



# Sierra Borealis *alaska report*

SIERRA CLUB ALASKA CHAPTER  
JUNE 2017



## Alaska House protects wolves via a Stampede Trail Buffer Zone *Urge your state senator to support HB 105--the Denali National Park buffer zone*

**Action  
Alert**

House Bill 105 passed the Alaska House of Representatives by a vote of 22-18 on May 17, 2017. This bill will go to the Senate in the next Legislative session—early in 2018. In the meantime, it is very important that Alaska residents begin NOW to contact their state senators and request that they support this needed buffer zone legislation. Due to likely reluctance by many Senators, steady pressure may be needed over many months.

The proposed buffer zone would prohibit the killing, trapping and shooting of wolves in the Stampede Trail area. This is a piece of state land that juts into the northeast portion of Denali National Park. Since it is state rather than federal land, the Alaska Department of Fish & Game and the Board of Game currently allow baiting stations which attract bears, wolves, and wolverine. The baiting stations in Stampede Trail have been laced with rotting hog carcasses in the past.

The Stampede Trail has been used by a few hunters, trappers and hunting guides from the Healy area. Healy is located about 11 miles north of the entrance to Denali National Park and Preserve along the George Parks Highway in Interior Alaska.

HB 105 was sponsored and led by Anchorage-area representative Andy Josephson. The bill would not have been introduced and passed without his persistence and

hardwork. He deserves thanks from wildlife viewers and wolf enthusiasts everywhere.

The wolf population across the six million-acre national park and preserve has declined from 147 wolves in fall of 2007 to 49 in spring of 2016. This decline has reduced the opportunity for half a million visitors to Denali Park to view wolves. (**sierra borealis**, Dec 2013) The economic value of living wildlife to the state of Alaska far exceeds the value of wolf pelts, bear hides, etc. In 2011, wildlife viewing activities supported more than \$2.7 billion of expenditures--twice as much as the \$1.3 billion provided by hunting activities in Alaska in 2011. Denali National Park contributes over \$560 million per year to Alaska's economy. It is the third largest revenue-generating park in the nation.



Denali Wolf. Image-National Park Service

Courtesy of Michael Mason, Rep. Andy Josephson staff

### Killing of wolves from Denali National Park takes a toll

Last May 2016, a National Park Service pilot observed three hunters near a bait station along Stampede Trail as well as a wolf in the distance. This gray male wolf had been radio-collared by Denali National Park biologists and thus could be tracked by the NPS pilot. When the pilot returned to circle over the area, he saw the three hunters and picked up on the signal coming from the body of the gray wolf lying near the hunters.

This wolf was the last breeding male of the East Fork (Toklat) pack and may have spelled the

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## Wolf buffer bill needs Senate support -- from page 1

end of a Denali wolf pack that had been studied for 70 years--beginning with the famous naturalist, Adolf Murie. The death of this male wolf left a pregnant female alone with no mate to provide food for her or her pups. The hunters never turned in the wolf pelt to be tagged and sealed by the Alaska Dept. of Fish & Game, and the radio collar was never returned to the National Park Service. Thus the identity of the hunters is not known, and the killing of the wolf was an illegal kill.

On June 7, 2016, the National Park Service spotted two small pups at the den. On July 26, 2016, a NPS helicopter approached the den and did not spot the mother or her two wolf pups. They landed nearby and found no carcasses nor signs of recent use of the den. It is thought likely that the mother and pups starved to death.

Both the East Fork pack and the Grant Creek wolf pack in the northeast part of Denali National Park were often seen by visitors on the Denali Park Road. But viewing of wolves in Denali National Park has dropped dramatically from 2010, when 45 percent of visitors saw wolves, to 2015, when only five percent reported seeing wolves. This change is probably related to the removal of the no-kill buffer in 2010 by the Board of Game. And the Board of Game has refused to reinstate the buffer zone.

At present the Board of Game (BOG) has seven members, all of whom are hunters, trappers, or hunting guides. By contrast, about 14 to 15 percent of Alaskan residents have hunting and trapping licenses. The Board of Game consistently votes down proposals submitted by Alaska non-consumptive users. The Board of Game voted down all proposals by wildlife advocates to reinstate the buffer zone along the Stampede Trail in the northeast border of Denali National Park.

The thousands of residents who live in Alaska because of opportunities to see and photograph living wildlife are stake holders in Alaska's wildlife too, but they are ignored by the Board of Game. It is time that Alaskans make their Representatives and Senators in the State Legislature know how much we value LIVING wildlife. It is also time for our Alaskan Senators to understand the economic value of the tourism industry in Alaska.

### ➔ WHAT YOU CAN DO:

Please contact your state senator – now and during the rest of 2017. If you do not know who your Alaska State Senator or Representative is, contact your Alaska Legislative Office (LIO). The Anchorage Legislative Office phone is (907) 269-0111. For Fairbanks the Legislative Office is (907) 452-4448. And for Juneau-- (907) 465-4648.

Letters to Senators and Representatives are valuable. They make a difference. But probably the most valuable time spent is if you arrange a meeting with your Senator or Senator's representative in their local office. ❖

-- by Susan Hansen

Contact me at [skhansen@ak.net](mailto:skhansen@ak.net)

## National Park Report on economic value of park visitation

A new **National Park Service Report** shows that 2.78 million visitors to national parks in Alaska spent nearly \$1.3 billion in the state in 2016. That record visitation and spending supported 18,000 jobs. This new report also shows that national park tourism is a significant driver in the national economy and is a big factor in the state's economy. The most-visited national parks in Alaska in 2016 were Klondike Gold Rush (912,351); Denali (587,412); Glacier Bay (520,171); Kenai Fjords (217,141) and Sitka (217,141).

