

Sierra Borealis

alaska report

SIERRA CLUB ALASKA CHAPTER
MARCH 2013



Two Interior Department decisions to protect Alaska Lands

Making History in the Western Arctic: 11 Million Acres Protected



photo: Nick Jans

Camping at the Kokolik River, Western Arctic

In early February the Department of the Interior issued a Record of Decision that formally adopts a new Integrated Activity Plan for the National Petroleum Reserve-Alaska (Reserve). Located on Alaska's North Slope and almost 23 million acres in size, the Reserve is our country's largest single unit of public land. The final plan appropriately protects five unique Special Areas in the

Reserve: Teshekpuk Lake, Utukok Uplands, Kasegaluk Lagoon, Peard Bay and Colville River. These places are critical to fish, wildlife, recreation and Alaska Native subsistence.

The announcement of the final Integrated Activity Plan wraps up a multiyear planning process, for the first ever comprehensive plan that has been completed for the entire Reserve.

More than 400,000 Americans,
-- continued page 2

No boondoggle road for Izembek Refuge Wilderness

The Department of the Interior announced in February that the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) decided to reject a request to build a road through a remote wilderness area of Alaska's Izembek National Wildlife Refuge. The matter was then sent to Interior Secretary Ken Salazar to make a final determination within 30 days that a road is not in the public interest.

The Izembek National Wildlife Refuge is internationally recognized for its important wetlands and wildlife habitat, and the area is congressionally designated wilderness. The proposed road would have significantly damaged an ecologically sensitive and critical part of the refuge that migratory species like the Pacific black brant depend upon. In some years, virtually all of the world's Pacific brant stop at Izembek to rest and feed on the vast eelgrass

beds in the coastal lagoons of the Refuge. Allowing a road to be built

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including sportsmen, Alaska Native subsistence users represented by the Western Arctic Caribou Herd Working Group, and villages, tribes and other organizations representing more than 90 villages in Alaska, called for protection of the wildlife and special places within the Reserve. Alaska Natives have relied upon the Reserve's resources for thousands of years for their subsistence use and continuance of their culture.

Sierra Club Alaska director Dan Ritzman describes his reaction to the good news:

"It's not every day that 11 million acres of pristine wildlife habitat is protected. In fact, during the 20 years



photo: U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Eiders in the NPRA

that I have been working on public lands issues, this marked the first time I've ever seen it. Such sweeping protection has hap-

pened before, most notably in 1980 when Congress passed the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act -- but that was decades ago.

I'm very thankful that Interior Secretary Ken Salazar signed a final decision to protect some of the special places in the National Petroleum Reserve of Alaska that spans across the North Slope of Alaska. The Reserve harbors rich wild lands and wildlife, including two caribou herds, millions of migratory birds, grizzly bears, threatened polar bears, walrus, wolves, and more, making it home to a vast array of globally significant wildlife.

That's why it's critically important that the "Special Areas" with the highest conservation and habitat value in the reserve be kept off-limits to oil and gas development. And that's exactly what the Obama administration has done.

The first-ever comprehensive plan for the entire Reserve ensures Teshekpuk Lake, the Colville River, Utukok River Uplands, Kasegaluk Lagoon, and Peard Bay are protected from dirty and dangerous drilling. The plan protects vital Teshekpuk Lake wetlands and shields sensitive wildlife including migratory birds and caribou from risky oil development, spills and industrial activity. The plan also protects the upper Colville River and Utukok Uplands--habitat for caribou, bear, wolf, and wolverine-- and coastal estuaries like Kasegaluk Lagoon and Peard Bay where rich marine life

thrives. The final plan also will manage 12 rivers for their outstandingly remarkable values, including the Utukok, Kokolik, and upper Colville River including its headwaters tributaries.

On the ground: the Arctic is a magical place

For the past 15 years, my job has let me be part of the efforts to help protect the special areas in America's Arctic from the threat of oil and gas drilling. I have also had the opportunity to spend time on the ground in this amazing landscape and witness wildlife spectacles for myself. I've seen 20,000 caribou fill a valley, watched a family of wolverine frolic in a snowfield, floated through a herd of muskox, and been awakened by the howls of seven wolves across a river.

