



# Sierra Borealis

## *alaska report*

SIERRA CLUB ALASKA CHAPTER  
SEPTEMBER 2012



### BLM announces Preferred Alternative to protect Western Arctic

Secretary of Interior Ken Salazar made an important announcement for the National Petroleum Reserve-Alaska, while he was visiting in Anchorage on August 13: The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) has selected a preferred alternative in the current area-wide draft plan for the vast (23 million-acre) Reserve. The new preferred alternative "B-2" is very similar to the original alternative B that conservation and Alaska Native groups enthusiastically supported in this spring's public comment process. BLM touts that over 400,000 comments influenced their decision.

The preferred alternative announced for the new management plan would protect nearly half of the Reserve for important wildlife values, including the calving grounds of two large caribou herds, wetlands that support internationally significant shorebird habitat, and the highest concentrations of wolverines in North America.

The new Alternative B-2 is a variation of the original B in the draft plan released by BLM this past spring. (See *Sierra Borealis* June 2012.) Under Alternative B-2, three of the six previously existing "Special Areas", noted for their extraordinary biological or geological resources, are expanded in size, and one new Special Area is established. The Special Areas--Colville River, Utukok Uplands, Teshekpuk Lake, Kasegaluk Lagoon, Dease Inlet-Meade River, Peard Bay, and DeLong Mountains--total 13.35 million acres and of that, 11 million acres is barred from oil and gas leasing. There are still improvements we hope for in the final plan, such as including Wild and Scenic River recommendations from some management alternatives, but overall the preferred alternative goes in the right direction.

photo: US Fish & Wildlife Service



Red-throated loon, one of myriad bird species in Western Arctic Reserve

Never before has there been a coherent plan for managing the resources and wildlife within the entire Reserve. The BLM has been working hard on it for the past two years, and the preferred alternative B-2 is an excellent step forward. The BLM has the delicate task of balancing the management of the Reserve, and the balanced approach in the Western Arctic plan is extremely encouraging. We still have a lot of work to do to make sure these protections are adopted.

#### Sierra Club must keep up the pressure

Sierra Club members  
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have a lot of stamina. We choose a goal and work feverishly, sometimes for decades, until it's accomplished. Right now it seems we're on track to succeed in our efforts for America's largest tract of wild public lands.

Don't let the name confuse you, the enormous National Petroleum Reserve-Alaska (the Reserve) harbors abundant wildlife, flowing rivers, vast stretches of Arctic tundra. The Reserve is home to half a million caribou, millions

photo: Richard Spener



Caribou near Teshekpuk Lake, Western Arctic

of migratory birds, thousands of walrus, and that's not even half of it! Oil companies want unfettered access to all the Reserve, including sensitive areas where caribou go to give birth to their young. If we let companies drill in these places, the wildlife will be the first to suffer. That's why it's so important to protect the land and its wildlife—and, with the announcement of the BLM's Preferred Alternative B-2, we're finally poised for a successful outcome.

However, we need to make sure that important places within these special areas are not subject to new, non-subsistence infrastructure. While Preferred Alternative B-2 goes a long way to protect the wildlife and landscape of this amazing place, it's not final yet. Now we need to make sure that the Administration stands firm against pressure to weaken its plan and adopts these important protections.

**⇒ WHAT YOU CAN DO:**

Please send a thank you email to the Department of the Interior letting them now you appreciate their efforts protecting 11 million acres and asking them to stand strong against pressure from extractive industries. Send your own email message to Secretary Salazar at [feedback@ios.doi.gov](mailto:feedback@ios.doi.gov). Or: Contact DOI at [bit.ly/SCgDRV](http://bit.ly/SCgDRV)

In addition, can you host a "House Party" to share this special place with your friends? We are offering a copy of the beautiful new photo/essay book *On Arctic Ground* by Debbie Miller (see *Sierra Borealis* June 2012) and a ten-minute DVD to people willing to host a "House Party" -- invite friends over and ask them to sign a petition. For information please contact [lindsey.hajduk@sierraclub.org](mailto:lindsey.hajduk@sierraclub.org). ♦

-- Lindsey Hajduk

## Alaska Chapter and Group Elections Ahead

The Sierra Club--the largest, most effective grassroots activist network of any conservation organization in the nation--has its policies and priorities set by its activist volunteers, in democratic processes. Every year, local Club members elect their leaders.

