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alaska report

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Happy 100th, Chugach National Forest! Celebrating 100 wild years and working for another 100 more

Just one century ago, on July 23, 1907, President Teddy Roosevelt, acting on advice of chief forester Gifford Pinchot, established the Chugach National Forest. This action was a milestone for Alaska, as it took a long-term view and recognized the value of this then-remote region and safeguarded natural resources in the broad Southcentral-Alaska area south of what is now Anchorage. The Chugach stretches from the Kenai Peninsula in the west, through all of Prince William Sound, and to the Copper River Delta farther east.

In Alaska this summer we are celebrating this historic foresight for the American people and future generations with a variety of community events. The Chugach offers a lot worth celebrating!

At 5.6 million acres, the Chugach National Forest is the country's northernmost temperate rainforest and is an internationally significant landscape. (We think of it as the nation's second largest national forest—next to Southeast Alaska's Tongass [established in 1902]—but the recent combining of Nevada's former two national forests into one vast unit, the Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest at 6.5 million acres, exceeds the Chugach in size.)

The Chugach features forests of spruce and hemlock

that blanket steep rugged mountains punctuated by vast ice fields, glaciers, peat bogs and lush alpine meadows.

The forest provides a wealth of recreation opportunities for Alaskan communities, including hunting, fishing, hiking, and boating. Relatively sheltered Prince William Sound with its many islands is ideal for kayaking and other boating. (See **alaska report**, Dec 04, Dec, Jun, Feb 03, Nov 02, Nov 2000.)

For the communities of Seward, Cordova, Valdez, and others, the forest is more than a playground;—it is home and livelihood. Commercial fishing and tourism economies are a direct result of Roosevelt's conservation action a century ago. Residents and tourists alike enjoy the Kenai Peninsula playground,

whether they hike on fantastic trails, kayak out of Seward, hunt, ski, or simply enjoy a relaxing weekend camping in beautiful country.

The watersheds of the Copper and Kenai Rivers support world-class salmon runs; fishing on both rivers is a cherished annual tradition for many Alaskans. These wild salmon watersheds provide livelihoods for hundreds of Alaskan fishing families.

The Copper River Delta, one of the most biologically productive wetlands in the world, is critical to millions of migrating birds and attracts visitors from around the state

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Chugach Centennial

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and the country.

Having such remarkable wild country and the quality of life that comes with it is a point of pride for Alaskans. *We want to make sure these values remain for another 100 years.*

The future of the Chugach National Forest is faced with challenges. Ironically, many threats grow out of the forest's wild recreational allure. The popularity of the Kenai Peninsula for snowmachine and other motorized uses has increased dramatically in the past decade. And habitat fragmentation, degradation, and loss associated with increased development activities on nearby private lands impact wildlife populations, particularly wild salmon and brown bears. Ever-increasing tourism and development pressures, past and potential oil spills, and the effects of climate change are some of our generation's major challenges.

Wilderness is a big priority for this wild forest. Currently not one single acre of this wild forest is protected by Wilderness designation—even though a large Congressionally-designated Wilderness Study Area (WSA)—the 2 million-acre Nellie-Juan/College Fiord WSA—has existed since 1980. Alaskan politics has kept this WSA, as well as the other vast areas of the Chugach that are roadless and qualify as wilderness, in limbo.

Sierra Club will continue to work with our members and the public to draw attention to the Nellie-Juan/College Fiord area and identify other places in the Chugach that deserve Congressionally designated Wilderness status. Our hope is to come up with a protection plan for the next 100 years that allows for progress and change but also preserves what matters most. Just as we are celebrating a forest that President Teddy Roosevelt had the foresight to set aside 100 years ago, we hope that future generations will be proud of us 100 years from now.

Centennial events draw attention to the Chugach

Special summer events to celebrate the Chugach Centennial included a work day on the Kenai Peninsula's Russian River and, in Anchorage, the innovative "Salmon in the City" festival during the first two weeks in August.

