



# Sierra Borealis

## *alaska report*

SIERRA CLUB ALASKA CHAPTER  
DECEMBER 2011



## More drilling for America's Polar Bear Seas?

### Comment on Arctic Ocean OCS lease plan

The Administration's 2012-2017 Outer Continental Shelf Oil and Gas Draft Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement is now out for comment. *Please comment on the largest offshore drilling plan in 30 years -- to tell the Administration NO more drilling in risky Arctic waters.*

- Public Comment period: ends January 9, 2012
- For more information: <http://ocs5years.is.anl.gov/>

Last year's BP Gulf oil disaster spilled more than 200 million gallons of oil into the Gulf of New Mexico. Two million gallons of toxic dispersants were released. The damage (that we know of) will be seen for decades. Just one year later, more than 100,000 birds, turtles, and marine mammals were injured or killed by the gargantuan spill, and an unknown number of fish. Now imagine this happening in the frigid waters and along the fragile coastline of the Arctic Ocean, where endangered bowhead whales and threatened polar bears depend on the pristine waters.

There are many reasons we should not drill in the Arctic Ocean. The big one is staring us in the face: *no one can clean up an oil spill in Arctic waters.* The federal government knows this but is still considering to allow more oil companies access to our oceans. Tell the government: **no** drilling in the Arctic Ocean.

The Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM) is soliciting public comment until January 9 on their plan that will dictate where they will sell leases for the next five years and thus where oil companies can drill.

BOEM acknowledges we do not know enough to drill in the Arctic and are not at all equipped to clean up an oil spill. In deference to this blunt fact, BOEM is just going to postpone new

-- continued on page 2

### "Thank you Arctic Heroes"

## Arctic National Wildlife Refuge Comment period ends

The U.S Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS) closed a public comment period for their revised Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP) for the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge in mid November. The comments were an important milestone in that the USFWS draft plan included formal consideration of Wilderness designation for the Refuge's Coastal Plain – the biological heart of this national wilderness icon. To support wilderness, the public needed

to come forward and urge the Refuge Coastal Plain to be protected as wilderness once and for all – and we did!

At every step of the way, Alaskans and Americans stood up for the unique "wildlife, wilderness, and recreational values" of the Refuge. Sierra Club members came out strong. You could see it everywhere, including Alaska: support for a wilderness recommendation for the Coastal Plain. At the two largest Alaska public hearings -- in Anchorage and



Gwich'in leader Lorraine Netro, from Old Crow, Yukon, Canada; Deputy Chief, Vuntut Gwich'in Government, speaks at Arctic CCP hearing

Fairbanks -- the public defended Refuge values by more than 2-to-1 for protecting the land from devastating oil drilling. In Anchorage, an "Arctic Refuge Cultural Celebration"

-- continued on page 2

## OCS leasing plan:

-- from page 1

leasing for a couple years—and that itself is unacceptable: they should commit to NO leasing in the Arctic Ocean.

Here's another contradiction: this postponement will not stop Shell from drilling in the ocean next summer—and that delegitimizes the whole process. We need strong decisions against offshore drilling, not a large new offshore drilling plan.

America's Arctic waters are home to polar bears, walrus, bowhead and beluga whales, and more. This fragile landscape is changing rapidly as the Arctic warms. We cannot gamble with dangerous offshore drilling.

### ⇒ WHAT YOU CAN DO:

Tell the government by Jan. 9: no new lease sales, no more drilling in the Arctic Ocean's Beaufort and Chukchi Seas. Point out that industrial noise, traffic, toxic discharges, and seismic activities could impact bowheads, walrus, fish and other wildlife.

#### Submit comments online at:

<http://ocs5yeareis.anl.gov/involve/comments/index.cfm>

**By mail:** Mr. J. F. Bennett, Chief, Branch of Environmental Assessment, Bureau of Ocean Energy, Management, Regulation, and Enforcement, 381 Elden St, MS 4042, Herndon, VA 20170.

View the 2012-2017 EIS at: <http://ocs5yeareis.anl.gov/> ❖

-- Lindsey Hajduk

## Arctic Refuge CCP comments:

-- from page 1

kicked off the hearing with throngs of supporters. In Fairbanks, a vast majority of folks testified for wilderness even after an attempt from a local union to stack the hearing with new hires who were required to attend as part of work. Nationally, the Sierra Club solicited comments from volunteers across the country in their "Arctic Hero" campaign.