Last summer, while walking along a gravel bar, I came across a bar-tailed godwit poking around in the gravel. This large, russet brown shorebird spends its summer in Alaska's western Arctic and, when it heads south, it makes the longest nonstop flight of any bird -- traveling 9,000 miles in one flight to the islands of the South Pacific. You can experience moments like this only in America's most pristine landscapes.

I am not alone in knowing that the special places of the western Arctic deserve protection: approximately 400,000 Americans submitted public comments to the Obama administration supporting strong conservation and protection of special areas in the Reserve. These comments came from sportsmen, business owners, conservationists, and folks just like me from across the country who want oil and gas drilling balanced with protection for key wildlife habitat.

Climate change adds a double whammy

And, after a year during which our nation experienced record floods, record droughts, record wildfires, and record storms fueled by climate disruption, protecting the Arctic is more important than ever.

The climate crisis has gone from being a threat to a dangerous reality. More dirty energy development threatens a double whammy for the Arctic, disrupting our landscapes with drills and dredging up more dirty fuel that further melts the area when burned into the atmosphere.

The Obama administration's final plan for the Reserve is a big step in the right direction toward permanently protecting critical wildlife habitat and subsistence needs in America's western Arctic.

The people spoke, and President Obama and Secretary Salazar listened. Future generations will surely benefit from this foresight. " ❖

--Dan Ritzman,

Sierra Club Alaska Campaign Director

On Arctic Ground: Tracking Time Through Alaska's National Petroleum Reserve By Debbie S. Miller

In her latest book on North Slope conservation, Fairbanks resident and Alaska Arctic traveler Debbie S. Miller describes her experiences during canoe trips down, and hikes off, the Colville, Nigu, and Etivluk Rivers within the Bureau of Land Management-administered National Petroleum Reserve-Alaska (Reserve). This is the first book entirely on the remote Arctic Reserve, and it sets a very high standard.

In addition to Debbie's own narrative, the coffee-table book features expansive stunning color photographs and descriptions by expert contributors of the internationally significant wildlife, wilderness, recreational, paleontological, and cultural resources of this vast 23-million-acre area. Thirteen of the nation's foremost wildlife and landscape photographers contribute numerous spectacular photographs. Complementing the photographs is a CD of wildlife sounds recorded by Alaskan Richard Nelson, cultural anthropologist and host of his natural history program Encounters on National Public Radio.

On Arctic Ground is intended to alert the public and Congress to the conservation opportunities of this little-known area. Its timely publication also helps readers evaluate a resource management plan for the Reserve just issued by the Obama Administration. (See *Sierra Borealis*, June 2012, for a preliminary notice about this book.)

Debbie's previous books are *Midnight Wilderness* (which has become a classic on the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge); *Journeys in Alaska's National Wildlife Refuge*, and *Ground Zero*, dealing with the impact of oil and gas development on the Inupiaq culture. She is also the author of several books for children, such as *Big Alaska*, *Arctic Lights*, *Arctic Nights*, and *Are Trees Alive?*

BLM's "Integrated Activity Plan"

In February, Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar issued a final Environmental Impact Statement and Record of Decision on the BLM's "Integrated Activity Plan" (Plan). He says it "...allows for the development of 72 percent of the estimated economically recoverable oil in the nearly 23 -million-acre Reserve, while protecting the vital subsistence resources of Alaska Natives and the habitat of world class wildlife populations." Oil and gas leasing is available on 11.8 million acres, while another 11 million acres is not open to such leasing.

In comments on the draft Plan/EIS, the Sierra Club had recommended an alternative (B-1) that called for more protection of key habitat areas than provided by the final



Debbie Miller spent most of three recent summers exploring the Western Arctic and its rivers.

Plan. Oil and gas leasing would be available on 7.5 million acres; 15.5 million acres would be unavailable.

When Congress turned over the former Naval Petroleum Reserve Number 4 to the BLM in 1976, the lawmakers directed that Teshekpuk Lake and the Colville River, two especially important habitats, be designated as Special Areas for the protection of caribou and migratory waterfowl, and peregrine falcons, respectively. The two areas, and the rest of the Reserve, would be available for oil and gas development, with the stipulation that caribou, birds, and other wildlife in the two Special Areas would be afforded "maximum protection" in the event these areas are leased.