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alaska report is now available on the Sierra Club website. Find this issue at http://www.sierraclub.org/wildlands/alaska_report/0708.pdf.

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photo: Russian River angler

Chugach Centennial work day on the Russian River, Aug. 18, 2007. Katherine Fuselier, Valerie Connor and other Sierra Club volunteers team up with the Forest Service, US Fish & Wildlife Service, and Alaska Recreational Management for a day of stewardship, removing many bags of trash, including monofilament line and lead weight, from the River.

We kicked off the *Salmon in the City* festival in downtown Anchorage on Friday, August 3. Hundreds of folks came to cruise the salmon stewardship information booths, listen to speakers, and enjoy the live entertainment.

Anchorage is fortunate to have all five species of wild salmon running in our local watersheds. Located right downtown, the Ship Creek salmon fishery is the third largest sport fishery in the state and generates over \$7 million annually to Alaska's economy.

At the kickoff event, Sierra Club conservation organizer Katherine Fuselier shared the stage with Anchorage mayor Mark Begich; Dorothy Cook, President, Native village of Eklutna; and Tresa Hohmann, VP for Human Resources for ConocoPhillips. All noted the partnership opportunities available in stewardship work that will ensure these salmon return to healthy, intact watersheds for generations to come.

The Festival ran until August 19, with additional programs including salmon mural art project by children; Ship Creek silver salmon derby; salmon scavenger hunt; Ship Creek restoration tour; Russian/Kenai River restoration work day; salmon marathon; and more.

Building our community image is a strategic component of the Sierra Club's Building Environmental Communities (BEC) campaign. Our *wild lands for wild salmon* work has greatly increased our visibility and partnership among non-traditional allies, and thus we have connected with many members of the community who might otherwise have shied away from the Sierra Club. Fish on! ♦

-- Katherine Fuselier



Prince William Sound, Chugach Forest

photo: Dean Rand

Arctic Refuge update: Congress; "Bird Year"

photo: Wilbur Mills



In late June Alaska advocates had another fire drill on an Arctic Refuge drilling bill that Alaska's U.S. Senators Lisa Murkowski and Ted Stevens threatened to

attach to the Senate Energy bill, H.R. 6 (dubbed the CLEAN bill). Rather than calling it what it was, a drilling bill, the two senators tried to disguise its intent by wording their amendment so the Coastal Plain would be renamed as a "strategic petroleum reserve" that would be opened for seismic exploration and oil drilling.

However, even pro-development lobbyists publicly stated that this was a foolish, impractical idea. And Americans across the country recognized the amendment for what it was: another scheme to hand the Arctic Refuge over to the oil industry. Thanks to many activists like you, every Senate office received calls opposing the drilling amendment.

In the end, the inept amendment fizzled and was not even offered for debate -- a sweet, quiet victory. Sen. John Kerry (D-MA) had threatened to filibuster any Arctic Refuge drilling bill, so please thank him (202-224-2742). It seems the Senate got the message that we, as a country, are ready for real, clean energy solutions, not drilling in special places like the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge—which Americans want left wild and natural.

Cosponsors for HR 39

The last issue of **alaska report** (May 2007) listed 133 cosponsors of the House of Representatives' Arctic Wilderness bill, HR 39, as of mid-April. Now, in late August, there are 140 Congressional cosponsors of this symbolic bill. The seven new ones are listed below, and if they are your representatives, or you know someone in their districts, please make sure they got a rousing "thank you!"