"Arctic Heroes" – this was the title given to folks who agreed to sign-up and volunteer to find other people to send in public comments for the Refuge. These Heroes were given forms, factsheets, and quick tips, to share this issue with others. More than 1,400 volunteers signed-up and collected thousands of comments. Added to its online comment forms, the Sierra Club generated over 100,000 comments to protect the coastal plain. In total, nearly 1 million comments were sent to USFWS asking for permanent protection for the coastal plain of the Arctic Refuge—an enormous accomplishment!

Now, more than ever before, it is obvious that the Arctic Refuge holds a special place in the hearts of Americans and Alaskans alike—a symbol of America's willingness to let wilderness be. USFWS now must weigh all the comments. In this crucial time, we spoke loud and clear: protect the Coastal Plain, biological heart of the Arctic Refuge. ❖

-- Lindsey Hajduk

## Tongass legislation update: New Opposition to Sealaska Lands bill

After more than a year of study and offering recommendations for improvement, The State of Alaska Citizens Advisory Commission on Federal Lands has notified Senator Lisa Murkowski of their opposition to passage of her bill, S.730, and its House of Representatives counterpart sponsored by Rep. Don Young, HR.1408. This is the Southeast Alaska Native Land Entitlement Finalization and Jobs Protection Act, known as the "Sealaska Lands Bill". The decision of the Commission was expressed in a Nov. 4, 2011 letter to Senator Murkowski signed by State Representative Wes Keller. Thus, the Commission joined a chorus of groups including Sierra Club in opposing these bills—which would let Sealaska select lands beyond their originally legislated areas.

The Commission found that this legislation would require revisions to the Tongass Land Management Plan (TLUMP) which could hinder implementation of the Forest Service's Southeast Alaska Transition Strategy. Available timber supplies to local mills would diminish. The Transition Strategy is the agency's program to facilitate a transition in the Tongass from jobs depending on cutting timber in old-growth areas—which had often involved constructing new logging roads in roadless areas—to jobs depending on smaller, second growth cutting. Under provisions of the Sealaska bill, certain lands the Forest Service counted on for timber supplies would be privatized and no longer available. Interference with the agency's conservation strategy might also lead to the listing of the Queen Charlotte Goshawk and the Alexander Archipelago Wolf under the Endangered Species Act.

Other negative consequences of the legislation, according to the Commission, include further reductions to the timber supply due to proposed conservation areas, decreased access and use by local communities, and eventual displacement of existing commercial guides. The concern was also expressed that other Native corporations will seek to revisit their selections.

The findings of the Commission were summarized as "We have determined that entitlement can be met with the currently selected lands in the existing withdrawals". This is the same conclusion reached by many conservationists for environmental reasons. The Senator has been willing to tweak the legislation around the edges based on suggestions from her constituents, and the opposition from the Commission will increase pressure for more changes. However, these minor changes do not make her efforts to grant additional lands to Sealaska acceptable to environmentalists and other concerned citizens. Yet, she continues to ignore the fact that her approach is fatally flawed. With opposition coming from all sides, including some local Southeast Alaska communities, it is time for Sen. Murkowski to drop this ill-conceived proposal.

⇒ Tell Senator Murkowski how you feel about her attempt to put more of the Tongass National Forest into the hands of corporations.

Phone her at (202)224-6665, or (907)271-3736 or 456-0233. or email her through: <http://www.murkowski.senate.gov/> or send her a fax at: (202)-224-5301. ❖

-- Richard Hellard

## Alaska Chapter election going on now: Please vote for Chapter and Group officers

In early December, all Sierra Club Alaska Chapter members should receive an election ballot in the mail to vote for members of the executive committee of the Alaska Chapter, and perhaps also of the regional group. *Please vote.* If your household has a joint membership, both members may vote on the same ballot. We mail paper ballots to every Sierra Club member household; for communications other than ballots the Alaska Chapter is working towards electronic communications, as much as possible. If we do not have your e-mail address, please e-mail it to chapter chair Pam Brodie at [pbrodie@gci.net](mailto:pbrodie@gci.net). (Don't worry, we use it rarely, and we won't clog up your computer with messages.)

