



alaska report

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POLAR BEAR LISTED AS “THREATENED” SPECIES

Endangered Species Act to the rescue – or business as usual?

After months of denial, the Bush Administration, faced by a court-ordered deadline, ran out of excuses for more delay and, with evident reluctance, on May 15 finally listed the polar bear as a “threatened” species. Not even a last minute push by Vice President Cheney could stop the listing. Americans concerned with the fate of this iconic wild creature, whose habitat—offshore Arctic sea ice—is rapidly shrinking due to global warming, breathed easier to think the polar bear now could come under the broad legal protection of the Endangered Species Act. And the Administration basked in the glow of front-page news stories heralding its listing.

At the same time, the Interior Department assured the oil industry not to worry. As the Sierra Club e-news pointed out, “after seven long years of chicanery and deception, many of us know to read the fine print when it comes to anything the Bush administration does. This time, however, they didn’t even bother to hide the devil in the details. They put it right in the headline: “Rule will allow continuation of vital energy production in Alaska.”

Sierra Club executive director Carl Pope called the administration’s sham plan “riddled with loopholes, caveats, and backhanded language that could actually undermine protections for the polar bear and other species.”

For example, the Bush plan calls for “*common sense* modifications to the existing Endangered Species Act.” If the “Healthy Forests” and “Clear Skies” initiatives are any indication of this administration’s idea of “*common sense*” policies, what’s in store for polar bears won’t be pretty.

The billions of dollars in leases the Minerals Management Service (part of the Department of Interior) rushed to sell to Big Oil while Interior chiefs simultaneously delayed listing the polar bear will remain valid. This means that the



photo: Trish Rolfe

Polar bear joins Trish Rolfe and Robert Thompson at Shell meeting in The Hague, Netherlands. (The bear is DC staffer Keren Murphy.) See article p 3.

Polar Bear Seas in the Arctic will be subject to seismic blasting as early as this summer, and polar bear habitat will be inundated with pipelines, well pads, boat traffic, and ice-breaking vessels, not to mention the ever-present threat of oil spills.

Most outrageously, the Bush listing plan involves “steps” to make sure that this ruling and the ESA itself are in no way actually used to do *anything* about global warming – which is precisely what is pushing the polar bear toward extinction.

Reactions: lawsuits from all sides

Almost immediately, environmental groups announced they would sue because the listing would not help polar bears sufficiently, and the state of Alaska announced it would sue for lack of sufficient evidence to

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Polar Bear listing

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support a listing--and fears that a listing will cripple oil and gas development in prime polar bear habitat off the state's northern and northwestern coasts.

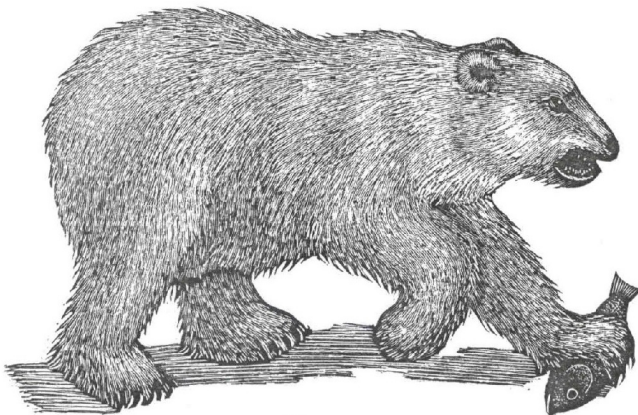
The new regulations to list the polar bear as threatened under the Endangered Species Act were not on the books for more than a day before the groups that had sued the administration earlier this year to force a listing filed legal complaints against the listing in the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of California. The Center for Biological Diversity, the Natural Resources Defense Council and Greenpeace say the administration broke environmental laws with the "special rule" it included as part of the polar bear listing. The special rule specifies that greenhouse gas emissions cannot and should not be regulated under the Endangered Species Act.

Environmental groups contend this exemption erodes needed protections for the bear, which was listed because of threats to its habitat from global climate change. The Endangered Species Act allows for special "4d" rules for threatened species that can include exemptions to some of the otherwise required protections.