Brown, Corrine [FL-3] 7/11/2007	Loebsack, David [IA-2] 4/24/2007
McNerney, Jerry [CA-11] 6/13/2007	Obey, David R. [WI-7] 4/19/2007
Pascrell, Bill, Jr [NJ-8] 5/8/2007	Rangel, Charles B. [NY-15] 7/12/2007
Reichert, David G [WA-8] 5/10/2007	

WHAT YOU CAN DO:

SEVEN NEW COSPONSORS IN FOUR MONTHS IS NOT A LOT. NOW IS A GOOD TIME, AS MEMBERS OF CONGRESS PREPARE TO RETURN TO WASHINGTON DC FOR A FALL SESSION, TO CONTACT YOUR REPRESENTATIVE AND URGE HIM OR HER TO STAND UP FOR THE WILD AND FREE ARCTIC COASTAL PLAIN BY BECOMING A COSPONSOR OF HR 39. IT'S SIMPLE: THEIR STAFF NEED ONLY MAKE A QUICK PHONE CALL TO REP. EDWARD MARKEY, ARCTIC CHAMPION. WITH YOUR HELP, WE CAN *DOUBLE* THE NUMBER OF NEW COSPONSORS BETWEEN NOW AND THE END OF 2007!

Bird Year for the Arctic Refuge

"Look at this one," said seven-year-old Malkolm. "A purple...I can't pronounce it. A purple something."

Malkolm sat strapped in the back seat, thumbing through the bird book that we'd just bought him. The year was 1999, and we were in the middle of a six-month slide-show tour about the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. We tried to ignore the contradictions that assailed us as we drove from the Yukon to Florida, up to New Jersey and west to California, burning gas while speaking out against oil development in the Arctic Refuge. Back in 1999, global warming was a tiny, barely-noticeable cloud on our horizons.

We taught Malkolm his schoolwork while we drove from show to show. He liked the bird book more than Math or English. By the time we found the "purple something" (a Gallinule) in the Everglades, he was hooked on birds.

Oil, the Arctic Refuge, birds, global warming -- all are inextricably linked with the plans for our "Bird Year," to wander through the Lower '48 finding birds that migrate each summer to the Arctic Coastal Plain. Our family decided to do this "migration" of ours without using any fossil fuels. We'll cover 10,000 miles by bikes, boots and boats -- from our home in the Yukon, south to California and east to Florida. Even Malkolm, now 15, acknowledges that it won't all be fun. There will be exhausting headwinds, rain, blazing heat and tormenting mosquitoes.

Despite that, we want to prove to ourselves that we can have fun, find birds while drawing attention to the connection between these birds and the Arctic Coastal Plain where they nest in summer... and do it in a way that doesn't harm the very birds we're traveling to see.

We've already scheduled numerous events which are listed on our website (www.birdyear.com). See the *regional* pages of our website for details of planned events across the country. We're on the west coast in August and September, then will travel east to **Texas** by Christmas, and to **Florida** to end our family's Bird Year in June of 2008. If you can't come out to talk with us in person -- follow our adventures on the website. ♦

-- Ken Madsen



Malkolm starts the birding and bicycling Big Year

photo: Ken Madsen

Regulating Off-road vehicle use in Alaska parks

National Park Service Begins Effort

Since passage of the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA) in 1980, off-road vehicle (ORV) use for subsistence and recreation in Alaska's parks, monuments, and preserves has gone largely unregulated by the NPS—despite the agency's studies and field reports documenting significant damage in many of the units. Apparently fearful of a powerful and hostile Alaska congressional delegation, and not getting support from the Reagan and both Bush administrations, the agency has most often chosen to look the other way. Until now.

In the last year or so, the agency has finally begun to address the ORV problem in three of its units. But its tentative approach and side-stepping of Congress's intent raises doubts as to whether the agency will adopt adequate plans.

Denali National Park. The agency is proposing an ORV plan for a "traditional [ORV] use area" of approximately 30,000 acres within the 1980 south addition near the community of Cantwell. Congress provided for the continuation of subsistence by local residents who had existing or historical patterns of subsistence in what became the new parks in 1980. If these same residents "traditionally employed" ORVs for subsistence pre-ANILCA, then ORVs could continue to be used subject to reasonable regulations. The agency has determined that Cantwell residents used ORVs for subsistence (fall moose hunts) prior to ANILCA in the "traditional use area."