➡ *Marked ballots must be received at the Sierra Club office in Anchorage by **Tuesday, January 3.***

Three long time activists, Richard Hellard, Jack Hession, and Pam Brodie are running for re-election to three slots on the nine member chapter executive committee (Excomm). Candidates for the Denali Group (Fairbanks and Interior Alaska) are Andy Keller and Fran Mauer, running for two seats on the five member Excomm. Candidates for the Juneau Group (Southeast Alaska) are Irene Alexakos and Richard Hellard, running for two seats on the five member Excomm. In addition, the Juneau Group Excomm has voted unanimously to place an amendment to its bylaws on the ballot to expand its Excomm from five to seven members, reflecting an increase in Group activists. At this time, there is no election for the Knik Group (Anchorage and Southcentral). The terms are two years. The Chapter Excomm includes liaisons from the groups, along with members elected at large. Candidate statements appear on the Alaska Chapter website <http://alaska.sierraclub.org/>; those of the three Chapter candidates are reproduced here as well.

*Rationale for Juneau Group executive committee's unanimous vote to add two more seats to the group Excomm:*

This will enable the Juneau group (JGSC) to have more activists involved in making decisions without requiring a current member leave the Excomm. Please note that these days it is hard to find active volunteers; the more we have involved at a high level the better off we all are. After JGSC Excomm voted for the expansion, by the Sierra Club's by laws, the Excomm of the Alaska Chapter of the Sierra Club then had to vote to allow the expansion also, and they did so. Now the membership of JGSC also needs to vote in favor of expansion. Please do so.

Why vote in our Chapter election? The Sierra Club is a democratic organization. Elected volunteers, not staff, determine Sierra Club policy, priorities and expenditures. Alaska Chapter and Group executive committee members welcome participation and communication from Sierra Club members on local environmental issues, and ask for your vote.

-- Pamela Brodie, Alaska Chapter chair

## Chapter Candidates and their statements



**Pamela Brodie:** For more than thirty years, I have worked to protect the environment as staff and as a volunteer with the Sierra Club, including 22 years here in Alaska. I coordinated the successful grassroots effort to persuade the Exxon Valdez Oil Spill Trustee Council to use Exxon's fines to purchase more than 600,000 acres of privately-owned coastal wild-

life habitat and protect it as new state and federal park, refuge and forest lands. I also organized the Sierra Club's actions, in coordination with other conservation organizations, to improve management of the Tongass National Forest, leading up to the major reforms of the Tongass Land Management Plan revision of 1997. More recently, I have served on the Alaska Chapter's Executive Committee, and as Chapter Chair. I appreciate the wonderful activists we have here, and strive to keep everyone working together smoothly and effectively to maintain Alaska's beauty and biological diversity, particularly by protecting our public lands and curbing global warming.



**Richard Hellard:** In 1982 I moved to Alaska and got involved with the Sierra Club the same year. Since that time, I have worked on a number of issues and, I hope, have helped bring about some changes. Whether it was the fight to thwart the major pulp mills in Southeast (a great victory), trying to prevent a boondoggle mining road to Juneau (so

far so good), or working with friends and allies on the national level to promote Wilderness status for the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, the battles have been fierce but worthy. Sometimes I feel like I have been hanging around for a long time. I have learned a few things, and my reasons for getting involved have not changed. More importantly, the threats to this place that I love have not gone away. The powers that be still want to clear-cut the Tongass, and our political "leaders" want to create a national sacrifice zone in the Arctic just like the Gulf of Mexico. Senator Murkowski believes that burning coal is essential for our future. With your permission, I will continue to help lead the Alaska Sierra Club's fight against these outdated ideas and strengthen our efforts for a healthy planet.



**Jack Hession:** If re-elected, I will continue my four-decade-long effort, first as long time Alaska representative and now as a Chapter volunteer, to guard Alaska's premier federal lands, with special focus on implementation of the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act. In this task, I will keep Chapter members posted on the latest concerns, monitor the actions of the

federal agencies with jurisdiction over our national parks, wildlife refuges, wild & scenic rivers, and wilderness areas; keep track of congressional bills affecting these national conservation system units; present the Club's positions on Alaska bills before Congress when invited to testify; assist our land protection team in the Washington DC office; work with Sierra Club attorneys, and help develop Chapter positions on these issues. ❖



# State Lands Need Protection too

Alaska is about 373 million acres. When Congress granted Alaska statehood in 1959, a provision of the bill granted the new state the right to select 103.5 million acres for state lands. In 1971 Congress passed the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA), which gave Native corporations 44 million acres. Section d(2) of ANCSA gave preliminary protection to some valuable lands in the remaining vast federal domain and opened the door for the epic decade-long struggle over Alaska conservation lands. After much debate, Congress passed the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA) of 1980. This “conservation bill of the century” was actually a compromise forced by the election of Ronald Reagan as president and a Congress that was much less supportive of establishing conservation lands in Alaska.