Alaska response: Governor Palin and Delegation

Alaska Governor Sarah Palin argued polar bears are well-managed and their population has dramatically increased over 30 years as a result of conservation. She stated that climate models predicting continued loss of sea ice, the main habitat of polar bears, during summers are unreliable. However, in fact, summer sea ice last year shrank to a record low, about 1.65 million square miles, nearly 40 percent less than the long-term average between 1979 and 2000. Polar bears rely on sea ice for hunting ringed seals. In recent years, summer sea ice has receded far beyond the relatively shallow, biologically rich waters of the outer continental shelf, giving polar bears less time in prime feeding areas.

Conservation groups responded that although the



Dale DeArmond © 1985

bears' numbers rebounded after the 1970s, such temporary increases were the result of measures taken to stop over-hunting. The primary author of the listing petition, Center for Biological Diversity polar bear expert Kassie Siegel, said Palin was either grossly misinformed or intentionally misleading and that it was "unconscionable" to ignore overwhelming

evidence of melting of global sea ice, the polar bear's habitat. "The governor is aligning herself and the state of Alaska with the most discredited fringe, she said."

Sen. Ted Stevens (R-AK) released a statement about the decision to list polar bears as "threatened":

"I am disappointed and disturbed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's decision to weaken the Endangered Species Act by listing the polar bear as threatened despite the steady increase in the species' population. Scientists have observed that there are now three times as many polar bears in the Arctic than there were in the 1970s.

"Never before has a species been listed as endangered or threatened while occupying its entire geographic range.

"This decision was made without any research demonstrating dangerously low population levels in polar bears, but rather on speculation regarding how ice levels will affect Arctic wildlife.... this action by the Fish and Wildlife Service sets a dangerous precedent with far-reaching social and economic ramifications. It...would severely hamper Alaska's ability to tap its vast natural resources. *Reinterpreting the Endangered Species Act in this way is an unequivocal victory for extreme environmentalists who want to block all development in our state.*"

Senator Lisa Murkowski spoke along similar lines:

"I can't express how extremely disappointed I am that the United States Fish and Wildlife Service has chosen to list the polar bear as threatened under the Endangered Species Act. I believe it is grossly premature, even with qualifications, to recommend this action based on highly variable climate change models and projected impacts... on a currently healthy population."

According to Congressman Don Young:

"It is hard to fully blame the Secretary [Kempthorne] for this decision, which seriously threatens the economy and freedoms of Alaskans and all Americans. He has been compelled to make a premature decision by a Clinton-appointed federal judge in Oakland, California, who is presiding over a lawsuit brought by radical environmental groups.

"Unfortunately, my fear is that radical environmental groups will file numerous frivolous lawsuits to stop development and traditional activities the Alaska Natives have conducted for thousands of years."

In its current form, the polar bear listing would give the bear some tangible changes. It requires new studies and a recovery plan. An extra layer of consultation will be needed for some projects in Alaska. And hunters can no longer bring trophies back to the United States from Canadian hunts.

Environmental groups have pushed for the bear's listing for years with the hope that its listing would give them leverage to press for reductions in greenhouse gas emissions.

Polar bear Seas Protection bill - HR 6057

With the Bush administration sidestepping vigorous polar bear protection, Reps. Jay Inslee (D-WA) and Maurice Hinchey (D-NY) are stepping forward to champion the habitat of this iconic wild species. The two environmental leaders in Con-

Sierra Club travels to the Netherlands to speak up to Shell Oil

As part of Sierra Club's ongoing campaign to protect the fragile arctic ecosystems of the Chukchi and Beaufort Seas from oil and gas development, a Sierra Club delegation flew to the Netherlands to attend Shell Oil's Annual General Meeting.