Would you like to lead and help decide Sierra Club policy? The Alaska Chapter will soon hold its annual election for positions on the Executive Committees of the Alaska Chapter and its regional Groups. If you are a Sierra Club member and would like to run for an executive committee post, or would like to nominate another member who is willing to run, please contact a member of the chapter Nominating Committee.

Executive Committee (ExCom) terms are two years, with terms staggered so that half the committee is elected each year. (In addition to its six elected members, the Alaska Chapter ExCom includes a liaison from each of the three regional groups and its delegate to the Sierra Club Council, ex officio, if that person is not already on the ExCom.)

The three regional groups are the Juneau Group in Southeast Alaska, the Knik Group in Anchorage and Southcentral, and the Denali Group in Fairbanks and Interior Alaska.

Alaska Chapter Nominating Committee members:  
Pamela Brodie: [pbrodie@gci.net](mailto:pbrodie@gci.net)  
Patrick Fort: [cpfort@uaa.alaska.edu](mailto:cpfort@uaa.alaska.edu)  
Richard Hellard: [rhellard@gci.net](mailto:rhellard@gci.net)

The deadline to submit names to the Nominating Committee is Thursday, October 11, 2012. The Nominating Committees will report names of nominees to the Executive Committees on Tuesday, October 30. Members who wish to run but are not nominated by a nominating committee may run if they submit to the committee a petition to run signed by fifteen (15) members of the appropriate chapter or group. The deadline for candidate petitions is Tuesday, November 13. This is also the deadline to submit ballot issue petitions.

The chapter Executive Committee will appoint an Election Committee at its regular teleconference meeting on Tuesday, November 20; no candidates may serve on the Election Committee. Ballots will be printed and mailed Friday, December 7. Marked ballots must be received at the Sierra Club office in Anchorage by Monday, January 14, 2013, and will be counted by the election committee starting at 5 pm. (This notice and schedule are in compliance with Sierra Club bylaws.) ♦

-- Pamela Brodie, chapter chair

# Shell's Broken Promises Spell Trouble for the Arctic

For more than four years Shell Oil has been pushing to drill for oil off of the northern coast of Alaska, and we have successfully pushed back—until this summer. Our government was poised to allow Shell to begin Arctic Ocean offshore drilling in early July, but a series of events had kept Shell from doing so until September 10, 2012 when drilling in the Chukchi Sea began. Less than 24 hours after that, they were forced to stop by an advancing ice floe—a 30 mile by 12 mile ice sheet up to 82 feet thick approached their equipment. This incident will keep Shell from drilling for days, and the ice-free summer season is nearly over.

This summer's events illustrate the unpredictable difficulties and uncertainties facing companies looking to drill in our Polar Bear Seas. First, Shell lost control of its massive drill rig that nearly ran aground in Dutch Harbor. Then, Shell admitted it would exceed the Clean Air Act standards in its air permits for its drill ship. And finally

Shell had to ask for reduced requirements for its oil spill containment barge. Without the barge Shell cannot drill into oil zones below the sea floor, but the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management is letting Shell drill for now down to only 1400 feet, well above the oil-rich zones.

## Shell's promises have been broken

"We recognize that industry's license to operate in the offshore is predicated on being able to operate in a safe, environmentally sound manner. Shell's commitment to those basic principles is unwavering. Our Alaska Exploration Plans and Oil Spill Response Plans will continually be guided by our extensive Arctic expertise, solid scientific understanding of the environment and world-class capabilities," said Pete Slaiby, VP Shell Alaska.

For months, maybe years, this is the basic message we have heard from the Shell Oil public relations machine -- trust us, we are doing everything we can possibly do to make sure we are not polluting the environment and are ready to clean up our oil spills in the Arctic Ocean.