The peer-reviewed visitor spending analysis was conducted by economists Catherine Cullinane Thomas of the U.S. Geological Survey and Lynne Koontz of the National Park Service. The report shows \$18.4 billion of direct spending nationwide by 331 million park visitors in communities within 60 miles of a national park. This spending supported 318,000 jobs nationally; 271,544 of those jobs are found in these gateway communities. The cumulative benefit to the U.S. economy was \$34.9 billion.

In Alaska, a variety of businesses often help make park visits possible. More than 400 private businesses operate in Alaska's national park areas, ranging from small, local companies to large international corporations. According to the 2016 report, most park visitor spending nationally was for lodging (31.2 percent) followed by food and beverages (27.2 percent), gas and oil (11.7 percent), admissions and fees (10.2 percent), souvenirs and other expenses (9.7 percent), local transportation (7.4 percent), and camping fees (2.5%). An interactive tool to explore the data is available at <https://www.nps.gov/subjects/socialscience/vse.htm>. ❖

**Announcement:** The **CHUGACH NATIONAL FOREST** seeks **INTERNS to ASSIST with WILDERNESS MANAGEMENT IN WESTERN PRINCE WILLIAM SOUND** from May to July (flexible). Commitment: 40 hours/week for 10 weeks. Duties: Fieldwork (60%): Assist rangers with education and resource protection in remote locations of western Prince William Sound. Duties may include: meet with youth groups, pull invasive weeds, record data, clean sites, assist maintenance crews. Field trips from 2 to 8 days, traveling by boat and camping in the wilds. Outdoor skills useful. Office work (40%): Computer Skills: Microsoft Word, Excel, etc. Work Station: Glacier Ranger District, Girdwood. Housing, possible for out-of-Anchorage interns. Stipend: \$34.00/work day (\$46.00 / day subsistence rate for overnight field trips). **To Apply:** Send resume and letter of interest to Tim Lydon at [tydon@fs.fed.us](mailto:tydon@fs.fed.us). For more info, call Tim Lydon at (907)754 2330.



### Alaska Chapter Outings 2017 season launched

Go to "**Sierra Club Alaska Chapter Outings**" on Facebook to learn details of upcoming scheduled hikes.

# Pebble Mine: *Can a slain monster come back to life?*

On May 12 the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) breathed new life into the Pebble Mine project, a controversial mining venture previously blocked by Obama-era EPA regulators. By settling the litigation filed by Pebble Limited Partnership, the EPA is allowing the company to seek federal permitting for the mine. This is potentially bad news for many Alaskans, as the area surrounding the proposed mining site is the spawning ground for the planet's [biggest runs of sockeye salmon](#). And two mostly wilderness national parks (Katmai and Lake Clark) would be severely impacted, as well as the subsistence lifestyle of remote Southwest Alaska communities. ([sierra borealis](#), June 2015, June & Sept 2014,



Salmon: Evon Zerbetz ©1996

March & June 2012, March & Dec 2011, March 2010).

After defeating the devastating open-pit mine proposal in 2015, we must now prepare to resume our fight against the Pebble mine project.

An effective campaign

requires accurate information

and knowledge, with the facts on our side. So we did a bit of research on the Pebble mine and the recent settlement between the EPA and Pebble Limited Partnership and share the information here.

The best information we found on the EPA and Pebble project was in this Washington Post article from Feb. 15, 2015: [https://www.washingtonpost.com/national/health-science/internal-memos-spur-accusations-of-bias-as-epa-moves-to-block-gold-mine/2015/02/15/3ff101c0-b2ba-11e4-854b-a38d13486ba1\\_story.html?utm\\_term=.f3c41b4a1070#comments](https://www.washingtonpost.com/national/health-science/internal-memos-spur-accusations-of-bias-as-epa-moves-to-block-gold-mine/2015/02/15/3ff101c0-b2ba-11e4-854b-a38d13486ba1_story.html?utm_term=.f3c41b4a1070#comments).

While the EPA's veto in 2015 to block Northern Dynasty Minerals Ltd. from beginning work on its [proposed Pebble Mine](#) was great news for Alaskan environmentalists at the time, the legal standing of the EPA veto (and their refusal to even review a proposal) was politically risky and deemed legally weak. The article suggests that an overturning of this unusual and controversial veto may have been nearly inevitable, and we now see these fears realized. The EPA's decision to preemptively veto without review was considered by some to be overreaching, and the EPA was even accused of promoting opposition of local residents, fishermen, and environmental groups. The stance of Pebble Mine proponents was then that the EPA decision involved inappropriate collusion--actively building opposition to justify its veto rather than considering the project in a neutral way based on the facts-- thus weakening the legal standing of their decision. Such assertions invited the litigation against the EPA which was just settled on May 12 by the current EPA (run by a new administrator under the Trump baton).

The EPA has now agreed to review a proposal by Northern Dynasty Minerals.

There is a lesson to learn here. The resistance, while critical and often challenging to build, must be initiated and executed from the ground up, by local communities willing to fight for long-lasting protections that withstand future challenges. We also see the danger of complacency: we won one battle a couple of years ago, but the war to protect our environment and our way of life goes on.

As the review process unfolds, we hope that the EPA will do the right thing and deny this foreign-owned mine that would destroy irreplaceable natural lands and resources. But with a new political administration and head of the EPA, the right choice is far from a foregone conclusion.