Sierra Club staffers Keren Murphy, Public Land organizer with Sierra Club's DC office, and Trish Rolfe, Alaska Regional Representative, were joined by Alaska Native Robert Thompson of Kaktovik. They flew to Amsterdam and took the train to The Hague where the day-long meeting was held. The goal of their odyssey was to call on the Shell Oil company to end its destructive oil and gas drilling practices that undermine Native cultures and threaten wildlife.

The company is preparing exploration activities in Alaska's Chukchi and Beaufort Seas this summer. These remote Arctic water bodies are America's *Polar Bear Seas*, which provide physical and cultural sustenance to Alaska Natives, who say drilling could destroy their way of life and drive them from their ancestral home. The offshore area is home to polar bears which in mid-May were placed on the Endangered Species List.

Polar Bear Seas bill

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gress introduced the "Polar Bear Seas Protection Act" (**HR 6057**) calling for a "time-out" on leasing and drilling in the Beaufort and Chukchi Seas until the full impact of such development is known. The legislation directs the National Research Council to identify missing biological information needed to study combined impacts of global warming and oil and gas development. It also requires effective oil spill cleanup technologies to be in place before new oil and gas activity in the Polar Bear Seas.

⇒ **WHAT YOU CAN DO:** Please contact your Member of Congress and ask him or her to cosponsor HR 6067. Reach your representative at (202)224-3121. Or write to the district offices or use the switchboard number to get the DC fax.

alaska report is now available on the Sierra Club website. Find this issue at http://www.sierraclub.org/wildlands/alaska_report/0806.pdf.

But only two issues out of approximately four a year will continue to be printed and mailed! To receive notice of when *web-only* issues appear, just send your email address and state of residence to vicky.hoover@sierraclub.org. That info will also get you on our email alert list for updates between newsletters.

If you would prefer only the electronic version and skip the paper, let me know. Getting both email and paper, works too.
Thank you for helping Alaska's magnificent public lands.

During the meeting Robert Thompson asked Shell's board of directors if they would be able to clean up an oil spill in an arctic environment, and their response was that they are not planning on having a spill but would use "best available technology" to clean up a spill if it happened. This response did little to ease his fears. "Our people have relied on a subsistence way of life along the Arctic Coast for generations, one big oil spill could destroy that way of life forever," said Thompson.

Other attendees pointed to Shell's past and current practices in other parts of the world -- such as South America -- where environmental destruction and conflict continue to turn communities against the company, eroding Shell's social license to operate.

Sierra Club along with representatives of Pacific Environment and Friends of the Earth delivered a letter to the company laying out our strong concerns about drilling in the Polar Bear Seas. If Shell proceeds with its plans, we will work with shareholders to file a resolution against drilling at the next annual meeting. ♦

-- Trish RolfeR



Teshekpuk Lake leasing averted--for now

The Secretary of Interior announced in May that the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) would defer additional oil and gas leasing around Teshekpuk Lake in the Northeast National Petroleum Reserve-Alaska (NPRA) for at least ten years. The decision came with the release of a final revised environmental statement and activity plan for Northeast NPRA -- after a lawsuit blocked a controversial September 2006 lease sale in that area.

This decision recognizes the international importance of the Teshekpuk wetlands. Even though this action does not grant permanent protection, it is a real victory that BLM has now taken this area off the table for oil and gas leasing. (**alaska report**, Dec 2007, Jan 07, Mar 06, Feb 03.)

The 10-year deferral of leasing in the Teshekpuk wetlands is only an administrative action, which can be changed by a future administration. Ultimately, the real solution is for Congress to enact permanent protection for these wetlands, a unique globally significant wildlife area. ♦

Proposed land exchanges at Izembek and Yukon Flats

Izembek: a road through wilderness?

In April the House of Representatives Natural Resources Committee approved by voice vote a bill (HR 2801) by ranking minority member Rep. Don Young (R-AK) to allow a road across the Izembek Wilderness, within the Izembek National Wildlife Refuge on the Alaska Peninsula. Also in April, a companion bill (S 1680) by Alaska Senators Lisa Murkowski and Ted Stevens was the subject of a Senate Energy and Natural Resources subcommittee hearing. At the close of the hearing, chairman Ron Wyden (D-OR) asked the witnesses to get together and try to bring a compromise back to the committee. (For background and opposition talking points on the proposed Izembek exchange and road issue, see **alaska report**, Dec 07, Sep & Dec 03, May, Sep & Dec 01, Jan & Nov 99, Oct 98, Sep 97.)