Recent events tell a different story as Shell breaks promise after promise on drilling safety. Shell still does not have all of its needed permits and is taking short-cuts that could damage Arctic wildlife and treasured landscapes, along with the Alaska Native communities that depend on them.

Shell based its near-shore and shoreline cleanup equipment on the assumption it can recover 95 percent of any oil spilled in the ocean. Now the company suggests that what it meant is that it will be able to "encounter" 95 percent of oil spilled—as in, watch 95 percent of the oil float away.

And then there is Shell's oil spill containment

equipment. Last year, Shell committed to ensuring that its oil spill recovery barge, the Arctic Challenger, could withstand a 100-year storm. But Shell will upgrade the 37-year-old barge to withstand only a ten-year storm now, despite challenging Arctic storm conditions. While the barge was still being upgraded in Washington state, it was sited for illegal discharges—not serious violations but serious implications. Once the spill recovery barge is approved, Shell may get the final permit allowing for drilling exploration.

Shell's Discoverer drill ship almost ran aground while moored in Dutch Harbor in the Aleutians—*en route* to the Chukchi Sea. A "stiff breeze" pushed the vessel within feet of the shore in front of Dutch Harbor's Grand Aleutian Hotel. That "stiff breeze"—35 mph with four-foot waves—pales in comparison to the gale force winds and 25-foot seas the Discoverer could encounter in the Arctic.

Shell has been granted a waiver to amend its Clean Air Act permit for the Discoverer drill rig, requesting that it be excused from the pollution reductions it promised to achieve. Though the company has known for two years that it could not meet the pollution levels in the permit, the oil giant has only recently acknowledged it – weeks before its planned drilling was supposed to commence.

Allowing Shell to drill in the Arctic is increasingly proving to be a losing gamble. The company has a disturbing pattern of making promises that cannot be kept – then begging for exceptions. As Shell's plans and promises unravel before our eyes, the public is left with new reasons why America's Arctic should not be entrusted to Big Oil.

With Shell's drilling program shelved for most of this summer, we are in an important position to hold Shell to its statements on safety and to our government's own standards. Now, Shell has asked to drill for longer in the oceans because it lost so much time with its own mishaps. Shell should not get another free pass. The present deadline for season's end to drilling activities must not be compromised: to avoid sea ice, drilling is to stop in the Chukchi Sea by September 24 and by October 31 in the Beaufort Sea. If something were to go wrong we know we cannot clean oil out of ice.

It should be clear that Shell is not ready for the Arctic, will not hold true to its words, and should not be allowed to drill for oil in the Arctic Ocean.

⇒ **WHAT YOU CAN DO:** Please ask President Obama, EPA Director Lisa Jackson, and Interior Secretary Salazar to step in and protect the Arctic. Remind them that, if Shell cannot meet the requirements of their permits, the permits must not be weakened to suit them; they simply should not be allowed to drill. Tell them to hold Shell to their promises and protect the polar bears, yellow-billed loons and other remarkable residents of America's Arctic. Please call the White House Comment line (between 9 am - 5 pm Eastern time): 202-456-1111. ♦

-- Dan Ritzman



## **Bridge over the River Brooks: National Park Service fumbles in Katmai National Park**

Brooks River is a world-famous brown bear viewing area in Katmai National Park that attracts approximately 12,000 to 14,000 people during the summer season to watch the bears chase and catch sockeye salmon migrating up Brooks River to Brooks Lake. Brooks River is also the most important brown bear concentration area in the national park system. A 2007 survey of the park and adjacent national preserve found an estimated 2,200 bears, making the unit "...the largest single concentration of protected brown bears on the continent," according to the National Park Service.

Now the NPS is proposing major changes to its 1996 Development Concept Plan (DCP), the existing visitor facilities plan for the Brooks River area. The agency plans to replace the existing 320-foot floating bridge on



Brooks River, that is in place only during the summer visitor season, with a \$7.4 million elevated permanent 1,550 foot vehicle/pedestrian bridge and boardwalk complete with "[bear] viewing area/pullouts."

The other major change would be to maintain the existing floatplane and boat landing at the Naknek Lake beach adjacent to the lodge.