Supporters of protecting Alaska’s wild federal lands formed a national coalition of which the Sierra Club was a very active member. Tongass National Forest logging and management issues, that were left out in ANILCA were amended in 1990; however controversies still persist in the Tongass Forest today. And ANILCA left open the oil drilling debate in the coastal plain of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. Other omissions in the ANILCA compromise that passed do not get the national attention of the Arctic Refuge or the Tongass.

## State Lands in southwest and central Alaska

One conservation unit that was in the original Alaska Coalition proposal and was later dropped in the compromise legislation was the Iliamna National Wildlife Refuge on the Alaska Peninsula between Lake Clark and Katmai National Parks.

The state-selected lands in this region have now become the site of the proposed Pebble Mine (see article, p. 8). If ever built, Pebble would be the world’s largest open pit copper mine with deposits of gold, zinc and other minerals. The decision whether or not to develop this mine site, that sits at the headwaters of rivers that flow into Bristol Bay and its world-class salmon fishery, is playing out in the permit process and public opinion in Alaska.

In 2007 state Senator Gary Stevens (R-Kodiak), introduced a bill that would establish a Jay S. Hammond state Wildlife Refuge encompassing the lands at the Pebble Mine site. Hammond was a former governor and conservationist who lived at Lake Clark and who felt strongly against the Pebble mine proposal. While a refuge would not totally block the mine, it would place additional hurdles in the way of mine development. The bill did not move in the legislature at that time, and Senator Stevens has not introduced it again.

Alaska Coalition proposals in 1977 included placing the area along the Stampede corridor, just northeast of Denali National Park, within the park. ANILCA excluded this region from the park, and activities that conflict with park values continue there, especially poaching. There is considerable interest in establishing a state recreation area in the Stampede corridor, and state Senator Joe Thomas (D-Fairbanks) and state Representative David Guttenberg (D-Fairbanks) are supportive of the idea.

One hundred miles south of Fairbanks and east of Denali National Park, the Alaska Range curves southeastward. Where the Richardson Highway dissects the mountains, the Tangle Lakes Archeological District exists. There is some federal BLM land in this region; however much of this land is now state land where exploration for nickel, copper, and platinum is currently occurring. Mining claims on state lands cover about 160,000 acres in this region. The claims surround the Delta national Wild and Scenic River, a favorite recreation area.

This vicinity is full of natural wonders. These include outstanding views of the Alaska Range, wide-open expanses of tundra and pristine examples of boreal forest. There are archeological sites and well preserved fossils in the limestone rock, which remind us of our past. The Tangle Lakes are home to loons, grebes, swans, terns, ducks and several species of fish. A conservation area would provide valuable habitat for the Nelchina caribou herd, which is hunted and photographed.

The hiking and canoeing possibilities seem endless. And it is possible to drive to this beautiful place in one weekend and back from Fairbanks. There is a proposal to establish a Tangle Lakes State Wildlife Refuge in the vicinity.

➔ **What You Can Do:** To express support for protecting these areas Alaskans should contact your state legislators:

Representative \_\_\_\_\_  
State Capitol, Juneau, AK 99801-1182  
Senator \_\_\_\_\_  
State Capitol, Juneau, AK 99801-1182

Non-Alaska residents can express support by writing to the Alaska Department of Fish and Game. (Letters-to-the-editor of Alaska newspapers will help to build support, too.)

Alaska Dept. of Fish and Game, Boards Support Section  
P.O. Box 115526, Juneau, AK 99811-5526  
Fax 907-456-6094 ❖

-- Andy Keller, Fairbanks

## Conservationist of the Year: Russ Maddox

Alaska Chapter activist Russ Maddox was named **2011 Conservationist of the Year** by our colleagues at the Northern Alaska Environmental Center (NAEC). We at the Sierra Club Alaska Chapter couldn’t agree more. Russ serves on the Chapter executive committee and is our number one volunteer fighting the pollution from coal development in this state, including water and air pollution from coal smoke, ash and dust, and the disastrous effects on global climate of increased carbon dioxide from burning coal. As if that were not enough, Russ is also our chapter delegate to the National Sierra Club’s Council of Club Leaders, and he serves on the Council of Club Leaders Executive Committee as well. And Russ manages to run his own business -- in his spare time -- boarding dogs in Seward, where he lives. Somehow, Russ seems to have the energy and commitment of several activists rolled into one. He is an inspiration to us all, demonstrating the difference one person can make. Congratulations, Russ...and thank you for all you do to protect Alaska’s environment.