Under the bills, State and Native corporation land would be exchanged for a slice of Refuge wilderness that would go the King Cove Native Corporation and open the way for the road, which the residents of King Cove say is needed for emergency medical evacuations. The road would connect the predominantly Native community of King Cove to Cold Bay and its World War II-era airport that can handle large commercial and military aircraft.

Since the mid-1990s, when King Cove began urging Congress to authorize a road across Refuge wilderness, Sierra Club and other state and national conservation organizations have unanimously supported all-weather ferry service, an alternative that the environmental impact statement identified as the environmentally preferable and safest alternative.

In 1998 Congress approved an agreement reached by Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt and Sen. Stevens intended to resolve the conflict. Congress appropriated \$37 million for a new village health center in King Cove, improvement to the village's airport, and a new road and hovercraft combination for emergency medical evacuation--when often stormy weather precludes aircraft transfers. The road from King Cove is to end near the Refuge boundary, from where the ocean-going hovercraft would take passengers and freight across Cold Bay to the community of Cold Bay.

Only a segment of the road has been built, and more federal funds would be needed to complete it. Meanwhile, in the absence of the planned road component, the hovercraft has completed 27 successful medical evacuations from King Cove to Cold Bay.

Hovercraft now at risk

King Cove officials now say they can't afford the hovercraft's \$600,000 annual operation and maintenance costs. (Passenger and freight revenues are apparently not being considered.) They have sold the boat's spare engines, and

are telling the Congressional committees that a shutdown of the hovercraft is imminent.

In prematurely scuttling the hovercraft, the officials could wind up back in square one: no hovercraft and no road. Given its past generous aid assistance to King Cove and the federal budget deficit, Congress may balk at more millions to replace the successful hovercraft system with the first road across a federal wilderness since the Wilderness Act of 1964--and in this case across a refuge designated under the Ramsar Convention as a Wetland of International Importance.

There is a way out of the current stand-off. The State of Alaska could provide an all-weather ferry or add the hovercraft to the state's marine highway (ferry) system. Federal highway funds cover most of the cost of road and ferry construction in Alaska, while operation and maintenance costs are the State's responsibility. Another solution that has been suggested is a U.S. Coast Guard helicopter stationed at Cold Bay, whose rescue operations would include emergency medivacs for all the communities on the lower Alaska Peninsula, including King Cove.

Yukon Flats: major oil development?



Falcon on the rocks overlooks the Yukon Flats

photo: Philip Hyde

This proposed land exchange between the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Doyon Ltd., an Alaska Native regional corporation, is on a fast track for approval in August--with the goal of facilitating massive development of underlying oil reserves. (See **alaska report**, Mar 2008.)

A correction to the March article--which stated that the 600,000 acre tract Doyon Ltd. would acquire under the exchange is designated refuge wilderness and hence Congress would have to review and approve--or reject--the exchange: More correctly, the 600,000 acre tract has been *recommended for wilderness* by the Service.

Unfortunately, as non-wilderness Refuge land still

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Sierra Club Appeals 2008 Tongass Land Management Plan

The Sierra Club, represented by the Juneau Group of the Alaska Chapter has filed an appeal of the Forest Service's 2008 Tongass Land Management Plan. The appeal is a collaborative document produced by several conservation groups. The co-appellants are Sitka Conservation Society, Greenpeace, Cascadia Wildlands Project, Tongass Conservation Society, Defenders of Wildlife, and the Center for Biological Diversity.

