of the Wulik across the rugged Wulik Peaks. We stay north of the Wulik basin to be away from the expanding Red Dog Mine area - both to avoid the activity and because the miners were hostile to our presence.

The wildlife encounters can be amazing. Some years the caribou have been plentiful with bands of 20 to several hundred often in view. In other years, there would be abundant game trails but only the stray caribou sighting. We have often seen a few musk oxen wandering near the high mountains. Because of our timing, we see grizzly bears consistently in the blueberry bushes. We always see wolf tracks, less often the wolves themselves. One year we inadvertently camped near an active wolf den and were serenaded all night by our neighbors.

In addition to the foliage, we anticipate abundant blueberries and sea-run arctic char. A special treat is to bring pre-mixed biscuit dough and a little brown sugar with which to bake blueberry shortcake over willow-wood coals. The char are great eating as well as an insightful lesson in evolution. An extensive char literature is related to the observation that these fish have recently radiated into a wide range of habitats freed by the end of the Pleistocene glaciation. They are in the process of actually creating a number of new species where they have entered new habitats, or become stranded in isolated mountain lakes. One individual char tagged by Alaska Fish and Game in the northwestern Brooks Range was recaptured thousands of miles away on the Anadyr River in Siberia!

*Enjoying fresh-baked char and blueberry shortcake while contemplating this wilderness from the moss covered bench above a nameless arctic drainage with endless views of colorful mountains is the high point of my hiking year.*

-- Fred Paillet



Campsite view on 2010 outing; drawing by Fred Paillet

And, more immediately, right now a trip led by Gary Keir and Donna Poggi is taking place—June 4 to 15; they are up there enjoying the wonderful western Arctic area as Sierra Borealis is in preparation. Just before departing for Alaska, Gary told us:

“We are doing a trip this June in the National Petroleum Reserve. The name does not sound inviting, but do not judge this place by its name. The whole northwest Arctic is an undiscovered gem. Our “Western Brooks range ramble” borders the scenic De Long Mountains and the sweeping, open coastal plain—so we savor both these dramatic settings. We range from the Noatak River to the Kokolik. The sun is up 24 hours, (unless we're socked in with clouds) so most of the “night” we can marvel at this beautiful quality of rich light that invites luminous evening strolls. In early June everything will still be brown with patches of snow. By the time our 12-day adventure is over the tundra will be green and rich with wildflowers. With any luck we'll catch a glimpse of the migrating Western Arctic caribou herd. We have seen fox, bear, and wolverine in this area before and hope to see them again. Birds that have flown in from several continents to mate and raise their young here will be nesting at our feet.

“From Anchorage, Alaska Airlines has regular flights to Kotzebue, the base to access this area. From Kotzebue we use Golden Eagle Aviation bush planes for a spectacular one hour flight to our adventure.

“This trip is rated ‘moderately strenuous’ considering our uneven terrain and heavy packs, but we're allowing several days to explore at leisure without packs. The pace will keep us progressing but allow us to stop and smell the bog rosemary. As we traverse the tundra, we stop to check any interesting geological, cultural, biological or scenic points of interest—that means we stop often.” And we'll discuss the issues involved in the land, the wildlife, and the people of this special area. ” ♦



## On Arctic Ground

Debbie Miller's new book on the Western Arctic

Longtime Fairbanks activist and writer Debbie S. Miller has broadened her outreach from the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, about which she has written since 1988, to the Western Arctic, or National Petroleum Reserve-Alaska. Her new book *On Arctic Ground* was released just after the June 1 close of the comment period on the Bureau of Land Management's new "Draft Integrated Activity Plan" for managing the National Petroleum Reserve-Alaska..

In Alaska's Western Arctic, 23 million acres of rolling hills, mighty rivers, clear lakes, and myriad connected wetlands are unspoiled by any roads and rarely visited by humans. From caribou to polar bears and raptors, *On Arctic Ground* reveals the wonders of this barely-described wilderness.

In preparation for her new book, Debbie and friends, accompanied by award-winning conservation photographers, spent the last three summers travelling on five rivers in the 23-million acre NPRA, the largest block of public land remaining in America. The rivers included the Nigu, Etivluk, Colville, and Utukok. With her team of photographers, Miller studied the wildlife, wilderness, and cultural and fossil history, including the largest bed of arctic dinosaur bones in the world. Her new book describes these studies and three summers of hiking and canoeing more than 600 miles through the western Arctic. Wildlife

biologist Jeff Fair contributes essays, naturalist Richard Nelson a recording of Arctic sounds, and former Secretary of the Interior Bruce Babbitt an introduction.

The book notes development threats to this fragile, remote area and the need to preserve the recognized "Special Areas", which comprise nearly half of the vast reserve; one alternative in the BLM's new plan would preserve all these Special Areas from development, add a



new "Special Area", and expand and protect several existing ones.

Miller, a former Marin County, California, resident, is a naturalist and author of *Midnight Wilderness: Journeys in Alaska's*

*Arctic National Wildlife Refuge*, published by the Sierra Club in 1990. This, her first book, is now a classic authority on the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge coastal plain and its issues. *Midnight Wilderness* has appeared in paperback, and recently in an updated version. She has also written some popular illustrated children's books.

To learn more about *On Arctic Ground* and to order the book, visit, [www.OnArcticGround.org](http://www.OnArcticGround.org). Published by Braided River. ISBN #978-1-159485-689-1. Hardbound, 12 x 10". 144 pp, \$29.95. Info@braidedriver.org Phone: 206.223.6303. Braided River, 1001 SW Klickitat Way, Suite 201, Seattle WA 98134.

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Please send your email address to Chapter chair Pam Brodie, [pbrodie@gci.net](mailto:pbrodie@gci.net). Include your name and mailing address and eight digit membership number for identification purposes. Thanks so much for your help.

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