-- Pamela Brodie

## Attending Alaska's Birds: A Wildlife Pilot's Story

by James G. (Jim) King

Hancock Press, second edition, 429 pp., \$29.95 (paper)

In his autobiography, Jim King describes his adventurous 32-year career, beginning in pre-statehood days, as a flyway pilot-waterfowl biologist with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Since his retirement from the Service he has remained active as a nationally known expert on migratory bird policy and management who does consulting work for the Service and for environmental consulting companies. His wife Mary Lou is a leading Juneau conservationist, noted for her work in establishing an outstanding network of area hiking trails. His son James is a recent past director of Alaska's state park system.

His Service title as Waterfowl Supervisor, (short for Supervisor of Waterfowl Investigations) surely amuses him. Aside from the short period when molting waterfowl can be rounded up and banded—an exercise King describes in detail—"supervising" waterfowl seems unlikely. Hence his preference for "attending," a word that reflects his career of taking care of our fellow creatures.

Flying annual spring waterfowl counts over the nesting areas of coastal, Interior and Arctic Alaska, as well as trapping and banding in these areas, gave King the knowledge and experience that paid off for the nation in memorable conservation victories of the last half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. These include his and fellow FWS biologists' 1961-2 study of waterfowl numbers and habitats on the Yukon Flats as part of a resource study of the Rampart Dam on the Yukon River proposed by new U.S. Senator Ernest Gruening (D-AK) shortly after Alaska joined the Union in 1959. Their report was instrumental in sinking the senator's scheme, a gigantic plug that would have inundated 36,000 lakes and ponds vital for millions of nesting waterfowl, "drowned 400 miles of the Yukon River bed and 12,600 miles of tributary fish habitat," "created a reservoir 280 by 80 miles in extent and covering 10,500 square miles," and flooded out six Alaska Native villages.

In 1971, as part of the settlement of Alaska Native land claims, Congress directed the withdrawal of millions of acres of unreserved public (BLM) lands for study as potential additions to the national park, wildlife refuge, and wild and scenic river systems. King and his fellow biologist pilot Cal Lensink, racing against a tight deadline set by Congress, quickly assembled data, maps, and recommendations for the most important bird marshes along the Yukon, Kuskokwim and Koyukuk Rivers that served as the basis for the subsequent withdrawal and studies. In 1980, as part of the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA), Congress added these areas, including the Yukon Flats, to the national wildlife refuge system.

Although Jim King's work focused on waterfowl, his aerial surveys of coastal Alaska yielded 20 memos, reports, and scientific papers on seabirds. His report on the sea

The author at work in the field, circa 1960s



Jim King photo

birds of Bristol Bay and his recommendation for a 250,000 acre refuge to protect the amazing seabird colonies of the Cape Newenham cliffs and adjacent drainages were the foundations of former Interior Secretary Stewart Udall's executive order in 1969 that established the 265,000 acre Cape Newenham Refuge unit. Later, ANILCA included this unit in the four-million acre Togiak National Wildlife Refuge.

As the first manager of the Clarence Rhode National Wildlife Range (established by former Interior Secretary Fred Seaton in 1960), King saw the need to protect additional highly productive habitat. His research and recommendation led to Secretary Udall's one million acre addition to the Range in 1969.

Secretary Udall's executive orders were necessary but not quite sufficient to fully secure the two refuges in permanent public ownership. As both Cape Newenham and Clarence Rhode were executive branch creations, they, like the other pre-ANILCA refuges and ranges established by executive order, remained vulnerable to adverse changes or even revocation by subsequent administrations. ANILCA, which gave all these units statutory status-- meaning that only Congress can change boundaries and uses--permanently foreclosed potential ill-conceived executive branch actions.

In his final chapter, *Summing Up, 2007*, King relates some "things he likes and dislikes." For example:

"I don't like the way the donors, lobbyists, and lawyers of the multi-national corporations have taken over the Alaska government and legislature. Our politicians work more for the worldwide stockholders of these companies than they do for Alaska residents."

That was written four years ago. The situation is even worse today in the land of "drill baby drill".