The preparation of a new 2008 Tongass Land Management Plan (TLUMP) by the Forest Service came about as the result of a 9th Circuit Court of Appeals decision that the previous 1997 TLUMP greatly over-estimated the market demand for Tongass National Forest timber. The Sierra Club

was a co-plaintiff on the law suit that alleged this major flaw and led to the Court decision. (See **alaska report**, Mar 08, May 07, Nov 05, Jul 04, Apr 99) The doubling of the estimated market demand in the 1997 TLUMP resulted in the Forest Service's decision not to designate important roadless areas for non timber-cutting land use.

It is the opinion of the co-appellants that the 2008 TLUMP is again flawed in the way it estimates the actual amount of market demand for Tongass timber. The plan's analysis of this issue is not only flawed in its data supporting its calculation of current demand, but also in basing its projected future demand scenarios on 'maybe it will happen' fantasies of higher demand. This once again puts many important roadless land areas, and other lands important for maintaining abundant wildlife populations, into the timber base for future logging. The Forest Service's rationale for their 'maybe it will happen' demand analysis is that they, the agency, will do everything they can to increase market demand, including continuation of extreme taxpayer subsidies for the non-competitive Tongass timber industry.

The plan is also flawed on other economic issues. The plan completely fails to present a real account of the costs of the timber program in the required cost benefit analysis. This analysis is a required process in order to provide information to the public about not only the costs and benefits associated with timber cutting but also the economic benefits associated with un-cut pristine areas. The 2008 TLUMP completely fails to do this.

A further flaw of the agency's new Tongass plan is that the timber cutting scenarios will not maintain the wildlife viability that rural Alaskan communities depend on for subsistence hunting and fishing. Southeast Alaska communities also depend on the economic benefits of non-commodity uses such as the tourism and recreational industries, that in turn depend on abundant wildlife. The plan has ignored the best scientific biological research data available for maintaining abundant populations of wildlife species, some of which are on the edge of being classified as endangered under the Endangered Species Act.

All of these and many more issues that the 2008 TLUMP does not deal with adequately have resulted in the co-appellants' detailed and substantive appeal to the Forest Service to redo the 2008 Tongass Land Use Management Plan. It is our hope that the current Forest Service administration, or the next administration in 2009, will agree to do this outside of any lawsuit process.

The Sierra Club's Juneau Group especially applauds Larry Edwards of Greenpeace and Paul Olson of Sitka Conservation Society for doing the incredibly time consuming and difficult process of combining the co-appellants' comments into one major document. ♦

-- Mark Rorick, chair, Juneau Group

Refuge land exchanges

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awaiting Congressional review for potential addition to the Wilderness System, the tract can be proposed for the trade-out by the Bush-Kempthorne Administration under the weak wilderness review provision of ANILCA.

Fortunately, Congress has an indirect, potentially decisive role. The effect of the proposed exchange on the federal budget will be reviewed by the House Appropriations Committee. If the members concludes that transferring publicly owned potential oil and gas reserves to a private corporation is not in the national interest, they can deny the federal funds needed to consummate the trade. And the House and Senate resources committees can weigh in too, with oversight hearings, and follow up with their own actions. ♦

-- Jack Hessionn

⇒ WHAT YOU CAN DO:

Help guard the integrity of Alaska's premier wildlife refuges! Stop road construction across wilderness and massive oil and gas development. Please write or call your Congressional representative and senators and urge them to oppose S 1680 and HR 2801 – for a land exchange with Izembek National Wildlife Refuge that would result in a road across present wilderness – if these bills come to a vote. Also ask them to oppose Administration efforts to fast-track a land exchange in the Yukon Flats National Wildlife Refuge, designed to promote irrevocable, major oil development on sensitive refuge land—an exchange vigorously opposed by Native Yukon River communities.

Write or call your legislator at his/her district or state office, or use the Congressional switchboard at (202)224-3121.

Bird year for the Arctic Refuge flutters to a flying finish

The “Bird Year” for the Arctic Refuge is almost up. Since June 2007, the Madsen family of Canadian cyclists have cycled more than 12,000 miles from their home in the Yukon Territory to Florida and back to Texas. Chief birder of the team, 16-year-old Malkolm Boothroyd, has identified 534 bird species. Along with his parents, Ken Madsen and Wendy Boothroyd, Malkolm has traveled the entire distance without using any fossil fuels for transportation. (See **alaska report**, Mar 08, Dec 07, May 07, Jun 06.)