In 1977 the Carter-Andrus Administration added the Utukok River Uplands Special Area designed to safeguard the calving grounds and range of the Western Arctic caribou herd, the nation's largest. Kasegaluk Lagoon Special Area was added by the Bush Administration in 2004.

The 2013 Plan:

- Adds 3.09 million acres to the existing 3.97-million-acre Utukok Uplands Special Area, the calving grounds of the Western Arctic caribou herd.
- Adds 1.9 million acres to the existing 1.75-million-acre Teshekpuk Lake Special Area by extending its boundaries west to pick up important estuarine and coastal habitats;
- Establishes a 107,000-acre Peard Bay Special Area along the northwest coast; and
- Broadens the purpose of the existing Colville River Special Area to include protection of gyrfalcons and rough legged hawks that nest on the river's bluffs along with the nation's largest concentration of peregrine falcons.

All five Special Areas are closed to oil and gas leasing under the plan, but within the Kasegaluk, Peard, Colville, and the addition to the Teshekpuk Lake Special Area, pipelines, drilling pads, and related facilities could be authorized in the event oil and gas is piped east to the Trans-Alaska pipeline outside the Reserve. This excludes the existing 1.75 million-acre core of the Teshekpuk Lake Special Area and more than 90 percent of the Utukok River Uplands Special Area from future oil and gas pipelines etc. Approximately 645,000 acres along the northern edge of the Utukok River Uplands would be available for such development.

-- contuned on page 4

Comparing Debbie Miller's conservation proposals with BLM's plan

In *On Arctic Ground* Miller and her colleagues propose substantially more protection for the lands and waters of the Reserve. Although acreages are not specified, their Peard Bay Special Area proposal is significantly expanded to include the adjoining Peard Bay watershed. They call for a Dease Inlet & Meade River Special Area that would connect to the expanded Teshekpuk Lake Special Area. The Plan's expansion of the Teshekpuk Lake Special Area includes most of their proposal, but as noted above, the expansion is available for future oil and gas transportation facilities.



In addition the authors recommend a Southern Ikpikpuk River Special Area that would connect to the northern (lower) Ikpikpuk River within the Teshekpuk Lake Special Area. Their most ambitious proposal is a DeLong Mountains & Arctic Foothills Special Area that would close the gap between the northern boundary of Noatak National Preserve and the southern boundaries of the Utukok River Uplands and Colville Special Areas. This area, part of the Western Arctic caribou herd's range in the upper watersheds of the Colville and Utukok Rivers, offers alpine tundra hiking, wildlife viewing, river running, Alaska Native cultural features, and scenery in an undisturbed wilderness setting.

The lack of permanent protection

A major theme of *On Arctic Ground* is the lack of permanent protection for the Reserve's world-class natural values and the need for such protection in the face of threats posed by oil and gas leasing. Miller and her co-authors are well aware of the vulnerability of any administrative plan to change. Throughout the book they stress that permanent protection for the Reserve is lacking but is needed if the Reserve's wildlife and wilderness are to last.

In adopting a final plan little changed from the draft preferred alternative, the Obama Administration declined to ask Congress for permanent protection of the Special Areas. The provisions of the Plan can be amended or revised administratively at the discretion of whatever Administration is in power. Already, President Obama has directed the Department of the Interior to carry out an annual round of leasing

Similarly, the 12 rivers found qualified for wild river status are not recommended for addition to the

permanent protection of the National Wild & Scenic Rivers System. Instead, the BLM commits itself to managing them consistent with preserving "Congress's option" to consider designating them as wild rivers. In the alternative supported by the Sierra Club, these rivers would have been recommended for addition to the System.

Potential future oil and gas extraction offshore in the Beaufort Sea would also mean onshore facilities. Thus the Plan's protections for the Special Areas could be ephemeral, with the exception of the Utukok River Uplands Special Area which is not known to contain oil. As Secretary Salazar states in his Record of Decision, "Due to the dynamic nature of public land resources it is necessary that plans such as this are maintained, amended, and, when necessary, revised. This plan will remain in place until the agency determines that it is appropriate to adopt a different approach to management of the Reserve."