Thus we again need to come together to campaign against this project which the majority of Alaskans do not support. We need to employ all possible strategies at our disposal - legal, political, and publicity, and to assure that our actions are based on accurate knowledge of the proposal. So let's look at economics of Pebble in addition to environmental harm. With some research we found this article:

<https://seekingalpha.com/article/4045672-northern-dynasty-minerals-ltd-pebble-deposit-commercially-viable>

According to the article published by Seeking Alpha, an equity research platform for investment professionals, the recent rise in the stock price of Northern Dynasty, due to an assumption that the EPA under a Trump administration will promote Pebble development, represents misplaced hope by investors about the viability of the Pebble Mine project.

Why is it misplaced hope? It is because the Pebble deposit is low grade and located in a remote area without infrastructure; and this makes the project commercially *not viable*. The article asserts that the Pebble deposit, while large in scale, is low-grade ore, meaning that large amounts of raw material would need to be processed to extract small amounts of valuable copper, gold, and molybdenum. But this processing requires a massive local infrastructure, presently non-existent. The project would thus entail building a large power plant, a deep-water harbor, an 86-mile road, an equally long set of pipelines for moving copper concentrate, and multiple huge dams--among the largest on the planet.

Northern Dynasty consistently tried to underplay the issues. In 2013, Anglo American, Northern Dynasty's former partner, withdrew from the project, walking away from more than \$500 million in sunk costs while making no effort to renegotiate the terms of its deal. Several companies have collectively spent many years of research and hundreds of million of dollars trying to come up with a profitable mine plan for the Pebble deposit. But they all walked away.

If the Seeking Alpha project analysis for Pebble is correct, the EPA's previous preemptive veto will eventually be proven to be spot-on: Pebble Mine -- *continued page 5, bottom*

# Newly at Risk—Alaska's Arctic Seas: *permanent drilling ban gone?*

## Sierra Club sues administration

On April 27, 2017, Secretary of the Interior Ryan Zinke held a press conference at 6 pm eastern time. Waiting on the phone in the Sierra Club Anchorage office for the conference to begin, I could hear murmurs from reporters all across the country. Rumors had swirled for days about the Administration's intent to undermine protections in the Arctic and Atlantic Oceans. Secretary Zinke was expected to carry this message, possibly followed by an executive order.

Oddly, Secretary Zinke's comments that night were innocuous. He remarked that the Administration would review existing offshore drilling plans (or, rather, drilling prohibitions). When a reporter asked about the permanent withdrawals from offshore drilling President Obama had enacted late in 2016, the Secretary replied mildly, "Oh, yeah -- we'll look at those, too." He wanted to hear from local communities, many of which oppose offshore drilling and seek solutions such as wind. He mentioned wind energy twice.

I came away from that conference scratching my head, but not for long. Within an hour, the Department of the Interior released a fact sheet about a new executive order to undo the permanent withdrawals and to initiate a new five year planning process for offshore oil and gas development.

Trump called it an "America-first offshore energy policy". He signed his executive order flanked by a smiling Senator Lisa Murkowski.

The backlash hit quickly, and it will keep coming.

On May 3, the Sierra Club, in partnership with conservation and Alaska Native groups, sued the Trump administration over this decision to revoke the permanent ban on new offshore oil and gas drilling in the Arctic and Atlantic Oceans. President Obama banned new drilling here under the Outer Continental Shelf Lands Act after hearing widespread public opposition to expanding drilling in those sensitive areas.

Trump's attempt to undo the withdrawals is unlawful. He acted under a statute that does not give him authority

to undo the permanent withdrawals of a prior president.

The Trump executive order is the first time a president has ever attempted to reverse a permanent withdrawal under the Act. If Trump's decision were to stand, more than 120 million acres of offshore areas could be opened to oil and gas drilling in undeveloped areas, endangering wildlife, sensitive ecosystems, and coastal communities.

We can't let that happen.

Drilling in remote and inaccessible Arctic waters



© Dale DeArmond

threatens imperiled wildlife such as polar bears, whales and walruses, and the people that depend on them. Drilling there is particularly risky because it would be effectively impossible to clean up an oil spill in icy, remote Arctic waters. The federal government itself has concluded that there is a 75 percent danger of a major oil spill if development and production in the Chukchi Sea occurs under even a single large lease sale.

Such major risks are particularly egregious in a world assaulted by climate disruption. Full development and burning of oil and gas from the Arctic Ocean alone could release nearly 16 billion tons of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere, the equivalent of over nine years of tailpipe emissions from every car and truck on the road nationwide. Pursuing this development is at cross-purposes with the nation's -- and world's -- move away from fossil fuels, and with previous commitments to address global climate change.

Ten groups including Sierra Club are part of the lawsuit to defend Obama's historic actions: The League of Conservation Voters, Natural Resources Defense Council, Alaska Wilderness League, Defenders of Wildlife, Northern Alaska Environmental Center, REDOIL (Resisting Environmental Destruction on Indigenous Lands), Center for Biological Diversity, Greenpeace, and The Wilderness Society, represented by attorneys at Earthjustice and Natural Resources Defense Council.

We need all hands on deck to fight this Administration's refusal to protect coastal communities, wildlife, and our climate. We expect the Administration soon to initiate a new five year planning process for offshore oil and gas development. If that sounds familiar, it's because you most likely commented on the recent process for the 2017-2022 plan under the Obama Administration -- urging them to keep the Arctic out of this plan entirely, which ultimately happened.