The 1996 DCP has two main features: steps toward creating a "people free" north side of Brooks River for bears (which Sierra Club supported, as benefitting bears) and replacing facilities removed from the north side with a major facilities complex on the south side of Brooks River. Sierra Club opposed this because it would just move the same management problems and headaches from north to south. And, risky brown bear-human encounters would continue, as bears moving between Brooks River and other salmon streams would have to run a gauntlet of the human activity and structures of the complex.

The newly proposed DCP changes eliminate the good portions of the original 1996 DCP and entrench and expand its undesirable development aspects.

Proposing a new permanent bridge/boardwalk, with continued use of the north side floatplane and boat access beach means that the agency is abandoning the "people free" north side goal of the DCP. Yet the agency is not admitting this fact, and downplays the impact of its proposed changes by claiming that only minimal facilities and activities would remain on the north side.

Its claim is misleading. Although the remaining facilities--a ranger/visitor contact station, picnic area, vault toilet--would be relatively minimal, current visitor and NPS staff activities would continue, as visitors would have unrestricted access to the entire north side, except when the bridge was closed to prevent bears from using it, and rangers would continue to track bears and visitors.

Also continuing would be the scene at the beach as visitors arrive and depart. Park rangers, some armed

and in walkie-talkie contact with other rangers, prepare to herd the visitors a safe distance away from approaching bears. And if a bear or bears e.g., a sow with cubs, delay visitors for more than 30 minutes, rangers are authorized to "haze" (the NPS's term) the animals using "air horns, yelling, bird scare devices, and rubber bullets." Running off bears in this manner, while necessary to protect visitors, is clearly contrary to the park's values and purposes of protecting bears and other wildlife.

The new proposal eliminates the principal ways the DCP would achieve a "people-free" north side:

- relocate in stages all north side facilities--lodge, campground, and NPS administrative facilities--to the south side;
- remove the existing floating bridge;
- close the Naknek Lake beach next to the lodge to floatplane and boat use (for access from the nearby community of King Salmon, the jumping off point for most visitors to the park).
- bus visitors from the new facility to the new main complex and the bear viewing platforms south of the river.

When bears are fishing in the lower river and get too close to or on the floating bridge, rangers close the bridge, move any anglers back from the river, and hold up visitors on both sides of the river until the coast is clear. These "bear jams," as the agency calls them, can cause lengthy delays for lodge guests, "elite" fly-fishing anglers (the NPS's term), and other visitors stranded on the south side. These delays can inconvenience these visitors trying to make scheduled flights out of King Salmon. In proposing its major changes, the NPS may be responding in part to pressure from commercial interests demanding relief from the delays.

Although numerous "bear-human interactions" have occurred over the years at Brooks River, including a mauling of a ranger, so far there have been no fatalities, a circumstance the NPS attributes to the bears becoming accustomed--"habituated" in agency jargon-- to presence of humans who pose no threat to them. This unnatural bear behavior, notes the agency, can also lead to park bears, who can travel many miles in a day, becoming easier prey for trophy bear hunters in areas nearby but outside the park.

In late August of this year, a visitor to Denali National Park was killed while photographing a grizzly, apparently because the victim approached too closely to the bear, which was later shot. It was the first lethal bear attack in the park's history. Denali grizzlies also view hikers and backpackers as unthreatening. Nevertheless, park managers there keep people well away from areas where bears are present. Backcountry permits are required, and visitors are told to stay a quarter of a mile away from any bear seen in the field.

The Denali tragedy has implications for visitor management at Brooks River, where visitors now freely wander around in an area with a high concentration of supposedly "habituated" brown bears.