By "revealing the wonders" of the Western Arctic Reserve, Debbie Miller and her colleagues are raising citizen awareness of what is at stake. *On Arctic Ground* is a splendid contribution to a renewed campaign for permanent protection of this Alaska Arctic treasure.

Seattle: The Mountaineers Books, 2012, 143 pages.
\$29.95. ❖

-- Jack Hession



Alaskans prepare to celebrate 50th Anniversary of Wilderness

How will YOU help to highlight the special American historic and cultural achievement of setting premier wild places aside from development--by law? Local events will be the vital component of celebrations around

Wilderness is "made in America"

the country -- in addition to a Washington DC gala in September 2014 and a major, national wilderness anniversary conference scheduled for Albuquerque, New Mexico in October 2014.

Look for an update in our next issue on what's happening in Alaska. ❖



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



Poster in Cold Bay airport

(See **Sierra Borealis** March `2012.)

On March 6, a coalition of conservation groups that included Sierra Club sent a letter to President Obama urging him to direct Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar to act swiftly in finalizing the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service's decision that a proposed road through a wilderness area in Alaska's Izembek National Wildlife Refuge is not in the public's interest. They commended the FWS for deciding the road should not be built and for recognizing that it would have severe negative effects on the wildlife refuge and the species it was established to protect.

Supporters of the road proposal claim it is needed to provide emergency medical transportation from the community of King Cove to the airport in the nearby town of Cold Bay.

But wilderness advocates opposing the road point out that Congress in 1998 appropriated \$37.5 million to improve local infrastructure and services, and a road--in addition to costing millions more taxpayer dollars for construction and maintenance--would often be impassable because of weather.

Dan Ritzman, Sierra Club's Alaska Program Director, stated, "We support the Fish and Wildlife Service's decision against a road through Izembek wilderness; this decision will uphold the principles of wilderness and protect the heart of the Izembek National Wildlife Refuge."

The 30 days for Secretary Salazar to approve a Record of Decision is almost over. Now the final say is up to him. Although Alaska Senator Lisa Murkowski has made threats to hold up the nomination of Salazar's potential successor, Sally Jewell, the Interior Department is unlikely to reverse itself and change its decision. ❖

(from Sierra Club press release)

through this designated wilderness would set a dangerous precedent that would threaten wilderness protection in national wildlife refuges, parks, monuments, and other public lands across the country.

Arctic Stay of Execution--Not a Pardon (Shell won't drill in 2013)

Good news! Shell Oil has dropped its plans to drill Alaska's Arctic waters in 2013. The 2012 drilling season was replete with equipment failures, safety and environmental violations, groundings, and other transportation accidents (see **Sierra Borealis** Dec. 2012) which are leading to ongoing investigations by the Coast Guard, Interior Department and the Department of Justice.

"After bumbling through a year of mishaps, beachings and complete safety failures, it's clear that Shell and the oil industry were not ready to drill in the Arctic," said Rep. Edward Markey. (D-MA)

Rep. Markey is the champion for the wilderness bill for the coastal plain of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, the Udall-Eisenhower Arctic Wilderness Act, which he reintroduced in the House of Representatives this January as HR139.

On January 8, 2013, Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar announced an "expedited, high-level assessment" and "review of practices" for the 2012 offshore drilling program. The review is being conducted by Interior's Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM) and was expected to be completed by March 8.

But the Arctic remains under dire threat

Melting sea ice is generating an emerging Arctic resources rush. In the past five years, the Arctic has lost up to two-thirds of its sea ice every summer. Summer polar ice is projected to thaw completely by 2030. Corporations and governments see this as an opportunity for development, trade, and tourism. Many circumpolar nations are already drilling for oil and gas in the region, as well as conducting mining, shipping, and cruising. Russia, Canada, and Norway are building icebreaker fleets and shore-based infrastructure. United States business interests envision economic potential from the energy and mineral resources in the trillions of dollars. The Alaskan Arctic is estimated to have 30 billion barrels of oil, more than 220 trillion cubic feet of natural gas, rare earth minerals, and massive renewable wind, tidal, and geothermal energy.