Cantwell was also designated in 1981 by the Reagan-Watt administration as a *subsistence resident zone* in which all residents are automatically eligible park subsistence users regardless of whether they were subsistence users prior to ANILCA, or were post-ANILCA arrivals with no connection to customary and traditional subsistence. Individual subsistence permits are not required for residents of a zone. To be eligible for resident zone status a community must consist "primarily"—i.e., a majority—of residents with an existing or historic pattern of subsistence use prior to ANILCA. In 1980, the outgoing Carter Administration had found that Cantwell did not qualify for resident zone status.

Congress authorized such zones for remote Alaska Native villages where virtually all residents could easily qualify as customary and traditional subsistence users, and therefore individual permits were unnecessary. Cantwell does not fall into this category, as it on the main Anchorage-Fairbanks (Parks) Highway and the Alaska Railroad and has grown considerably since its initial designation as a resident zone.

In authorizing resident zones, Congress also called for their periodic reevaluation. In the event a community is found to no longer qualify for zone status, individual subsistence permits are issued to qualified residents, who by definition would constitute a minority of the residents.

In comments this summer on the agency's draft ORV



plan, the Sierra Club's Alaska Chapter, the Alaska Wildlife Alliance, and the Coalition of National Park Service Retirees recommended that the NPS begin its planning effort with a reevaluation of the Cantwell resident zone. Cantwell has changed: In 1980 the community had

89 residents, in 2000 229. Most of these arrived after 1980. Assuming, as the census and NPS data suggest, that Cantwell no longer qualifies for resident zone status, the result of a reevaluation would be an individual subsistence permit program with fewer subsistence users and hence fewer ORVs in the traditional ORV use area. Genuine subsistence users would not compete with unqualified users for subsistence resources; hunting pressure on park wildlife would be lessened.

Despite Congress's intent and the evidence of Cantwell's changed status, the NPS summarily dismissed the recommendation from the three groups. Its refusal does not auger well for a final plan to adequately protect the park.

Glacier Bay National Preserve: In the 57,000-acre Glacier Bay National Preserve adjacent to Glacier Bay National Park, the agency proposes to close several illegal ORV trails that have damaged park habitat and to confine sport-hunting and subsistence ORVs to designated trails and "routes."

However, the proposed plan does not include a traditional use determination for subsistence ORV use, despite the admission in the plan's environmental assessment that the NPS does not consider ORVs for subsistence to have been traditionally employed prior to 1980. And although ANILCA does not authorize use of ORVs in parks or preserves for sport hunting or other recreation, the NPS is side-stepping ANILCA by claiming that the NPS Organic Act and President Carter's pre-ANILCA executive order regulating ORVs in national park system units provide the necessary authority.

Katmai National Preserve: NPS foot-dragging has been the policy until recently. For several years the agency has been sitting on a traditional subsistence-use determination for ORVs, claiming that it is only a "draft." Ralph Moore, Katmai's new superintendent, has re-started the process and promises a traditional use determination after park staff can interview nearby villagers who use ORVs for subsistence on their own and adjacent public lands. Former Katmai Superintendent Ray Bane, author of the detailed ORV study *Shredded Wildlands* for Sierra Club (see *alaska report*, Sept 01) found no evidence of ORV use in the preserve during his time as park Superintendent. ♦

--Jack Hession

Western Arctic news: Renewed NPRA threat; victory over Shell oil

Bush Administration renews Teshekpuk Lake threat

The federal Bureau of Land Management (BLM) is renewing its attempt to drill for oil at Teshekpuk Lake, one of the most sensitive and important wildlife habitats in the Western Arctic. It has released a draft supplemental environmental impact statement (SEIS) presenting alternatives for oil and gas leasing in the northeast National Petroleum Reserve-Alaska (Reserve), including near Teshekpuk Lake.

The move comes at time when many Republicans and Democrats agree that more drilling in Alaska will not solve our nation's energy and climate change crisis.

Right now, much of the land in the Reserve that has oil potential is already available for leasing. In fact, 3.8 million acres have already been leased for oil and gas drilling and are actively being explored.