Now more than ever, we must work together to safe guard our coasts for future generations and avoid disastrous, unnecessary additions to climate disruption. Please follow Sierra Club Alaska Chapter on Facebook to stay involved. ❖

-- by Alli Harvey

### **Pebble Mine: revival?**

-- from page 4

is an economically doomed plan that would also significantly compromise the unique, irreplaceable, and endlessly precious environment of the Bristol Bay region.

So what now? We should prepare ourselves for the ongoing fight for Bristol Bay: the Trump-era EPA could decide to issue the mining permit despite overwhelming facts against its viability. In this political climate, anything seems possible, and we must not assume that logic will prevail and this issue will just go away. We must prepare for any possibility and join with other environmental groups to ensure the survival of the world's largest salmon spawning ground, one that supports the Alaskan way of life for humans and wildlife alike.

-- by Jonathan Ross & Yasuhiro Ozuru

# Arctic Refuge Coastal Plain--the crusade crescendos

Alaska contains some of the earth's last remaining expansive wild and natural places. They are not "untouched"; these landscapes and waterways have sustained indigenous peoples since time immemorial, alongside and in relationship to an astounding and diverse network of wildlife. In a broader way, Alaska and its wild vastness also inspire a sense of hope and adventure even for those who may never have the chance to visit. Yet, for the fossil fuel industry and for almost all of Alaska's elected officials, these irreplaceable landscapes just add up to dollar signs: resources to be dug up and sold.

There is no place in Alaska that is a more potent symbol of the human, animal, and spiritual values threaded through the state's most remote and wild places--or of what is at stake if those places are lost--than the coastal plain of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge.

The fight to preserve the wild coastal plain has gone on for more than thirty years--ever since the 1987 Reagan-era Interior Department report that recommended developing this strip of land on Alaska's northeast Arctic coastline. To defer to the oil industry, the coastal plain had been left out of wilderness protections of the 1980 Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA). Left out—but not without a measure of caution—opening the coastal plain to exploitation would require an Act of Congress.

For 30 years—almost miraculously, environmentalists have held off the tide of oil and political pressure. Via vetos, serendipitous spill disasters, passionately vociferous advocates, effective and dedicated organizers, and just sheer luck—we've kept the coastal plain wild and free.

*Can we continue to do that in face of an Administration and a Congress allied for big business?*

The Trump Administration wants to undo conservation measures in Alaska and open previously protected areas to industry. Two recent Administration actions send a clear message that the Arctic coastal plain is under fresh and sharp attack: inclusion of assumed revenue from drilling in the coastal plain in the President's "fat" budget and Secretary Zinke's announcement during his recent Anchorage visit that the Administration will review potential oil resources under the coastal plain. (The budget will surely be revised as it goes through Congress.)

For the next four years, the Sierra Club and our coalition partners will be in defensive mode for the wild Refuge. We have a special weapon--legions of passionate lovers of wild places who are eager to ACT to counter an Administration that blatantly disregards the global future-- (as the Huffington Post denounced on June 2, 2017: "*Trump to Planet—drop dead*").

*Our work is underway, and we are awed by the fierceness and depth of our movement.*

Leaders of the Gwich'in Nation, the Native tribe whose ancestral homelands in Alaska and northern Canada include the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, partnered with Sierra Club and Patagonia to go on a ten-stop tour of the Desert Southwest, wrapping up at the start of June. The tour emphasized

connections with indigenous leaders in Arizona, Nevada, Utah, and Colorado, while calling on Senators in these key states to defend the Arctic Refuge. Jeneen Freij Njootli, a Gwich'in artist originally from Old Crow, in Canada's Yukon Territory, said, "**We have always been migrating for our survival. This [tour] is a continuation of that migration.**"



Gwich'in leader Bernadette Demientieff on tour meets with Arizona state senator Jamescita Peshlakai at Arizona legislature in Phoenix, AZ

You can

read about the tour here:

<http://www.sierraclub.org/arctic-southwest-protect-our-homelands>

Even as Gwich'in leaders were in the Southwest, Secretary Zinke in Alaska met with oil and gas executives and pro-drilling politicians. The Sierra Club Alaska Chapter and partners worked together to birddog Zinke and spread the word that Alaska is not for sale. Zinke also took the time in Alaska to issue a Secretarial Order opening the Arctic to oil and gas drilling, including new drilling in the Western Arctic and a review of oil resources in the coastal plain of the Arctic Refuge. The Environmental campaign issued a press [statement](#) slamming the decision which was echoed on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#). [Alaska Public Radio](#) covered the Club's take.

Alaskans need to upbraid our members of Congress for misleading Americans into thinking ALL Alaskans seek to exploit the Refuge. (See petition article, page 8.) But since our state's legislators are leading instigators of harm to Alaska's environment, we will need to do more—such as establish networks of friends and relatives ready to contact their own legislators in key states like the four just visited by the Gwich'in tour plus others—such as Pennsylvania, Virginia, North Carolina, Maine, Tennessee, Ohio, for example. Now is the time to start the campaign—to speak up on behalf of the Arctic Refuge Coastal Plain, an incredible wild jewel that is a crucial part of the natural legacy we hope to leave for our children.

To win this fight, we need your voice.--loud and clear. To add your voice *now* as an Arctic campaigner in Alaska—and receive action updates, contact: Alli Harvey ([alli.harvey@sierraclub.org](mailto:alli.harvey@sierraclub.org)) or Yasuhiro Ozuro ([yasozuru@gmail.com](mailto:yasozuru@gmail.com)). **Let's preserve the wild Arctic!** ❖

-- by Alli Harvey

Update:

## Can commuter rail reduce Alaska CO2 emissions?

Alaska's Arctic and subarctic regions are warming at twice the global pace. Yet when it comes to transportation policies that would reduce CO2 emissions, Alaska lags.