The following scene was described on the Bird Year website (www.birdyear.com).

I pulled my wool hat low over my ears and zipped up my windbreaker. The icy north wind shredded the fog and we could finally make out the bird's dim silhouette on the ridge. It bobbed up and down like a marionette-bird and called, “too-lip, too-lip.” As the mist lifted, I saw a dozen caribou including several butter-colored calves feeding in a draw behind the American golden plover. . .

Okay. I know you've already figured out that this scene didn't happen as we cycled across Louisiana and Texas in the heat of summer. If I put on a wool hat in the steamy warmth of the Gulf Coast I'd melt like a blob of butter. We did see three American golden plovers though, in a muddy field sandwiched between emerald-green rice fields brimming with yellowlegs, dowitchers and other assorted shorebirds. We saw these beautiful birds on a day when we had to cycle 83 long miles, mostly against a headwind. A tough day for us, but nothing compared to what those plovers do on a regular basis.

I can't help but associate American golden plovers with the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. Up north is where they are born. It is where they set out from when they are just a couple of months old, on the first leg of their incredible migration. They fly eastward to the Atlantic coast, then launch into the void for a non-stop flight across the ocean to South America.

Our own “migration” across the continent in search of birds that visit the Arctic Refuge in summer has given us some insight into the difficulties faced by migratory birds. It is no wonder that so many people have lamented that they aren't seeing as many birds as they used to. One of the biggest problems of course, is habitat loss. Birds, and other wild creatures, can't afford to lose productive habitat such as the irreplaceable wilderness in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge.

After 12,000 miles of exploring North America by bikes, boats and boots, we can say with confidence that there is no place like the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. Over the past decade, Wendy, Malkolm and I have spent many wonderful months hiking and paddling in the Arctic Refuge. As Canadians we're proud that our own government has steadily opposed American efforts to open Alaska's Arctic Refuge to development – and that Canada has protected its

own share of the Porcupine caribou herd's habitat by establishing several national parks in the Canadian Arctic. We all believe that the U.S. should grant permanent Wilderness protection to its portion of the caribou habitat. We're willing to keep doing what we can to achieve that goal. We hope you will too! ♦

-- Ken Madsen

Coastal Plain dodges delegation darts

Even though Congressional leadership remained firm against Arctic Refuge drilling, the Alaska delegation, maybe out of habit, this spring launched several tries at opening this remote flagship area to oil development--through the budget, in an energy bill, and by trying to tie drilling to a rise in the price of oil. Despite a recently released study by the U.S. Energy Information Administration indicating that drilling in the Coastal Plain of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge could save Americans only a few pennies per gallon *by 2025*, the Alaska delegation used the current high gas prices to again call for drilling in the Refuge. In an arcane legislative move called a “Motion to Instruct Conferees” on the entire federal budget, their shot in the dark sought to open the coastal plain of the Refuge, along with the nation's entire coast, to development. The House defeated this move by a vote of 229-185.

In the Senate, on May 13, a decisive 56-42 vote slammed the brakes on delegation efforts to incorporate drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge in a dirty energy package that included new offshore outer continental shelf oil and natural gas drilling, promoting new oil shale-drilling on our