With increasing development by other Arctic nations already a reality, it will be difficult to protect Alaska's Arctic. There are no mandatory requirements for those operating in or passing through the wider Arctic region, in spite of incredibly harsh and dangerous environmental conditions. There are no designated shipping lanes -- no requirements for ice-strengthened hulls, ice navigation training for ships' masters, or even for updated navigation

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Arctic threats and Shell

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and ice charts. The United States has not signed on to the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), has no Arctic policy, and lacks ships, aircraft, or infrastructure to enforce sovereignty or criminal laws. And so, the U.S. has no way to protect people and the marine environment from catastrophic incidents.

In the lower forty-eight states, response time to an oil spill or capsized vessel is measured in hours. Arctic coasts lack infrastructure to launch any such response or to otherwise support proposed commercial development in the region. In Alaska, it could take days or weeks to get the right people and resources on scene. The nearest major port is Dutch Harbor in the Aleutian Islands, 1300 miles from Point Barrow; response aircraft are more than 1000 miles south on Kodiak Island.

Imagine an oil spill on the scale of the Deepwater Horizon in Alaska's Arctic. In 2010, British Petroleum (BP) proved woefully unprepared to respond to a huge spill in the Gulf of Mexico, perhaps the most well-equipped region on the planet to deal with a massive oil spill. Lack of any Arctic safety infrastructure in the face of some of the world's most extreme weather, ice, and sea conditions makes it abundantly clear that no oil company is prepared to work safely in the Arctic.

Even without an oil spill, intensive Arctic development threatens catastrophe. Increased pollution from the CO₂-intensive development of infrastructure such as roads, platforms, tankers, ports, and pipelines will darken sea ice due to dust and particulates and increase its capacity to absorb heat and hasten melting. As consequent accelerated atmospheric warming thaws tundra, darker-hued shrubbery will move in, further increasing heat absorption in the Arctic. And, thawing tundra makes roads, airports, bridges, pipelines, and other infrastructure extremely unstable.

Arctic wildlife already shows significant signs of stress from climate change. An unprecedented number of polar bears have drowned because of dwindling summer sea ice. Narwhal, walrus, bowhead and beluga whales, seals, and birds, will also be affected by the increase in human activity and pollution. Unhealthy or declining Arctic wildlife will impact indigenous peoples

who depend on it for subsistence.

⇒ What can you do?

Sign on to the Sierra Club on-line petition urging suspension of the Arctic Drilling Program. Contact President Obama, Congress, and other officials and urge them to take several important actions:

1. Suspend the Arctic Offshore Drilling Program immediately.

2. Sign on to the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS)

3. Develop a comprehensive policy with real safeguards for the Arctic's environment and people.

4. Increase Coast Guard capacity for law enforcement and emergency response in Arctic waters.

<http://www.whitehouse.gov/contact/PresidentBarack>
Obama. Or call the White House comment line: 202-456-1111.
<http://www.govtrack.us/congress/members>
Find Your Congressional Representatives
<http://www.doi.gov/public/contact-us.cfm>
Secretary of the Interior, Ken Salazar
<https://secure.sierraclub.org/site/Advocacy?pagename=homepage&page=UserAction&id=10049&JServSessionIdr004=kced7w2zf1.app220a>

Sierra Club Action Petition: the Arctic's Double Whammy. ❖

-- Mike O'Meara, Alaska Chapter Vice Chair

(Mike O'Meara has been an Alaska resident since 1969 and has lived on his homestead near Homer since 1976, and traveled in the central and western Arctic. Mike was the curator of the Pratt Museum exhibit, Darkened Waters: Profile of an Oil Spill. It was the only comprehensive exhibit on the Exxon Valdez Spill and traveled throughout the nation between 1991 and late 2002.



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Potential Threat to the White Mountains National Recreation Area

The White Mountains National Recreation Area is a 1.1 million-acre wild area less than an hour's drive north of Fairbanks that affords wonderful opportunities for all kinds of recreational activities ranging from multiple-night backpacking, dogsled, ski, snowshoe and snow machine trips to picnicking, berry picking and day hikes. Fairbanksans are fortunate to have such a world-class conservation area at our doorsteps, and it is time to speak up against a potential threat to it.

In January, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) released a Draft supplement to their Eastern Interior Alaska Plan that potentially could allow hard rock mining and gold dredging in the White Mountains National Recreation Area (NRA) and other BLM areas. The plan covers 6.7 million acres of BLM land, including the Fortymile Area and Upper Black River region, where this is the first management plan ever. It also involves three Wild and Scenic Rivers (Beaver Creek, Birch Creek, and Fortymile), the Pinnell Mountain National Recreation Trail and the White Mountains NRA.