### **Day-use: A reform opportunity for the NPS**

In 1996 when Sierra Club and other environmental organizations opposed the DCP's flaws,

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## Western Arctic national outing

(National Outing leader Gary Keir reports on the "Western Brooks Range Ramble" Alaska trip he led in June 2012. See *Sierra Borealis*, June 2012, for an announcement before this trip)

We started our adventure to the arctic in Kotzebue, Alaska, on a Monday morning in early June. After we crammed our backpacks and supplies into the bush planes of Golden Eagle Outfitters, we were soon on our way. The flight from Kotzebue to our hiking destination near Primus Creek in the Noatak Preserve is spectacular and a treasure in and of itself. The scenery is truly vast and breathtaking. Our pilots have great eyes, and while we are spellbound by the general scene, they point out wildlife and other features of interest. For almost an hour we see no signs of other human beings, and the ground slowly fades from green to brown. Once on the ground, we see patches of snow in every direction. Spring has come later than usual here. We notice immediately the bright blue forget-me-nots and Pasque flowers bursting through the brown tundra. In the course of our twelve-day trip, the season will rapidly change from winter to full summer. Looking along the hillside, we see small groups of caribou grazing. In a few minutes they are gone.

On our first full day we took a day hike without our heavy packs up the hill behind camp to familiarize ourselves with the landscape. The cloudless sky provided us with beautiful views

### Brooks River bridge

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they called instead for a "day use plan" that would relocate the lodge and NPS support facilities to or adjacent to the community of King Salmon at the west end of the park, leaving only those facilities and staff at Brooks River needed for day visitors. Sierra Club policy supports locating national park infrastructure and visitor services in or near gateway communities.

Limiting visitor experience to day use would cost far less than the DCP, by now probably around \$45 million or more (the agency has been asked for an updated estimate), require fewer staff, promote visitor and staff safety, reduce disturbances to the bears, benefit the economy of King Salmon, and allow park managers to focus more on other vital park functions such as preparing and implementing an Alagnak Wild River management plan, curbing illegal off-road vehicle use along the park's western boundary, and wildlife monitoring and research.

All the other 14 national parks, monuments, preserves, and historical parks in Alaska have day use programs that preclude costly taxpayer-funded hotel/NPS resort complexes in their remote areas. Given the advantages of day use, the NPS needs to explain to citizens and Congress why it persists in wasting public funds on a new resort complex at Brooks River--a proposal that flaunts Congress's directive in ANILCA to move overnight accommodations to the western boundary of the park.

The Draft EIS on Brooks River Visitor Access of June 2012 is available online at: <http://parkplanning.nps.gov/document.cfm?parkID=13&projectID=24254&documentID=47499>. Printed copies can be requested from: National Park Service, 240 West 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue, Anchorage, AK 99501. ♦

-- Jack Hession



photo: Gary Keir

of our intended route, and of a sow and her cub, and, because of two group members who thought ahead to bring special glasses, we were rewarded with a glimpse of the transit of Venus. The next day we began our backpack in earnest. We crossed a mountain pass and went into the National Petroleum Reserve. It does not look anything like its name. This is pristine wilderness.

This was a very strong group of hikers, but because of the late spring many of the ravines were filled with snow, and many streams were raging causing us to make many detours and slowing our scheduled progress. But, this is the arctic--without established trails, and we are free to modify our route. Because of this rerouting we stumbled onto one of the highlights of the trip--an awe inspiring mountain pass. Serene and isolated with jaw dropping beauty. We camped near a stream just over the pass and took in the glorious evening light as it danced across the jagged Brooks Range. From this point we turned south and back toward our landing strip in the Noatak. On our return, fields that would have been brown just a week earlier were now carpets of wildflowers. The final full day we hiked over to Desperation Lake. We had heard that there were ancient Inuit archeological sites around the lake. A knowledgeable member of our group helped us identify some artifacts. To imagine how these people not only survived but prospered in this harsh environment was as awe inspiring as the views we saw.

When we think of the wild arctic we often think about bears and herds of caribou, and these are memories that certainly stick to you. What is every bit as tenacious are memories of the light, the incredible variety of plants and flowers, the small nest on the side of a tundra hummock, the openness and the peace.

The Western Arctic National Parklands and the National Petroleum Reserve are undiscovered gems. They provided us a truly great wilderness experience.