The Teshekpuk Lake area is the only part of the northeast Reserve that--for now--remains closed to drilling. Four presidents and their secretaries of the Interior recognized the importance of this area and acted to protect it. The Teshekpuk Lake area provides critical molting habitat for up to one-third of all Brant (a marine goose) in the Pacific Flyway. The 45,000-head Teshekpuk Lake caribou herd uses the area for calving and relief from insects.

Late last year, the U.S. District Court of Alaska struck down a BLM plan to sell oil and gas leases on more than 400,000 acres around the lake, because the environmental analysis failed to consider the cumulative environmental impact of widespread oil and gas drilling. The BLM's new analysis attempts to satisfy the court and allow leasing and drilling to move ahead. (See **alaska report**, Jan 07, Mar 06, etc.)

The North Slope of Alaska is our nation's only arctic ecosystem. A balanced approach would give wilderness protection to the coastal plain of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge and also permanently protect the most biologically and culturally important areas of NPRA and the Arctic Ocean, while maximizing oil and gas potential in the central arctic around Prudhoe Bay and elsewhere in the NPRA. In all



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cases, wherever exploration and development proceed, these activities must be carried out under strict environmental standards, including those related to operations, cleanup and restoration.

In its new SEIS, BLM chose the unusual approach of not presenting a preferred alternative. The public comment period on the draft document will extend from August 24 through October 23, 2007.

Court shells out a setback to Shell Oil

The 9th Circuit Court of Appeals granted a stay request that Shell Offshore, Inc. halt all exploratory drilling activity in the Beaufort Sea just off of the Arctic Refuge until the court decides whether environmental harms were properly considered. The mid-August court ruling marked a victory for subsistence communities and marine wildlife, and it suggests that Shell's longer term plans of drilling in the Beaufort Sea might be in danger.

Sierra Club and a coalition of Native Alaskans and conservation groups had sued to halt the offshore drilling on concerns that such large-scale industrial activities would threaten endangered bowhead whales, polar bears and other marine animals in coastal waters just off the Alaska National Wildlife Refuge. They challenged the permit issued by the federal Mineral Management Service (MMS) on grounds that the agency failed to conduct proper assessment of environmental impacts.

The court, which first had temporarily halted exploration in July at the groups' request, said it would keep the injunction against exploration in place until the court resolves challenges to the agency's environmental review. The court put resolution of the case on a fast track.

The court order concludes that the petitioners "have shown a probability of success on the merits" and "the balance of hardships tips sharply in their favor."

Noise from exploration activities will disturb bowhead whale migration and feeding in the Beaufort Sea. Also at risk from disturbance and potential oil spills--which are inordinately difficult to clean up in these frigid "polar bear seas"-- are polar bears and a variety of other animals, including the threatened Steller's and spectacled eiders.

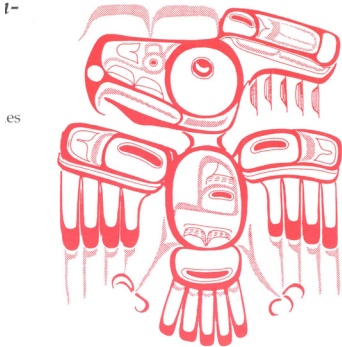
Shell had initially been granted permission by the MMS to drill as many as four wells this year, some just offshore from the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, which is an area still kept off-limits to major mineral exploration despite continued efforts of the Bush administration to open it to such activities.

Groups represented by Earthjustice are the Alaska Wilderness League, Sierra Club, Natural Resources Defense Council, Pacific Environment, Center for Biological Diversity, and REDOIL (Resisting Environmental Destruction on Indigenous Lands). ♦

-- Trish Rolfe

Pioneering Conservation in Alaska

Yes, this is an activist newsletter promoting action by our readers to help preserve Alaska public lands. Yet occasionally we bring your attention to some Alaska conservation history. We described Roger Kaye's book on the campaign to designate the Arctic National Wildlife Range, Dan Nelson's *Northern Landscapes, the Struggle for Wilderness Alaska*, and we reviewed Ken Ross's account of events leading to passage of the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA).