National averages show significant emission savings from rail transit. While the private auto averages .96 pounds of CO2 per passenger mile, and bus transit .64 pounds per mile, commuter rail averages .33 pounds per passenger mile.

In February 2017 the Alaska Department of Transportation submitted its final "State Rail Plan" to the Federal Railroad Administration without changes to the Draft recommended by the Alaska Railroad Corporation and the public. They did this despite the fact that the Rail Plan is ADOT's statutory responsibility under a 2008 federal law called the Passenger Rail Investment and Improvement Act (PRIIA). To be eligible for the capital grant funding authorized under PRIIA, states must develop state rail plans that are accepted by the Federal Railroad Administration. (**sierra borealis** June 2016, Sept 2010)

The ADOT Plan failed to address citizen comments on the need for multi modal transportation planning in the Glenn Highway corridor. This is ironic, because capital costs to begin commuter rail are small compared to what the Department is spending or planning to spend on Glenn Highway improvements. On its projects web page, the Alaska Department of Transportation has listed "highway congestion and accidents" as reasons for adding lanes to the Glenn Highway. No mention is made of commuter rail.

The Alaska Railroad is a State owned corporation set up like a private business, under the Alaska Department of Commerce and Economic Development. Both the Commerce and Economic Development Commissioner and the Department of Transportation Commissioner sit on its Board of Directors. The Department of Transportation began its rail planning under PRIIA by forming a Rail Plan Policy Committee in 2013 consisting of these commissioners and the commissioner of the Alaska Department of Natural Resources, plus the heads of the Alaska Railroad Corporation and the White Pass and Yukon Railroad.

The Department held public meetings in the Matanuska-Susitna Borough as it developed the State Rail

Plan. These meetings saw strong public interest in commuter rail. In October 2013 a Policy Committee and a Technical Committee consisting of local government and transportation user representatives composed a "vision and goals" statement which included commuter rail between the Matanuska Susitna Borough, Anchorage, and the Ted Stevens Anchorage International Airport. Commuter rail would be relatively easy to implement because the rail track already connects these locations.

Unfortunately, after 2013 active work on the Rail Plan slowed, then stopped. To the disappointment of the Alaska Railroad Corporation and citizen advocates, the Draft Rail Plan that ADOT finally released in December 2015 was not updated from 2013. But it was a step in the right direction in that it praises rail as a means to reduce emissions and highway congestion. However, it considers rail unfeasible because of its costs.

And south of Anchorage, the \$4.15 million spent each year on subsidizing the Whittier tunnel (which was supposed to pay its own way through tolls) exceeds the \$3.6 million annual subsidy required to operate commuter rail.

Is it cost effective or environmentally smart to keep pouring money into Alaska's highways, with their high carbon emissions per passenger mile, while planners say that commuter rail is "too expensive?"

In May 2003, Anchorage's Municipal Assembly passed a resolution supporting commuter rail between the Matsu Borough and three of Anchorage's largest employment centers: downtown, the airport, and the Dimond Shopping Mall. The Alaska Railroad track already goes to the airport and passes Dimond Center on its way south. To the north, it parallels the Glenn Highway between Anchorage and the Matsu Borough. Both freight and passenger trains (currently geared to tourists) run daily along this track.

The Matsu Valley City of Wasilla drew up plans in 2015 to move the historic Wasilla station in order to better accommodate trains and car traffic, provide bus and cab drop off, and more parking for commuters. A potential station near the Glenn/Parks interchange is being considered, as well as possible stations at Eklutna, Birchwood, Eagle River, and Elmendorf Air Force Bases. Since 2002, \$78 million has been spent straightening the track, making potential commuter rail time competitive with driving.

### Background on highways versus commuter rail in Alaska

So why was the sprawl-inducing Glenn Highway interchange built (along with more additions to the Glenn Highway). and why is the commuter rail, called a "Smart Choice" back in 2002, still only "visionary" 15 years later?

The first part of the answer is that the U.S. is a highway centric country. Although both highways and commuter rail anywhere in the world require capital expenditures and operating subsidies, in the U.S. it is much easier to get money for highways than for rail. Still, cities such as Seattle and Salt Lake City show that commuter rail funding is possible.

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photo: Cynthia Wentworth



Commuter rail: reducing congestion and CO2 emissions

## Commuter Rail—ease congestion and emissions? — from p. 6

Secondly, our Alaska Department of Transportation is still basically a highway and aviation agency. ADOT is so highway-centric that the State Rail Plan is not even mentioned in the State's Long Range Transportation Policy Plan! The State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP), where money is programmed, mentions the Highway Safety Plan and the Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan, but not the State Rail Plan. In both 2015 and 2016, interested activists commented on this STIP, but we have received no response to our comments on the need for multi-modal Glenn Highway corridor planning in the STIP.

A true multi-modal transportation corridor plan would list all costs – those for cars, bus rapid transit, and rail. These costs include accidents, public safety, CO2 emissions, comfort, and amenities such as coffee and restrooms, and time efficiency (ability to use laptops and read books) – as well as the capital and operating costs of highway and rail infrastructure. Without actually quantifying all costs, some remain hidden. This perpetuates the myth that rail is more expensive than road.

Anchorage residents, especially young people working in the retail and the technology sectors, regularly ask me: "Why don't we have commuter rail? "I don't like riding buses, but if they had commuter rail I'd move to the Valley!" Friends who live in the Valley recently said to me: "This winter there was a highway accident every other week, turning our one-hour commute into two hours. We need another option!"