Along with co-leader Donna Poggi, we had nine participants for a total of 11 hikers. It was a 12-day trip from Monday of the first week of June until Friday of the following week. The trip "Western Brooks Range Ramble" will be run again in 2013. ♦

-- Gary Keir

## Déjà vu - Some Similarities between Tobacco and Coal

Last spring when the Alaska Railroad and Aurora Energy hosted an elementary school field trip here in Seward and sent the unwitting students home with "goodie bags" containing a number of questionable items, I couldn't help but recall my own grade school days. When I was in grade school back in the sixties, tobacco companies were giving schools candy cigarettes which the schools passed on to students. (Even then they wouldn't have dared give us real cigarettes.)

The operators of the local coal storage and export facility included in the goodie bags, as they called them, lumps of coal in a sandwich bag, invasive seeds, refrigerator magnets, stickers, and pins emblazoned with "I Love Alaska Clean Coal", and hard black candy made to look like coal with no labeling



other than the coal company logo.\* (See Sierra Borealis, June 2012.)

Since the Seward field trip fiasco, similarities between the tobacco industry and coal industry have been raised regularly in the national

media. It's hard not to notice the similar tactics they use to promote their products as something less than harmful and to specifically target our youth. Think "clean coal" and Joe Camel. It has also been widely reported that the coal industry uses many of the same law firms, lobbyists, and ad agencies that defended and represented the tobacco industry.

In the 1960s, as the evidence became stronger that smoking tobacco caused cancer and numerous other health problems for both smokers and those involuntarily exposed to second-hand smoke, the government reacted by raising taxes and using the proceeds for tobacco related health care and smoking cessation efforts\*\*. The Surgeon General mandated that warning labels appear on tobacco products, tobacco sales plummeted, and the US tobacco industry focused on expanding exports of their products to less knowledgeable and less regulated overseas markets.

This is the same goal the US coal industry is currently pursuing. Less knowledgeable and unregulated overseas markets for coal are their new target. Public awareness is up, and the steep health, social, and environmental costs of dirty coal are now better understood which has caused domestic demand to shrink. The rising pressure to mine and export more and more coal has become a national concern. Proposals to expand existing mines and develop new mines from Appalachia and the Powder River Basin to Alaska, for new export facilities here in Alaska, in the Pacific Northwest and on the Gulf coast would impact more communities just so Big Coal can make profits by plying their dirty wares for a few more years.

Like tobacco, coal's impacts affect us all. Like tobacco, coal should come with warning labels and be heavily taxed to cover health, social, and environmental damages. The entire coal cycle, from destructive mining, to pollution from

transporting it halfway around the world, to the combustion and associated waste-streams, spreads dangerous particulates and heavy metals.

Tobacco use is estimated to cause over 400,000 premature deaths annually.

The health effects of tobacco use are better documented, having been studied longer,

but coal is gaining on tobacco as the subject gets more and more scrutiny, with 13,200 premature deaths annually being attributed to its use. Coal combustion emits more heat trapping CO<sub>2</sub> than any other single source. From the shrinking ice cap to eroding coastlines and melting permafrost, the costs of continuing the dirty coal cycle are evident here in Alaska.

On September 10, the Kenai Peninsula Borough School District's Board school reviewed draft language for a new parent-proposed protective school district policy to require comprehensive screening of any gifts allowed to be given to students. A "first reading" was anticipated for October and a final vote in November. This campaign began after parents objected to the coal companies' gifts which seemed to exploit children with misleading propaganda. Local parents felt that the sinister bag of tricks wouldn't have passed muster had it been screened by the teachers and chaperones beforehand. Whatever legal rights coal companies may have to pollute the airwaves with misleading propaganda, and permits that allow them to pollute our planet, they do not have the moral right to pollute our children's minds.

Notes:

\*"Company gives lumps of coal to children." - Mary Ann Hitt  
<http://grist.org/article/2011-02-17-stop-polluters-clean-air-clean-water-are-under-attack/>

\*\*"Is clean coal the new tobacco?" - Joel Greenberg  
<http://www.unmassed.com/?p=112>  
[http://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/data\\_statistics/fact\\_sheets/health\\_effects/tobacco\\_related\\_mortality/](http://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/data_statistics/fact_sheets/health_effects/tobacco_related_mortality/)

Cigarettes and Death: Cigarette smoking causes about 1 of every 5 deaths in the United States each year.16

Cigarette smoking is estimated to cause the following:

- 443,000 deaths annually (including deaths from secondhand smoke exposure,)
- 49,400 deaths per year from secondhand smoke,
- 269,655 deaths annually among men,
- 173,940 deaths annually among women.