Now historian Ross has written a new book, delving farther back in Alaska conservation events. His 2002 book led him to question what happened *before*, and pretty soon he found himself researching

back in time. Now he describes the conservation practices and malpractices in Alaska back to the first clashes between Native inhabitants and Russian visitors.

The book documents what many have long perceived: the constant tension, the endless tug-of-war between

Proposed commuter rail for Southcentral Alaska

The Seldovia Native Corporation (SNC) will receive the first installment of \$3.3 million from the Federal Transportation Administration (FTA) in Seattle on Sept. 13; this is to cover the NEPA process, hire a staff coordinator with an office, prepare a new conceptual design and begin building the Dimond Center station for Anchorage. This installment will be followed by \$10 million (the whole project is expected to be \$20 million) and the Alaska Railroad will team work with SNC for the first phase. The hope is that part of the monies can be used to upgrade the bus system—which is a key part of the project. It is needed to get people to various destinations all over town when the commuter rail car arrives in downtown Anchorage.

At the Dimond Center the Railroad's plans include expansion of the existing bus facility, a full platform with boarding of the disabled, additional parking and pedestrian amenities. An advisory group of diverse community constituencies including Sierra Club will be formed for the project after the Sept. 13 Seattle meeting with the entire FTA team.

This rail project is widely viewed in Alaska as a way to curb global warming by getting many people out of their cars and is the start of building a whole public transportation system for the region. ♦

--Maryellen Oman

conservation and exploitation of nature is not new. It has been going on as long as we have a record of events, whenever Nature and its resources could prove of utility or profit to humans.

The book helps us view the broad Alaska issue of predator "control", for example, which is of great interest today, in its historical context, as a recurring, constant accompaniment to the human use of Alaska's wildlife resources, beginning with the Russians' frenzied search for furs.

Ross spotlights wildlife conservation, and the alternating waves of greedy, thoughtless capture, and then, as resources were depleted, reluctant conservation attempts. The book follows the gradually changing philosophies of wildlife relative to humans. Grizzly bears, at first seen only as a menace, came to symbolize wild, raw nature.

As early as 1821, catastrophic depletion of sea otters led to efforts (often ineffective) to sustain and rebuild their populations. Ross highlights the international fur seal controversy, among Russians, Americans, and Japanese, and he places the fur seal story up with that of the buffalo and passenger pigeon, whose demise eventually turned public opinion toward preservation on principle, and not only utility conservation. Other wildlife species are similarly featured.

There are absorbing vignette biographies of early leaders in Alaska wildlife conservation, the elite sportsmen in the influential Boone and Crockett Club, who made the problems of declining Alaska wildlife known to other Americans, especially in their journal *Forest and Stream*. George Bird Grinnell, Madison Grant, William Hornaday, and Charles Sheldon influenced Congress to pass regulations to conserve wildlife. Later, the agencies such as the National Park Service evolved their own conservation cultures. The landmark work of conservation giants such as John Muir, Bob Marshall and Olaus and Mardie Murie receives concise, pithy summaries.

This is not a "popular" tome; it is a scholarly account that may not be for everyone. But for serious advocates for Alaska's tremendous, unmatched public lands, the book will hold great interest. Today's conservation battles can be grasped best when the evolution of the clashing forces is brought to light and traditions of players comprehended.

Some of the most absorbing parts of the book are those that give the most detailed descriptions. Ross lets you vividly see the Natives clubbing the sea otters or the fur seals (at times forced by Russian overlords.) While this in-depth book is not one to read from cover to cover without stopping, its thorough portrayal of wildlife management and other Alaska conservation issues is outstanding.

Extremely detailed endnotes, bibliography and index add significantly to the value of the book.