Every year the Alaska Railroad runs the "Green Line" to the Alaska State Fair in the Matsu community of Palmer, with help from its corporate sponsors. This train, which runs three times per day on Saturdays and Sundays, twice on Fridays and twice on Labor Day during the two Fair weekends, is so popular that it sells out weeks in advance. Besides all the positive numbers on ridership that have appeared in commuter rail feasibility studies conducted since 1979, the State Fair train is proof positive that people like riding trains.

### Anchorage area transit progress

In the past year, the Municipality of Anchorage's Planning Department has made progress on commuter rail. The Muni is now open to designating parts of the Alaska Railroad corridor as a transit-oriented development corridor on its Land Use Plan Map, though this still needs Municipal Assembly approval. Assembly approval would be consistent with their 2003 resolution supporting commuter rail.

Anchorage's Climate Action Plan calls for Anchorage to become the most energy efficient city in America. The current Metropolitan Transportation Plan predicts the number of daily commuters on the Glenn Highway to increase from the present 25,000 to 40,000 by 2035. A new transportation plan is needed to better use an underutilized asset: *the Alaska Railroad*.

Now more than ever, commuter rail needs to be a "smart choice", as it was in 2002. For this to happen, Alaska's governor, Anchorage and Matsu Borough mayors, and our state legislators need to hear from citizens. ❖

— by Cynthia Wentworth,  
Alaska Chapter transportation chair

## Two federal land updates:

### Setback for Alaska national wildlife refuges

Congressional Republicans and President Trump have revoked the Fish and Wildlife Service's 2016 regulation or rule for protecting refuge wildlife from the predator control and Intensive management advocates that dominate the Alaska Board of Game (*sierra borealis* March 2017). Their move, using the 1996 Congressional Review Act (CRA) was one of several revocations of federal regulations issued late in the Obama Administration. (Fortunately, the National Park Service's stronger early 2016 rule for protecting wildlife in Alaska's national preserves escaped the CRA net, which applied to regulations issued after May 31. Repealing the NPS rule would require new rule-making.)

The FWS's rule was in response to Board of Game regulations that are obviously incompatible with federal wildlife law and the purposes of the refuges as set forth in ANILCA. According to the FWS:

"The BOG has adopted regulations under the [State's intensive management] statute that require targeted reductions of wolf, black bear, brown bear, or a combination of these in designated "predation control areas" within game management units. These State regulations are implemented through intensive management plans that authorize activities including aerial shooting of wolves or bears or both by State agency personnel, trapping of wolves by paid contractors, allowance under permit for same-day airborne hunting of wolves and bears by the public, and allowance under permit for the take of any black or brown bear through baiting or snaring by the public (5 Alaska Administrative Code (AAC) 92)."



Cancellation of the wildlife rule for Refuges means that the FWS must continue to deal with the BOG and ADF&G as it has prior to the rule—negotiating on a case by case basis in an attempt to forestall proposed regulations incompatible with federal wildlife law and ANILCA's refuge purposes. Had the refuge rule survived, incompatible regulations would be prohibited, relieving the FWS of this routine task.

### "Sturgeon" case in Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals

This litigation arose when the National Park Service told Mr. Sturgeon, an Alaska resident who was operating his hovercraft on a navigable tributary of the Yukon River in Yukon-Charley Rivers National Preserve, that hovercraft are prohibited on navigable preserve rivers, if not on the Yukon. Sturgeon took the matter to the federal district court, arguing that since the State owns the submerged land under navigable rivers, the State also controls use of the water column as well, including motorized access (*sierra borealis* Dec 2015). The State has strongly supported Sturgeon's challenge to federal efforts to protect waterways and the wildlife inhabiting them.

Citing federal laws, the NPS — continued page 8, bottom

## Petition against Alaska's HJR 5 -- misleading on Alaska's fossil fuel dependence

In March, the Alaska State legislature passed a joint resolution--HJR5--to urge the United States Congress to pass legislation to open the coastal plain of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge to oil and gas development. During the late January legislative debate prior to passage of the resolution, more than 30 people from Juneau, Anchorage, and Fairbanks, showed up to testify against the bill. I personally witnessed that as I was there myself.

Nonetheless, the legislature subsequently passed the resolution. While the State resolution itself does not open the coastal plain of the federal Arctic Refuge, it sends a message to the US Congress, claiming that "Alaskan people are asking to the US Congress to take the action to open the Refuge for oil/gas exploration." Senators Murkowski and Sullivan and Representative Young will portray this argument to make it appear that "all Alaskans are in favor of opening the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge for oil/gas exploration," which is simply not true.

Right now is the time to counteract HJR5 by speaking out with strong voices that "many Alaskans are against this idea". Insist that many Alaskans are concerned about the negative impact of drilling on wildlife, traditional life, and environment -- see this: <http://www.patagonia.com/the-refuge.html>.

Not only would coastal plain exploitation harm the fragile Arctic environment, but an economy depending on fossil fuels is becoming more and more obsolete. We are currently experiencing a significant economic downturn in Alaska that threatens many people's lifestyles-- from cities to villages -- as education, law enforcement, and other critical services to maintain quality of life are cut substantially. A significant part of this economic downturn is attributed to the over-dependence on oil-based revenue in the state economy -- a dependence that the state of Alaska has built up deliberately in the past 30 years or so. Many countries are leaving a fossil fuel based economy behind and clearly transitioning to an economy based on renewable energy.