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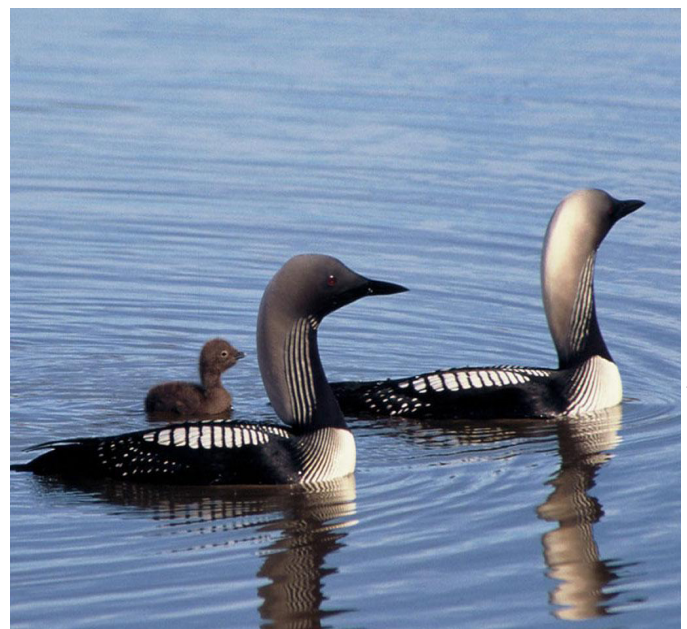


photo: Ken Madsen

Loons migrate between the Arctic Refuge and the Lower 48

Alaska's Coal Rush is a dirty threat

Despite feeling disproportionately the impacts of global climate change, Alaska, like much of the world, is in the middle of a coal rush. World wide demand for cheap energy is increasing interest in developing Alaska's vast reserves of coal, thought to be roughly half of the total U.S. coal reserves. Although a growing list of U.S. states has rejected plans for coal-fired power on concerns over greenhouse gas emissions, Alaska is moving forward with several projects.

The Alaska coal mine development of most pressing concern is the **Chuitna Coal Project** located just 45 miles west of Anchorage across Cook Inlet near the communities of Tyonek and Beluga. This low-grade coal strip mine would destroy thousands of acres of pristine moose, bear, and salmon habitat on a tributary to the Chuitna River. Local

people rely heavily upon the Chuit, as the river is known, for subsistence hunting and fishing. This is the most productive salmon river in northern Cook Inlet, supporting all five species of Pacific salmon in addition to trout and Dolly Varden. PacRim Coal is currently submitting State and Federal permits to the Alaska Department of Natural Resources. A Draft Environmental Impact Statement could be out by January 2009. PacRim has over 30 square miles of coal leases, including the additional adjacent coal leases held by Barrick Gold. More than 50 square miles of sensitive habitat are threatened by coal strip mining in the Chuitna River watershed.



Another major exploration in Alaska is the massive **Western Arctic Coal Project** west of the National Petroleum Reserve (NPR) near the villages of Pt. Hope and Pt. Lay. BHP Billiton is currently in year 2 of a five-year exploration project on Arctic Slope Regional Corporation lands. The coal reserves of the Northern Alaska coal province are estimated to be the largest coal resource in the entire U.S. As warming temperatures diminish arctic sea ice and open sea lanes from Western Alaska to Asian markets, this project poses a serious threat to efforts to address global climate change.

In addition, in 2006 the Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority (AMHTA) put up nearly a quarter of the **Matanuska Valley Moose Range** north of Anchorage for coal lease. And **Homer Electric Association (HEA)** is moving forward with plans to **restart the Healy Clean Coal Plant (HCCP) near Denali National Park**, which failed an initial test run in 1999; HCCP is not designed to capture CO2 or reduce mercury emissions.

Coal fired power plants are the largest source of CO2 emissions, the leading contributor to global climate change. Energy-related CO2 emissions from coal totaled 2.1 billion tons in the U.S. in 2006, about 35 percent of total emissions, and as much as every plane, train and automobile combined. Coal-fired power plants account for almost 40 percent of human-caused mercury emissions — the nation's largest source. Mercury, known to cause developmental and neurological problems, is emitted from coal fired power plants from as far as Asia, transported through atmospheric currents, and then deposited in Alaska where it can bioaccumulate into fish and wildlife. ♦

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Coastal Plain dodges --

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public lands, and increasing use of dirty coal. By this vote the Senate clearly demonstrated its awareness that drilling in the Arctic Refuge would not help reduce gas prices.