<http://www.civilsocietyinstitute.org/media/b012511release.cfm>. Titled "Benefits of Beyond Business as Usual," the Synapse report for CSI notes: "The human health costs of burning coal are real and substantial. The extraordinary social cost of the annual 8,000 – 34,000 premature deaths, when valued by current federal standards, imparts a cost on society of \$64 to \$272 billion.... 1 ♦



-- Russ Maddox, Seward

## Early Warming: Crisis and response in the Climate-Changed North

by Nancy Lord

Climate change concerns have already resulted in a wealth of articles and books. As Nancy Lord points out in her new (2011) book, “publications on the subject abound. Some of them are listed in my bibliography.” Not seeking to duplicate other writings, Lord, who lives in Homer and is Alaska Conservation Foundation Board of Trustees chair and Alaskan Writer Laureate, takes a close look at five different northern communities and talks to their people to discover the ways they “are learning from, struggling and coping with, and adapting to the climate-related changes they encounter on a daily basis.” Her scattered visits are “more opportunistic than comprehensive”, but overall her goal is to “see if people in the forefront of so much change were getting information and the assistance they needed.”

Her first study is of her own surroundings, on the Kenai Peninsula—an area where the economy “largely runs on salmon”. By canoe, Lord helps a stream ecologist log water temperatures—and correlated air temperatures. Higher temperatures stress salmon and reduce their growth rates, make it harder for salmon to reach their spawning grounds, and cause other complications and uncertainties.

She then visits the boreal forest, since a third of all the world’s boreal lies in Alaska and Canada. Lord heads up to the Mackenzie Mountains in northwest Canada, rafting the Mountain River for 200 miles to the Mackenzie. Canadians “are promoting an awareness of the role intact boreal forests can play in moderating the effects of global warming”—due to their ability to absorb carbon—because of cold. In the far north, forest decomposition is so slow that little carbon is released and much more stays in the ground. But stresses due to warming have vastly increased tree mortality—and, as soil warms, its microbes release more carbon than trees absorb.

In Fort Yukon, Alaska, where a polar bear had recently been sighted for the first time, Lord visits village elders, older women who’d seen a lot of changes; now they worry that the river hadn’t been freezing properly in winter and was unsafe to cross. People on snow machines had been falling through. And in summers—where were the salmon? Lord quotes Pam Miller of Fairbanks: “The magnitude of losing the boreal forest is as big as losing the sea ice—but it’s more subtle.”

Now heading to the Beaufort Sea—the northern edge of Alaska, Lord goes to Kaktovik, on Barter Island to investigate “sea ice and ice bears”. The loss of sea ice leaves the coastline open to the action of the sea waves. In summer now the edge of the land is undercut by waves; she sees how huge slabs of earth have fallen into the sea. The land is being eaten away. Sea level rise, complicated by storm surges, was causing more flooding of the Kaktovik airport, and alternatives for relocation were being studied. All were expensive. Exhausted bears are seen swimming far from any ice or shore. The feedback loops of open water absorbing more solar heat, thus melting more ice and leading to even more open water, are outpacing scientists’ models and raising

worries about “tipping points”.

Next Lord visits the community of Shishmaref (population 608). The story of this Inupiaq village on a small sand barrier island on Alaska’s northwest coast has been often told—ever since a 1997 storm took away 125 feet from the island, dropping buildings into the sea. Elizabeth Kolbert describes it in *Field Notes from a Catastrophe*. Al Gore called the people of Shishmaref “the first climate refugees”. Residents voted in 2006 to relocate to the Tin Creek area on the mainland. But what has happened since then? Nothing. Multiple state and federal bureaucracies have studied the question in detail, done road, seawall, drainage, airport, harbor, and wind power studies, compared costs. Beginning to despair of real assistance to relocate, residents contemplate whether to leave as individuals—breaking up the community, or stay. And the problem of this one village leads Lord to consider the global issue of sea level rise displacing many millions of people. “Already, the United Nations reports, more people are being displaced by environmental disasters than by wars.”