### Sturgeon Court case update

-- from page 7

prevailed at the district court, and at the Ninth Circuit, but not at the Supreme Court, which found the NPS's brief flawed and sent the case back down to the Ninth Circuit. There it reposes as this report appears.

The stakes could not be higher. If the federal position is ultimately overturned, the impact on National Park System units and the other ANILCA units will be devastating. Owners of various motorized crafts and contraptions--including but not limited to, hovercrafts, air boats, jet boats, and high-speed skiffs--will have unrestricted access to the rivers, including designated wild and scenic rivers. Federal field personnel will be hard-pressed to control illegal off-river use of, for example, four-wheelers brought in by river boats. ❖

-- Jack Hession

So I call on our friends in Alaska to join an effort to send a petition that represents the true voice of responsible Alaskans: "we DO NOT believe that allowing oil and gas development in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge is good for our state and our country."

See below for petition text. If you are willing to sign or (even better) to collect petition signatures among your friends-- to receive an actual petition with signature space, please contact: [yasozuru@gmail.com](mailto:yasozuru@gmail.com).

### In Response to HJR 5, An Alternate Resolution From Alaskans Regarding The Arctic National Wildlife Refuge

We (undersigned in the list below: name and contact information) are Alaskans **who DO NOT believe that allowing oil and gas development in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge is good for our state or our country**, for the many reasons including (but not limited to) the following:

The Arctic Refuge has thousands of years of human history, and continues to sustain the Porcupine Caribou Herd, and therefore the Gwich'in people with a subsistence tradition;

Protecting the caribou and the Gwich'in way of life is a matter of basic human rights, and clean air, lands, and waters are necessary to sustain life in the Arctic;

Clean lands and waters will sustain tourism, fisheries, subsistence and more, while intensive resource extraction threatens them for short term gain in a limited industry;

The Arctic Refuge is one of our most majestic places in Alaska, home to caribou, musk oxen, wolves, polar bears, and nearly 200 species of migratory birds;

The coastal plain of the Arctic Refuge is the only 5 percent of Alaska's Arctic coastal plain with any legislated protections against oil and gas development;

Arctic Refuge oil production would result in a sprawling industrial complex of drilling sites spread across 1.5 million acres of critical wildlife habitat;

Climate change is impacting all of Alaska, and it is impacting Alaska's Arctic more than any other place in the country;

Addressing climate change requires us not to burn a large portion of our oil reserves;

Alaska was home to the Exxon Valdez oil spill, and Alaskans have seen first-hand what happens when things go wrong;

We are Alaskans who are resolved to address climate change while also crafting a sustainable future for our state's economy. We refuse to leave a legacy of long-term destruction of public lands and waters, just for our short-term benefit today, and we ask you to stand with us for Alaska's public lands and waters. ❖

-- Yasuhiro Ozuro

Sierra Club Alaska Chapter Chair



# Izembek bill would set harmful national precedent by a road through Wilderness *Masquerades as “King Cove Land Exchange”*

A bill in both Houses of Congress— HR 218, introduced by Alaska’s Congressman Don Young, and in the Senate, as S. 101 by Alaska’s senior Senator, Lisa Murkowski, seeks to construct a road across a portion of the designated Wilderness in southwest Alaska’s Izembek National Wildlife Refuge. This deadly attack on the Wilderness System’s prohibition of roads masquerades under the innocent sounding name of King Cove Land Exchange Act.

It would mandate a land exchange with the State of Alaska for a part of the remote Izembek National Wildlife Refuge on the Alaska Peninsula—nearly as far off as the Aleutians chain.

They want to build a road across part of the present wilderness. Understanding it would be illegal to construct a road in a designated wilderness, they propose to exchange that land with some allegedly equivalent land (more acreage, but of less value for wildlife habitat) belonging to the state of Alaska.

The legislators claim that residents of the tiny coastal community of King Cove need this road to be able reach the big airstrip of another neighboring community (Cold Bay) for potential emergency medical evacuations.

That will get sympathy, won’t it? Most of us in Sierra Club certainly want to help isolated indigenous communities.

But – what is the REAL story here if we delve deeper?

It is a bogus issue. Congress, some 20 years ago when the call for such a road began, appropriated many millions of dollars to improve ferry service along the Alaska Peninsula, enhance coast guard presence, and provide helicopter assistance, for King Cove. The \$37.5 million provided in 1997 included upgrading the medical clinic. In addition, Congress provided a \$9 million hovercraft which successfully completed all requested evacuations -- before they sent it away to another village in 2012, claiming it was too hard to service it with new parts.

It is also bogus because the road that is sought would be snow covered much of the year, and would be too dangerous and expensive to keep open and clear through the dark winter months. The trip using the hovercraft took about 20 minutes to cross the bay from King Cove to Cold Bay airport, but the proposed road would be at minimum a two-hour ride and would be, in practice, unusable during the long winter months: jeopardizing safety in the winter darkness, frequent violent storms, snow drifts and ice glazed road conditions. The proposed dirt road would cost at least \$24 million—plus unknown amounts for maintenance.

The real motive for this is a direct attack on America’s Wilderness system. A deadly attack, because of the national precedent it would establish -- that if any entity wants to put a road through an existing wilderness, it has only to get Congress to pass a land exchange to reduce the wilderness -- then so much for our proud American concept of keeping some special wild places wild *in perpetuity*, devoid of roads and machinery.