Pioneering Conservation in Alaska: by Ken Ross. University Press of Colorado, 2006. ISBN-13:978-0-87081-852-3 (hardcover). www.upcolorado.com, or (800)627-7377. ♦

--Vicky Hoover

House opposes Tongass logging roads subsidies

But Sen. Stevens proposes rider

Early in the summer, the House of Representatives voted overwhelmingly against continuing federal subsidies for logging road construction in the Tongass Forest in Alaska. The Senate has yet to move forward on their version of the Interior appropriations bill and plans to combine a number of appropriations bills into an Omnibus appropriations bill. This means that the historic House vote to amend the Interior Appropriations bill to prohibit logging road subsidies will need to be implemented in the House/Senate conference committee on the Fiscal Year '08 Omnibus bill.

A new threat is a rider on the appropriations bill proposed by long-time logging proponent Sen. Ted Stevens (R-AK). Sen. Stevens is working to include a rider that would severely limit the ability of citizens to legally challenge a scheduled but, yet-to-be-released, Tongass land management plan. As best as we know in late August, the Stevens rider would require that any legal challenge be brought within 60 days of the final plan being announced. This not only restricts citizens' access to challenge federal agencies but sends a green light to the Forest Service to ignore citizens' desires for less commercial logging and more wild forest protection.

Sierra Club and our allies will continue to make a strong push to end taxpayer subsidies for commercial logging roads in the Tongass National Forest.

The Tongass National Forest represents our nation's most significant expanse of old-growth forest and provides abundant habitat for a diversity of fish and wildlife species--many of which have declined substantially in the lower 48 states--as well as superlative recreation opportunities. During the last 50 years, the timber industry has logged nearly half a million acres of old-growth forest and constructed over 5,000 miles of logging roads in the Tongass. Despite the fact that the federal government has always lost money with its commercial logging program in Alaska, the Forest Service is still planning new logging roads and timber sales in wild roadless forests. The Forest Service typically loses an average of \$40 million each year logging the Tongass. This amounts to an annual subsidy of about \$200,000 for each direct logging job.



⇒ WHAT YOU CAN DO:

INTO MID-SEPTEMBER, PLEASE CALL YOUR REPRESENTATIVE AND SENATORS AND ASK THEM TO PREVENT NEW LOGGING ROAD SUBSIDIES IN THE TONGASS NATIONAL FOREST. CONTACT THEM IN WASHINGTON, DC THROUGH THE CAPITOL HILL SWITCHBOARD AT (202) 224-3121 OR IN THEIR LOCAL DISTRICT OR STATE OFFICE.

Kensington Mine proposes lake destruction

This summer Coeur Alaska, the mining company that seeks to build a levee around a pristine Tongass mountain lake, fill it with 4.5 million tons of waste from a hardrock gold mine over ten years, and kill all of the lake's native fish, launched an aggressive ad campaign in the Juneau media to try to get around the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals' ruling last December that the federal permits granted them were issued illegally, against the requirements of the Clean Water Act (see **alaska report**, May 2007). The court decision put the project in doubt and disagreed with Coeur Alaska's claims that, like the coal mining practice of mountaintop removal in Appalachia, their plans meet the legal requirements of the Clean Water Act because the mining waste is really "fill."

In spite of the court decision, Coeur Alaska has still been allowed to build the on-site infrastructure for the mine and will have this done in the next few months.

In August Coeur even sent a direct mail piece that urged locals to target Carl Pope's office and Sierra Club Juneau Group leader Mark Rorick with criticism. "Their glossy mail piece hit every mail box in Juneau, and as a Club volunteer you don't really want your personal home address on one of their propaganda pieces," says Mark. "It's clear that Coeur Alaska wants to use the lake as a dump because other disposal methods cost more. They've yet to realize that we're not giving up."

Alaska State law requires that "existing water uses and the level of water quality necessary to protect existing uses must be maintained and protected." Dumping 4.5 million tons of mine waste into the lake doesn't meet this requirement. Yet, Coeur Alaska describes its plans as having a "strong regard for environmental protection." It's OK, says the mining company, because they'll eventually "improve productivity and aquatic habitat" better than nature had, and they'll restock the lake with fish when they are done mining.