BLM says the final plan could allow mining on hundreds of thousands of acres in the White Mountains NRA. The Supplement considers allowing hard rock and placer mining in a number of tributaries to Beaver Creek and in the view of remarkable Mount Prindle, near campgrounds, hiking and winter trails, fishing and river float use areas.

The BLM seeks input on its Draft Plan, and it is time to speak up before April 11. The agency's Alternative C is its Preferred, but Alternative B, emphasizing the protection of wildlife habitat, recreation, wilderness qualities, and subsistence values, is environmentally preferable.

The agency has identified nearly 99 percent of the entire planning area as Lands with Wilderness Characteristics; management varies with alternatives. (See Table 3.12 in the existing environment section. Appendix F has a summary of the wilderness characteristics (WC) inventory. The entire WC inventory appears on the Eastern Interior website documents page: www.blm.gov/ak.)

The plan proposes four new Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC), and Alternative B contains the best boundaries and management direction. Alt. B is the only one proposing the White Mountains ACEC for caribou calving and post-calving and Dall sheep habitat, and it has a larger Steese ACEC; it also proposes a Fortymile ACEC to protect Fortymile caribou herd and Dall sheep habitat; Salmon Fork ACEC for salmon habitat, bald eagle nesting, and rare plants (should be expanded to reflect public nomination for a larger area in the Upper Black River to protect the wildlife and cultural values).

Alternative B could also be further improved with these additional measures:

1) Road construction is not compatible with the designation and management priorities for the White

Mountains or Beaver Creek Wild River and should be prohibited by the plan.

2) All ANILCA or D-1 mineral withdrawals should remain in place for the White Mountains NRA, Steese NCA and Upper Black River area and within the Fortymile National Wild, Scenic, and Recreational River segments, to keep them closed to locatable mineral entry and mineral leasing (including oil and gas).

3) In the White Mountains NRA and Steese NCA, the boundaries of primitive and semi-primitive recreation designations should remain as they are. The changes BLM proposes in decreasing the primitive management areas could facilitate mineral development and transportation corridors into the heart of the NRA.

4) The lands found to have Wilderness Characteristics should be managed so those values remain.

5) Monitor and mitigate climate change impacts, such as erosion, increased wild fires, and fisheries and habitat losses, through further site-specific plans spelled out in the final overall plan.

⇒ **WHAT YOU CAN DO:**

Please submit comments on this plan before April 11. Comments do not need to be long or complex, however going into some detail is useful, as is stating how you use the land. The basic message is to tell why you want its recreational/wilderness/scientific values preserved.

You can view the draft plan at www.blm.gov/ak. (look Under the Spotlight for a link to the Eastern Interior RMP website.) Jeanie Cole is the BLM official to call at 907-474-2340 for more information. Comments will be accepted until April 11, 2013. You can also go to EasternInterior@blm.gov for more info. You can contact me for questions concerning submitting of comments. ❖

-- Andy Keller

(Andy Keller is chair of the Alaska Chapter's Denali Group in Fairbanks: <bigpoarbear@acsalaska.net> 907-455-7083)



photo: Andy Keller

There are many ways to enjoy the White Mountains NRA

Sealaska bill is back in Congress



Alaska Senator Lisa Murkowski has introduced the latest version of her bill to authorize the Sealaska Corporation, an Alaska Native regional corporation, to select lands outside of its existing congressionally-established selection areas and take 70,000 acres of high-volume timber lands elsewhere in the forest, plus several small tracts with high potential for commercial development, and some Tlingit cultural sites. The corporation has 63,000 acres left to select of its land grant under the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act. But Senator Murkowski's bill provides it with additional lands, 70,000 acres.

Sierra Club continues to oppose the 2013 Senate bill as introduced—as part of our general and consistent opposition to privatizing valuable public lands. (See *Sierra Borealis*, March 2010; June and Dec. 2011.)