Another observation: "In general Alaska is a fun place to live and to visit. Those of us who reside here can enjoy the superlative waters and woods and mountains in an undefined Alaskan way... . A sense of adventure is often a real element in people's lives. Is this the "Alaska mystique" recognized by people all over the world? Those who conquer high mountains, shoot trophy animals, kayak great rapids, make impressive wilderness trips,... and write with glowing intensity add to the mystique. How significant it is that keeping the oil industry out of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge has become a national issue of more than 20 years' standing. Retaining the mystique

-- continued on page 7

# The Campaign against Coal: Fueling the Debate

Recently, in response to a constituent's query about alleged coal ash contamination in Fairbanks, Alaska's senior senator, Lisa Murkowski, took it upon herself to explain her unwavering belief in carbon storage and sequestration (CSS) and support of coal power.

As our planet faces the highest carbon dioxide levels in the atmosphere, juxtaposed with the smallest polar sea ice coverage in millennia, we all process in different ways the news that our planet is warming. Evidence is mounting that climate modeling has been too conservative, and the anticipated effects are occurring much sooner than previously predicted. Folks of reason well understand how our ever increasing combustion of carbon saturated fossil fuels threatens the productivity of our oceans and disrupts the climate in ways that we are just beginning to understand. With coal the most harmful of these fossil fuels, communities across America have risen up and refused to accept new coal fired power plants in their airsheds and watersheds. The Sierra Club's Beyond Coal campaign has been very effective in helping communities stop many of the proposed coal fired power plants.

Coal companies see the resulting fallen domestic demand as an opportunity to capitalize on lucrative foreign markets to sell their dirty fuel. They spend their profits inundating the airwaves with their misleading propaganda rather than truly cleaning up their messes and avoiding unnecessary risks to public health and environmental degradation. Unfortunately their misinformation and influence reach beyond the media to Congress and often prevent an



Lovebird © Israel Shotridge

honest debate.

There was considerable interest surrounding the theory of carbon storage and sequestration (CSS) back in the '08 election cycle. This was to be the solution to avoiding the dire consequences associated with transferring the carbon dioxide that has been safely stored in coal underground into the atmosphere through combustion. Many millions of dollars were dedicated to a handful of projects intended to prove this theoretical process. As it turns out it is a flawed

concept and offers no silver bullet. Due to the inefficiencies involved with pumping the CO2 back underground and the obvious fact that there is not enough room underground to safely sequester the volumes that would be necessary, these pilot projects have been abandoned. (See July, 2011 article from New York Times: <http://www.nytimes.com/cwire/2011/07/15/15climatewire-aep-move-to-stop-carbon-capture-and-sequestr-83721.html>). CO2 could feasibly be used to reinject into some diminishing oilfields to lift the remaining oil, but as far as being the solution to what to do with CO2 to curb climate change, CSS is not it. The only truly safe way to sequester carbon dioxide in coal is to leave it in the ground in the first place.

Apparently someone forgot to tell our senior U.S. Senator the news. Or perhaps her many conversations with coal industry lobbyists and campaign coffers flush with coal industry contributions have influenced her stance? As the minority leader of the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee, Sen. Murkowski enjoys one of the most influential positions one can achieve to develop energy policy in our nation.

In her reply letter to a constituent worried about problems with coal ash, she stated:

"The United States, and especially Alaska, has an abundance of coal that, when combined with cutting-edge technology to curb or eliminate carbon dioxide (CO2) emissions, can be used to help us achieve energy independence and security by reducing our use of foreign fuels. Carbon dioxide produced during the fuel's production can be largely captured using technology to sequester it, or lock it up, underground. Therefore, I believe carbon sequestration technology, when used for electric power generation, constitutes a significant net benefit to the environment. We will need all of these low- and zero-emission technologies if we are to meet America's energy needs in the future while cutting greenhouse gas emissions."

She dismissed her correspondent's concerns about "accidental coal ash spillage" by saying, "The Environmental Protection Agency has properly stated that it will propose regulations to address coal waste disposal." Then, at the same time she pointed out she opposed EPA's finalizing a rule that would "permanently damage the beneficial use market...."

What this has to do with her constituents' concerns about the health risks associated with coal ash blowing over her home in Fairbanks is anyone's guess. Anyone can cut and paste coal industry talking points, but it takes a leader of substance and fortitude to go against the demands of big coal's powerful industry lobby and take a principled stand for the sake of the health of one's constituents.