The precedent being set by this project is immense. If Kensington gets the okay to go forward, the door will be opened for other dubious mine projects. For example, the proposed Pebble Mine (see **alaska report**, May 2007; Nov. 2005) would create a vast fill lake threatening tens of thousands of acres in the salmon-rich Bristol Bay watershed. And, on every national forest in the western United States are defunct mining claims that could be made operational with such an exemption from the Clean Water Act.

For background and more information see the Sierra Club's website at www.sierraclub.org/forests or call or write Sean Cosgrove at (202) 675-2382.. OR visit:

<http://cleanwaterforall.org/>

<http://newstandardnews.net/content/index.cfm/items/3037> ♦

-- Sean Cosgrove, Sierra Club National Forest Policy Specialist

Wilbur Mills to receive Sierra Club Ansel Adams Award for 2007

The Sierra Club's prestigious Ansel Adams award, which honors an individual "who has made superlative use of still photography to further a conservation cause", will go this year to longtime Alaska activist and Sierra Club outings leader Wilbur Mills, of Sammamish, WA, for his pioneering photographic work for the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (then Range) in the late 1960s and early 1970s. The award will be presented at the Club's annual Awards banquet in San Francisco on September 29.

Wilbur's careful and dramatic photography appeared in a number of large-format picture books as well as in the Sierra Club *Bulletin* (predecessor of Sierra magazine), including at least two *Bulletin* cover photos (October-November 1969 and April 1970.) Books containing his photographs include *Alaska, the Great Land*, by Mike Miller and Peggy Wayburn, a Sierra Club Landform Book, 1974; *Earth & the Great Weather: the Brooks Range*, by Kenneth Brower, 1971; *Vanishing Arctic*, by T.H. Watkins, 1988; and *Last Great Wilderness, the story behind the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge*, by Roger Kaye, 2003.

Today, when beautiful picture books of the Arctic Refuge abound, and millions of Americans know of the controversial Refuge, it is hard to recall that in the late 1960s hardly anyone knew about this remote area. Wilbur was one of the very first who publicized the Refuge (Range) through his color photography. His images helped lead to the expansion of the Eisenhower-era Arctic "Range" in 1980 and its re-establishment as an official "Refuge"—more than doubled

in size. In the years leading up to this expansion, various Congressional reports mentioned the role his photographs had in convincing legislators to support the new protection.

Wilbur may have been one of the first to offer guided trips to the Arctic Range/Refuge on early Sierra Club outings to Alaska's far north. He remains to this day a sought-after leader of our Alaska outings-- one who always shares with his participants his deep knowledge of Alaska lands advocacy.

In addition to his early photography work, Wilbur wrote extensively (and eloquently) to promote expanding the Range; he produced significant reports—based on his six summers of field work in the Brooks Range from 1968 to 1973, reports with titles such as "Environmental Degradation in the Arctic National Wildlife Range" (1970) and "Completing the Arctic Wildlife Range, Alaska" (1974).

Senior Alaska activist Jack Hession, who worked with Wilbur in the 1970s, reminisces: "In the fall of 1971, when the Sierra Club and others were engaged in a desperate, last-minute campaign for the Udall-Saylor Alaska National Interest Lands amendment to the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act of 1971, Wilbur showed up in Washington D.C. to help the Sierra Club team lobby for the amendment. And, during Congress's 1977-80 consideration of Alaska bills, Wilbur returned to DC from time to time to help advance H.R. 39, the bill that became ANILCA. Wilbur focused on the proposed Brooks Range units he knows best--the Arctic Refuge, Gates of the Arctic, Noatak National Preserve, and Kobuk Valley National Park." ♦

--Vicky Hoover

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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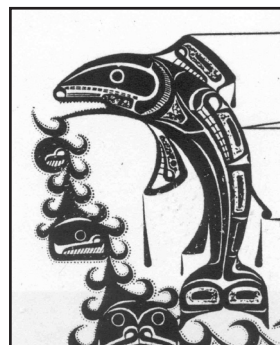
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