➔ WHAT YOU CAN DO:

PLEASE CONTACT YOUR MEMBERS OF CONGRESS TO LET THEM KNOW THAT YOU SUPPORT PROTECTING THE BIOLOGICAL HEART OF THE ARCTIC NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE FROM OIL AND GAS DEVELOPMENT. ♦

Sierra Club and Sportsmen ally for conservation

In two spring events, the Great Alaska Sportsmen Show and the Mat-Su Sportsmen Show, Sierra Club's Alaska sportsmen organizer Katherine Fuselier shared conservation news about salmon, the nearby Chugach National Forest, and Alaska's Teshekpuk Lake. In addition to Katherine, 21 Sierra Club volunteers helped hand out free "I (heart) fishing/hunting the Chugach" t-shirts and signed up more than 500 new "Sierra Sportsmen".

Together these two local sportsman shows draw crowds in the 10,000s. At the Sierra Club booth at both, 539 folks signed up to receive email or mail action alerts and program information from Sierra Club. More than 200 visitors to the booths signed a postcard to the Governor asking for a carbon cap on all new coal power plants and to look at renewable energy sources.

The Mat-Su Outdoorsman Show took place March 28-30 in Wasilla, Matanuska Valley. Just after that, the Great Alaska Sportsman Show in Anchorage was held April 3-6.

For more information on Alaska's hunting and fishing conservation program: katherine.fuselier@sierraclub.org. ♦

-- Katherine Fuselier

-- Dennis Gann, Alaska Chapter

Juneau Road Project's Draft Permit Criticized

U.S. EPA latest to question boondoggle

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Regional Administrator in Seattle issued a letter on May 21, 2008, raising serious questions about the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' rationale behind its draft permit for the Juneau Road and Ferry project. Among EPA's chief concerns are the Corps' failure to evaluate a less environmentally damaging alternative than those proposed by the Alaska Department of Transportation (DOT) and the Corps' lack of clear criteria for selecting the project's route. In its letter, EPA says the Corps' analysis "tends to emphasize favorable facts that support the draft conclusion and overlook[s] unfavorable facts that may lead to a different conclusion." (See **alaska report**, Mar 08, Dec 07, Mar 05, Mar & Jul 04, Feb & Nov 00, Mar 98.)

Lois Epstein of the Alaska Transportation Priorities Project stated, "When a rigorous analysis is performed, the Juneau Road project will not pass the red face test....EPA's letter reinforces concerns with this project that legislators, at least one former transportation commissioner, and citizens have expressed for years."

In a March 12 column in the *Juneau Empire*, State Senator Kim Elton (D-Juneau) questioned DOT's credibility after the department presented statistics to the Senate Transportation Committee comparing the cost of the Juneau Road project, which would parallel an existing ferry route, to the cost to the state of the entire Alaska ferry system.

EPA's letter is the latest in a series of official pronouncements on the Juneau Road project and how it has been evaluated. Earlier in May in a widely-disseminated email and in a May 9 *Juneau Empire* story, Alaska Governor Saarah Palin stated that the project is not a priority for her administration, and she questioned the project's ability to withstand legal challenges. She expressed the need for a more accurate project cost estimate.

In March, five Republican and one Democratic House members asked the House Finance Committee Co-Chairs to "reappropriate the money left in the Juneau Access Road... to the Alaska Marine Highway [System] Fund."

The recent doubts and criticism from officials about the Juneau Road project echo sentiments expressed by voters throughout the state. According to a November 2007 statewide poll, Alaskans prefer by a 79% to 11% margin that the state spend money on local transportation repairs, maintenance, and upgrades rather than on the Juneau Road. The poll is available at <http://www.aktransportation.org/press-releases/november-19th-2007>.

Sierra Club has steadily opposed this road project as causing irrevocable environmental impact on pristine coastal areas, as well as being unnecessary, excessively expensive, unsafe, undesired by local communities, and undercutting the state's unique and popular Marine Highway System ferries. Sierra Club supports the ferry system. ♦

alaska report

alaska report is the newsletter of the Sierra Club Alaska Task Force, encouraging advocacy on Alaska federal lands issues, particularly as they pertain to the passage and implementation of the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act of 1980.

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