No one disputes Sealaska's right to its remaining land selections. However, although Congress clearly defined the withdrawal areas from which Sealaska is to select lands, the corporation now seeks its remaining selections from other, high-value lands in the Tongass. It has clear-cut most of the economically valuable timber in its existing selection areas. The land offered to Sealaska in the Murkowski bill—approximately 70,000 acres, is among the richest and most biologically productive in the Tongass and also includes exclusive rights for tourism development of some of the forest's most popular bays and river valleys currently used by local residents.

Nine communities in southeast Alaska said they oppose Murkowski's bill, arguing the bill could threaten their livelihoods and take away their own established uses of Tongass lands. In February the nine communities asked the new chair of the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee, Sen. Ron Wyden, (D-OR), to kill the Sealaska bill as being "special interest legislation" for Sealaska Corporation.

The communities opposed to the revised Sealaska Lands Bill include Thorne Bay, Cape Pole, Hollis, Naukati, Whale Pass, Kupreanof, Port Protection, Edna Bay and Point Baker. The same nine communities opposed Murkowski's Sealaska bill at a Senate committee hearing in May 2011.

Meanwhile, in an attempt to make her bill more acceptable, Alaska's senior senator, ranking minority member of the Senate Energy Committee, is negotiating with the Forest Service and Senator Wyden. The revised Southeast Alaska Native Land Entitlement Finalization and Jobs Protection Act is cosponsored by Sen. Mark Begich (D-AK.)

In the House of Representatives Rep. Don Young has a companion Sealaska bill. ❖

(Jack Hession helped in preparation of this update.)

Katmai National Park Bridge Plan Update

On February 12, 2013 the National Park Service issued a final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) on its plan for a \$7.4 million elevated bridge and boardwalk across the Brooks River at Brooks Camp in Katmai National Park and Preserve. A 30-day review followed, and the plan now awaits a final "Record of Decision" approval by Secretary Ken Salazar or his successor Sally Jewell, whose confirmation awaits a Senate vote. See *Sierra Borealis* (Sept. 2012) for the Sierra Club's evaluation of the bridge/boardwalk plan.

In summary, the plan amends the park's 1996 Development Concept Plan (DCP) for the entire Brooks Camp complex. The DCP calls for relocating the concession lodge, campground, other visitor facilities, float plane and boat landings, and NPS housing and other facilities now on the north side of the river to the south side in order to create a more or less "people-free" north side for brown bears moving to and from the river. There would be no "Bridge over the River Brooks," currently a floating bridge temporarily links the two sides during the summer and early fall.

The bridge/boardwalk amendment to the DCP plan means that the NPS has abandoned the earlier people-free north side concept of the DCP. Under the new amended DCP, float planes and boats taking visitors to and from Brooks camp would continue to land at Naknek Lake adjacent to the existing complex; visitors would be free to cross the bridge and wander at will in north side bear habitat.

Sierra Club and other environmental organizations had urged the NPS to adopt a far less costly and more bear-friendly day-use alternative in which all overnight accommodations and most NPS facilities would be located in or near the gateway community of King Salmon just outside the western boundary of the park. Day use programs are in place in Alaska's other 12 NPS units including overnight accommodations located in or near gateway communities.

Unfortunately, in its Final EIS, the NPS brushed off the day use alternative and clung to its expansive—and expensive—plan for the massive elevated bridge and boardwalk. despite Congress's directive in ANILCA that overnight accommodations be located at the west end of the park—in effect a day use directive. The agency also ignored former Secretary Bruce Babbitt's gateway community policy for locating major NPS visitor facilities in or near communities.

Although the NPS in Alaska is determined to burrow in at Brooks Camp, there is the possibility that Congress will scrutinize closely the notion of a fancy new resort/visitor complex in the heart of the most important brown bear concentration area in the National Park System. With an estimated cost of \$45 million as of two-three years ago, the DCP as amended by the grandiose bridge/boardwalk proposal is a sitting duck for the appropriation committees. ❖

--Jack Hession

+ Ginny Hill Wood, renowned Alaska conservationist, dies at 95

Legendary conservationist and pioneering outdoorswoman Virginia "Ginny" Hill Wood died peacefully in her sleep on March 8 at her home in Fairbanks, aged 95.

A decorated member of the WWII Women Airforce Service Pilots (WASP), she flew fighter planes and bombers across the country, delivering them to bases and to be shipped overseas for the war effort. She moved to Alaska in 1947 and dedicated her life to preserve Alaska's environment.