Big coal's constant attempts, including influence on our legislators, to keep the dirtiest fossil fuel dominating our energy use is a plague on our society. ❖

-- Russ Maddox, Seward



## Mat-Su Residents come out in force against the Wishbone Coal Mine

Who would have thought that on a frozen windy night in November more than 350 people would turn out to an elementary school in tiny Sutton, Alaska? This big event was the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) public hearing for the renewal application of a mining permit for Usibelli Coal to allow the strip-mining of nearby Wishbone Hill. Coal from this proposed mine would solely be for export to Asian markets; it would be returned as greenhouse gasses and poisonous mercury to Alaska's pristine fishing industry.

The opposition outnumbered coal proponents as the hearing went on into the night. One thing became obvious to everyone in that room in the small Matanuska Valley town east of Palmer. This fight against coal is being waged by local Alaskans. One after another, life-long Valley families spoke out about their love of the area and how it is important to their families to preserve it. They could not bear thoughts of ripping away a newly restored salmon stream, constant blasting, dangerous coal trucks, loss of precious wildlife and blanketing clouds of coal dust. The people at the hearing were mostly all neighbors, they lived there. The only real outsiders in the room were coal proponents, several paid employees of Usibelli who had traveled from Healy.

Why this change in mindset against coal? For one reason, the Mat-Su Valley is not the same as it was once. Although the area has a history of coal, many people now live where there once was mining. Then, the mining companies didn't worry about fouling drinking water, toxic coal dust and the dangers associated with transport. Very few people were there to notice. Now, rapidly growing cities such as Palmer and Wasilla would bear the full brunt of such impacts. *Thousands of Alaskan families could soon have a front row seat to strip-mines.*

Approval of the mine would severely impact life for the Mat-Su. In addition to toxic effects on air and water, property values will fall next. Already, new home loans have been denied by banks such as Wells Fargo to property owners near Wishbone Hill -- based upon the predicted ill effects from a new mine.

Usibelli is also having problems on additional fronts. Shortly before the Sutton hearing, Usibelli Coal withdrew their previously submitted air quality permit application for Wishbone Hill. They feared permit rejection, for opponents had exposed major flaws in their air quality data. The data that Usibelli is relying is several decades old and completely

obsolete. Nor does it take into account all the people now living in the area. No wonder local Alaskans are fighting it.

It is not too late for the opposition that is rising up. Groups like the Friends of Mat-su, Castle Mountain Coalition, and leaders of the Chickaloon Nation are working with the Sierra Club, taking this fight door-to-door, neighborhood-to-neighborhood to build the power necessary to defeat the proposed Mat-Su Valley strip-mine.

### ⇒ WHAT YOU CAN DO:

More volunteers are needed. To help this campaign to protect the Mat-Su Valley from strip-mining for Asian export coal, please email Emily Fehrenbacher at the Sierra Club in Anchorage:

[emily.fehrenbacher@sierraclub.org](mailto:emily.fehrenbacher@sierraclub.org).

Or call her at (907)276-4060. ❖

-- Marc Heilesen, Sierra Club  
Northwest Region Senior Organizing Manager

### Book Review--Jim King -- from page 5

and maintaining the fun are things I like to see."

Jim King's memoir is a splendid addition to Alaska conservation history, and to the current debates and conflicts between conservationists and resource extractors over the fate of the federally protected lands in Alaska. It is highly recommended reading for citizens determined to protect Alaska's public lands. ❖

-- Jack Hession

### Online news and communications

Please help the Sierra Club conserve paper and save postal costs by moving more of its communications on-line.

Check the Alaska Chapter's website, <http://alaska.sierraclub.org/> for environmental news, background on issues, Chapter activities, newsletters, and alerts. In March and June our quarterly Chapter newsletter, **Sierra Borealis**, is published electronically only. Our September and December issues, containing election notices, are still printed and mailed to members for whom we do not have an email address. You can help us reduce those costs.

Please email to us your own e-mail address. We will use it sparingly. Send email 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.

*Pam*

# Pebble Mine: Survey details opposition in region

According to a poll released just before Thanksgiving, 81 percent of the shareholders of the Bristol Bay Native Corporation (BBNC) who returned a survey oppose the proposed Pebble Mine, with 69 percent strongly opposed.

The Pebble Mine is a proposed vast industrial gold, copper and molybdenum open pit mine in the uplands of the Bristol Bay drainage between Lake Clark National Park and Lake Iliamna, the largest fresh water body in Alaska. Bristol Bay is the world's most valuable wild salmon fishery. The mine would be located on state land within the BBNC region.