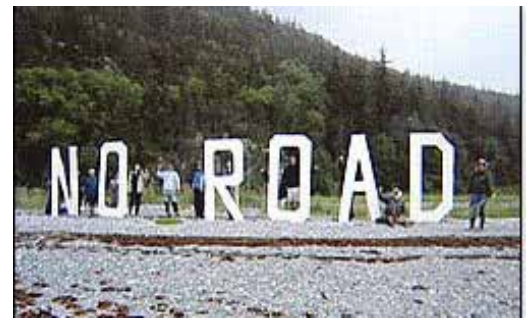
In addition to the national wilderness system argument against building this ten-mile road, there is serious concern about impacts to uniquely valuable wildlife habitat. The Izembek Lagoon, almost 45,000 acres in size, and supporting

the world’s largest eel grass beds, is designated as a Wetland of International Importance. This Refuge is famous worldwide among birders for the extraordinary confluence of migrating bird species that assemble here to fatten up on the eel grass for their long and arduous migratory pilgrimages. The eel grass is the foundation for a complex food-chain composed of invertebrates, fish, marine mammals, and seabirds.

Waterfowl that nest in Izembek Wildlife Refuge and fly through there also go north to the Yukon Kuskowkim Delta, where subsistence hunters from Yup’ik Eskimo communities (about 27 villages) harvest them for subsistence. Myron Naneng (Yup’ik Eskimo from Hooper Bay) testified against the road in front of the House committee. He was former President of AVCP (Association of Village Council Presidents) in Bethel.

As the National Wildlife Refuge Association recently testified: “The road would cause irreversible damage to the refuge’s wildlife and environment, negatively impact the subsistence way of life of Alaska Natives, waste millions of taxpayer dollars, undermine our nation’s bedrock environmental laws, and set a dangerous nationwide precedent for the entire National Wildlife Refuge System and all designated wilderness lands.”

Sierra Club’s Alaska Chapter has repeatedly refuted the Congressional delegation’s claims about the mythical “need” for such a road. The



Obama administration and specifically Secretary of Interior Sally Jewell firmly resisted the delegation’s push for a road. But, now, with a new Administration allied to hostile forces in Congress, viability for a potential road effort make this not just an Alaska issue: it is a NATIONAL issue.

Your editor spent a week during summer of 2012 in nearby --also tiny--Cold Bay, headquarters of Izembek National Wildlife Refuge, and saw how valuable this land is as feeding habitat for migrating bird species. ❖

➡ **WHAT YOU CAN DO:** The Alaska legislators count on the remoteness of “Izembek” --that hardly anyone has heard of “and that fewer still have a clue where it is”--to whisk their measure through. Don’t let them get away with that.

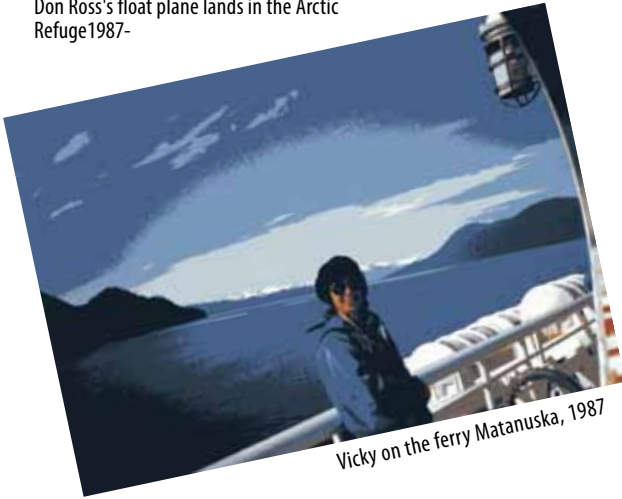
Contact your friends in other states and ask them to urge their members of Congress to firmly oppose S 101 and HR 218--a sinister attack on America’s Wilderness system. The proposed road is NOT needed by residents there, whose needs have already been taken care of by Congress. And this taxpayer boondoggle could be used only during part of the year.

-- Vicky Hoover

## Thirtieth Anniversary trip to Alaska



Don Ross's float plane lands in the Arctic Refuge 1987-



Vicky on the ferry Matanuska, 1987

Thirty years have passed since I first visited Alaska in July of 1987 – a beautiful first trip on the Alaska Marine Highway System – travelling with four San Francisco Bay Area Sierra Club friends aboard the ferry Matanuska from Seattle to Juneau. During that first trip we toured Anchorage and visited the Sierra Club office there, backpacked five days on the “Dixie Pass” trail in Wrangell-St Elias National Park, stayed overnight in Glacier National Park, briefly visited Homer, rode the bus in Denali National Park to Wonder Lake, camped out in Fairbanks, and had an amazing three-day exploratory flight in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge – then hardly known and newly a big environmental issue—camping in a different location each night.

Since then I have visited Alaska many times, and been to many (but far from all) remote corners of the state, and enjoyed ferry travel to Sitka, cross-Gulf from Juneau to Whittier, and the marvelous trip on the Tustumena to Dutch Harbor at the start of the Aleutians. But never again have I travelled from the Lower 48 to Alaska by ferry.

Now, I am about to take that ferry ride again – a big 30th anniversary trip, this time aboard the Kennicott from Bellingham to Juneau--then on northward--by plane and train. Here a few photos from 1987, and look for a trip update in the next Sierra Borealis. ❖

-- Vicky Hoover

Meeting Jack Hession, field staff, in Sierra Club Anchorage office, 1987



## Sierra Borealis / alaska report

is the newsletter of the Alaska Chapter of the Sierra Club

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Granite Tor hike near Chena Hot Springs, 1987