Photo courtesy of Roger Kaye, Fairbanks, who points out that this photo of Ginny Hill Wood during World War II, with her favorite plane, a P-51 Mustang, was very important to her, maybe because it expressed the fact that although she was renowned as a conservationist, that wasn't her whole life. She had multiple interests and was multitalented, and was a pilot of great accomplishment, both during the war years and after, in Alaska.

Along with her friend and fellow pilot Celia Hunter, she helped found the Alaska Conservation Society in 1960, Alaska's first grassroots environmental organization, which operated until 1993.

It successfully fought Project Chariot, (a plan to use nuclear bombs to create a harbor in Alaska's North Slope), and the proposed Rampart Dam on the Yukon River. The group was involved in passage of the 1980 Alaska National Interest Lands Act (ANILCA)



Ginny Wood, skiing on Mt Baker in Washington State

and protection of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. The society was superseded by another organization that Wood and Celia Hunter helped to found in 1980, the Alaska Conservation Foundation. With Hunter she also cofounded Camp Denali in 1951, which they operated until 1975, considered to be Alaska's first ecotourism wilderness lodge. Wood was inducted into Alaska Women's Hall of Fame in 2010.

According to Arctic National Wildlife Refuge Wilderness Specialist/Pilot Roger Kaye, who worked at Camp Denali during the 1970s, "She played a fundamental role in the beginning of the conservation movement in Alaska. The Alaska Conservation Society was founded in her living room in the late 1950s."

In 1967, Hunter and Wood hosted then Sierra Club president Ed Wayburn and his wife Peggy at Camp Denali on their first trip to Alaska, helping guide them to study some of the most magnificent areas of Alaska's vast public lands. The two pioneering Alaska conservationists greatly influenced the Wayburns, and consequently the Sierra Club, in making Alaska land preservation a major priority.

The book *Boots, Bikes, and Bombers: Adventures of Alaska Conservationist Ginny Hill Wood* edited by Karen Brewster, was recently published by the University of Alaska Press. (This innovative and collaborative life history of Ginny Hill Wood is available at local bookstores, or on-line at Amazon.com or through www.alaska.edu/uapress.) ❖

-- Pamela Brodie



Ginny Wood in then-Mt McKinley National Park, ca. late-1960s.

Photo courtesy of Roger Kaye



Photo courtesy of Roger Kaye

Alaska Chapter 2013 Election Results

Juneau Group becomes Tongass Group

The Juneau Group has changed its name to the Tongass Group, thanks to a vote of the Group members in the recent Sierra Club elections in Alaska. This reflects the actual



membership of the Group, which includes Sierra Club members throughout Southeast Alaska, not just in the city of Juneau. Most regional groups in the Sierra Club are named for natural areas, rather than cities, and the Tongass, America's largest national forest, covers the majority

of Southeast Alaska. The other two regional groups within the Alaska Chapter are Denali (Fairbanks and Interior AK) and Knik

(Anchorage and southcentral Alaska).

In other Chapter election results, Irene Alexakos, Russ Maddox, and Mike O'Meara were all re-elected to the Alaska Chapter Executive Committee. Continuing members of the executive committee are Richard Hellard, Jack Hession, and Pamela Brodie. The executive committee also includes regional group liaisons: Andy Keller from Denali Group and Tina Brown from Tongass Group. Within the executive committee, Pam Brodie was re-elected as Chapter chair, Mike O'Meara as vice-chair, Irene Alexakos as secretary, and Patrick Fort as treasurer (the treasurer is not required to be Excomm member).

Within the groups, Mark Rorick, Kevin Hood, and Layla Hughes were re-elected to the Tongass Group executive committee, joining Richard Hellard, Irene Alexakos and Tina Brown who are continuing members. Douglas McIntosh, Nancy Kuhn, and Magali Vincent were re-elected to the Denali Group ExComm; Andy Keller is a continuing member.

Thanks to all who voted, and especially to all who serve. ❖

--Pamela Brodie, Chapter chair

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To help us save paper and postage, **please send your email address to chapter chair Pam Brodie, pbrodie@gci.net**. Include your name and mail address and 8-digit member number for identification. Thanks, Pam