Finally, Lord goes to communities at the Bering Sea to learn about changes in the ocean itself. She meets with Dorothy Childers, who is documenting what Native elders experience as their environment changes. The Bering Sea Elders Advisory Group seeks to enable Alaska Natives in 65 communities at the edge of the Bering Sea to fully participate in federal management processes affecting the region. Its shallowness and ocean current movements make the Bering Sea one of the most productive marine environments, and its commercial fisheries total almost half of all U.S. fisheries production. As cold bottom waters move northward, fish are moving north; salmon weigh less, as they themselves have less to eat. Changes in ice and its melting regime cause a ripple effect of changes in the whole sea life structure, from phytoplankton on up.

The intensely local studies that Nancy Lord describes in detail are her announced topic, but she can’t limit it to just that – she also looks beyond. We mentioned global sea level rise—and “feedback loops.” And she generalizes, “It’s not just the Bering Sea’s rich ecosystem that’s at stake, it’s also the life support systems that...the entire world needs....oceans cover three-quarters of our earth and house 90 percent of the planet’s biomass.. Compared to land, oceans have been inadequately studied....”

There’s much more to note in this book, both on local and global scales. Thank you, Nancy Lord.

See <http://www.nancylord.alaskawriters.com/book11.html> Counterpoint Press, 2011. List \$26.00. Paperback, 218 pp, plus detailed end notes and selected bibliography. ♦

-- Vicky Hoover

## Alaska's Coastal Management Initiative—no luck at the polls

No doubt about it, with enough money one can buy an election. In Alaska's August 28 primary election, Alaskan citizens were thwarted when they tried to reinstate their Coastal Management Program -- outspent ten to one, primarily by multinational corporations. The coastal ballot measure 2 failed 64,210 "no" to 39,624 "yes" votes.

Established in 1977, Alaska's Coastal Management Program helped effectively guide coastal development until 2003 when then Alaska Governor Frank Murkowski gutted the program to better accommodate extractive resource and other corporate interests. It died in 2011 when state legislators allowed the law to sunset.

Fewer than one in four registered voters came to the polls on August 28. The Alaska Chapter supported ballot measure 2 with a pre election email alert to club members urging them to vote yes and restore their right to a say in how our coasts and coastal resources are managed.

The email alert said, in part: "Vote Yes on 2 and support the right of all Alaskans to determine the future of our coasts! Powerful corporations...don't want us to have a say...We know that a coastal management program will work because...Alaska's former plan served our communities, fostered development, and protected our coastlines ...."

Oil companies, mining interests and other resource development and industry groups raised more than \$1.5 million for their "Vote No on 2" campaign. The Alaska Sea

Party, an *ad hoc* group of Alaskans promoting reinstatement of the Coastal Management Program, faced this Goliath with a modest \$200,000 to promote the measure.

Unfortunately, the ballot measure was fifteen pages long. The slick campaign against it made the most of this complexity to confuse voters, painting the initiative as just more government control.

With over 60 percent of the nation's coastline, Alaska is now the only coastal state lacking a coastal management program. Most Alaskans, including Anchorage residents, live in coastal communities. They now have no effective voice in "development" projects proposed for federal waters, adjacent lands, and affected communities.

### What now?

According to the Alaska Sea Party, the effort to bring back the Coastal Management Program is far from over. More than 33,000 Alaska citizens had signed petitions to place the issue on the ballot. And, almost 40,000 Alaskans voted in favor. The Alaska Sea Party contends that significant statewide support remains, and they hope to pursue a new Coastal Management Program through the state legislature.

It remains to be seen how successful this will be given the number of Alaska lawmakers who see extractive resource corporations, not ordinary Alaskans, as their real constituency.

-- Mike O'Meara

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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: [amkeller@alaska.edu](mailto:amkeller@alaska.edu)

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

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)

Find Sierra Borealis on [www.alaska.sierraclub.org/](http://www.alaska.sierraclub.org/) (click on newsletters)



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