The survey, conducted by Dittman Research and Communications during September and October, shows a 12 percent increase in opposition compared with the previous survey conducted four years ago, also by Dittman. BBNC is one of the Native corporations created by Congress in 1971 under the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act; the mission of the Native Corporations is the economic benefit of their shareholders. "BBNC supports responsible resource development, but opposes the Pebble project due to the risks it poses to our fisheries and our Native way of life," Jason Metrokin, Bristol Bay chief executive, said in a company press release. Of BBNC's shareholders, 41 percent live in the Bristol Bay region, 39 percent elsewhere in Alaska, and 20 percent outside Alaska.

BBNC also commissioned Strategies 360 Polling and Market Research to conduct a telephone survey of 802 Alaskan voters statewide. In the October poll, 54 percent of respondents

expressed unfavorable opinions of the proposed mine, compared to only 32 percent favorable. Those with an unfavorable opinion tended to hold their opinions much more strongly than those with favorable.

These follow a poll released in August showing that 85 percent of commercial fishermen holding permits to fish in Bristol Bay oppose the mine. Commissioned by the Alaska Conservation Foundation, this poll was conducted in May by Craciun Research, and surveyed 350, or 10 percent, of the permit holders. Included were permit holders living in the Bristol Bay area, elsewhere in Alaska, and outside the state.

The relatively small population of the Lake and Peninsula Borough held a mail-in election in October, in which residents voted by a margin of 280 to 246 for a ballot initiative targeted against the mine. This represents a relatively high 57 percent participation in the election. The mine site is located within the Lake and Peninsula Borough, which serves about 1600 people, but much of the local population that would be directly affected lives outside the Borough boundaries. The ballot initiative, among other things, forbids resource extraction developments larger than 640 acres that would have a "significant adverse impact" on anadromous waters. Both the State and the Pebble Partnership mine developers are challenging the measure in court. ❖

-- by Pamela Brodie

## Sierra Borealis / alaska report

is the newsletter of the Alaska Chapter of the Sierra Club

Sierra Club Alaska: 907-276-4108

750 W 2nd Ave Ste. 100, Anchorage, AK 99501

Alaska Chapter mail address:

P.O. Box 103441, Anchorage, Alaska 99510-2429

### Chapter Directory

Chair: Pamela Brodie, Homer: [pbrodie@gci.net](mailto:pbrodie@gci.net)

Vice chair: Mike O'Meara, Homer: [mikeo@horizonsatellite.com](mailto:mikeo@horizonsatellite.com)

Secretary: Irene Alexakos, Haines: [irenealexakos@yahoo.com](mailto:irenealexakos@yahoo.com)

Treasurer: Patrick Fort, Eagle River: [cpfort@uaa.alaska.edu](mailto:cpfort@uaa.alaska.edu)

Conservation chair: Richard Hellard, Juneau: [rhellard@gci.net](mailto:rhellard@gci.net)

### Other Executive Committee members:

Jack Hession, Anchorage: [jack.m.hession@gmail.com](mailto:jack.m.hession@gmail.com)

Andy Keller, Fairbanks: [ftamk@uaf.edu](mailto:ftamk@uaf.edu)

Russ Maddox, Seward: [russmaddox@yahoo.com](mailto:russmaddox@yahoo.com)

Mark Rorick, Juneau: [mprorick@alaska.net](mailto:mprorick@alaska.net)

Webmaster: William Taygan: [william@taygan.com](mailto:william@taygan.com)

(Newsletter editor: Vicky Hoover: [vicky.hoover@sierraclub.org](mailto:vicky.hoover@sierraclub.org))

### Alaska Field Office:

Dan Ritzman, Alaska Program Director, 206-378-0114,

[dan.ritzman@apps.sierraclub.org](mailto:dan.ritzman@apps.sierraclub.org)

Emily Fehrenbacher, Associate Regional Representative, Coal campaign; 907-276-4060 [emily.fehrenbacher@sierraclub.org](mailto:emily.fehrenbacher@sierraclub.org)

Lindsey Hajduk, Associate Field Organizer: 907-276-4088

[lindsey.hajduk@sierraclub.org](mailto:lindsey.hajduk@sierraclub.org)



### Featured in this issue

#### ACTION NEEDED

•OCS COMMENTS	P. 1-2
•SEALASKA BILL	P. 2
•CHAPTER ELECTIONS	P. 3
•STATE LANDS	P. 4
•WISHBONE MINE	P. 7

#### ALSO

ARCTIC CCP	P. 2
BOOK REVIEW	P. 5
MURKOWSKI AND COAL	P. 6
PEBBLE SURVEY	P. 8