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alaska report

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Teshekpuk Lake drilling planned in the Western Arctic

Public overwhelmingly says, "NO!"

Sierra Club activists responded to the November 6 deadline for the Department of Interior's public comment period for its latest supplemental environment impact statement on leasing the sensitive wetlands surrounding Teshekpuk Lake, a Special Area in the western Arctic's National Petroleum Reserve-Alaska (NPRA). The court-mandated new document resulted from a district court's rejection of the previous plan for this environmentally important area for caribou and waterfowl in Alaska's Arctic.

As of the deadline the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) had received around 150,000 comments on its plan to lease in this fragile area. This new outpouring came close to a year after the BLM had received more than 200,000 public comments opposing its initial oil and gas plans for the Teshekpuk Lake--or T-Lake-- area. Comments from Alaska Natives, sportsmen, environmental groups and the public challenged the agency's failure to provide an adequate quantitative assessment of the cumulative effects of oil and gas development or to account for relevant effects of climate changes.

The Teshekpuk Lake region is the only part of the Northeast Planning Area of the National Petroleum Reserve-Alaska that – for now – remains closed to drilling. Four Presidents and their Secretaries of the Interior have recognized the importance of this wildlife area and acted to protect it. The wetlands around Teshekpuk Lake provide 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 bears its calves and seeks relief from insects nearby.

"Drilling at Teshekpuk Lake would destroy habitat important for waterfowl that are hunted in every state from the Mississippi Valley west to the Pacific Ocean," said Sierra Club sportsmen's organizer Jon Schwedler. "This place is too important to wildlife to throw to the oil industry."

Sierra Club has not opposed leasing in most of the vast 23-million acre National Petroleum Reserve-Alaska, but has insisted on keeping the identified "Special Areas" in the NPRA closed to development. These include Teshekpuk Lake, the Colville River watershed, Kasegaluk Lagoon, and the Utukok River Uplands. (see map, page 2)

Black brant at T-Lake

Just a little more than a year ago, the U.S. District Court of Alaska struck down the first Interior plan to sell oil and gas leases on more than 400,000 acres around the lake. The judge found that the environmental analysis violated federal laws by failing to consider the cumulative environmental impact of widespread oil and gas drilling in the reserve and across the North Slope. (See **alaska report,** Jan 07, Mar 06, Jul 04, Feb 03 and earlier.) Nevertheless, the agency continues to pursue oil and gas leasing of this sensitive and pristine area. Approximately 3.8 million acres of the NPRA has already been leased to the oil and gas industry.

Rosemary Ahtuangaruak, former mayor of the city of Nuiqsut, commented, "Human health effects from oil and gas development continue to rise with higher numbers of asthma-related illnesses occurring in my village of Nuiqsut, just four miles from the Alpine oil fields " Ahtuangaruak is a community health-care practitioner and board member of the Inupiat Community of Arctic Slope.

The BLM did not select a preferred alternative in its August 20 Supplemental EIS. As a result, there is no way to

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Teshekpuk Lake leasing

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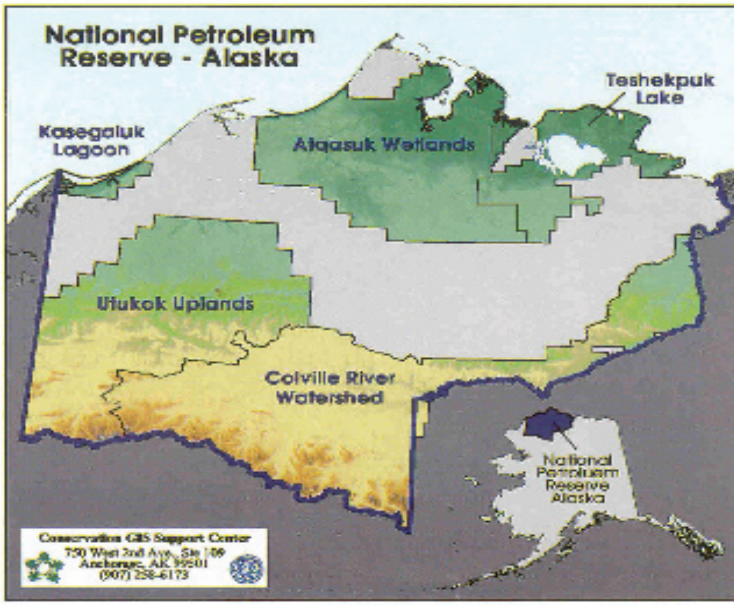
know how and when the agency plans to proceed with its plans for Teshekpuk Lake. Whatever happens, this region remains a major concern for Sierra Club and its partners in the environmental community. We'll follow plans and activities closely and alert our members to the next opportunity to help protect the Western Arctic's outstanding wildlife habitat. ◆

-- Trish Rolfe



Juneau Road boondoggle

Update and Call for Action

In early November Alaska Governor Sarah Palin's office issued a statement urging Alaskans to contact their legislators to support funding a Juneau Road. In response to the Governor's recent decision to support this costly pet project of her predecessor former governor Frank Murkowski, the Alaska Chapter urged its members to ask their state legislators and the governor to stop this senseless Murkowski-era boondoggle, which Sierra Club has opposed from the start.

Why does the Sierra Club oppose a Juneau road?

--Need:** The proposed Juneau Road is not needed. Southeast Alaska communities are well served by their special "road"—the Alaska Marine Highway System—the state ferries that ply back and forth through the inland waterways of Southeast. The new fast ferry, the m/v Fairweather, has halved the time it takes to travel the Lynn Canal between Juneau, Skagway, and Haines.

--Opposition:** The proposed Juneau Road is unwanted by the local communities. Haines and Skagway have passed resolutions opposing the road. Juneau also opted for improved ferry access over the proposed road.

--Safety:** The proposed Juneau Road is unsafe. If built, the proposed 51-mile road would be one of the most dangerous roads in America, crossing more than 60 avalanche chutes while winding along the east side of Lynn Canal--one of the world's deepest fjords--from just north of Juneau to the Katzehin River. A geological report issued this past summer listed a total of 112 geological hazards along the road's route. The report identified 38 recently active rockfall and landslide hazards with enough rock mass that they have the potential to close the highway for weeks.

--Threats**: The proposed Juneau Road threatens Congressionally protected wild areas in famed Berners Bay just north of Juneau. It would carve a road into the largest roadless area in the national forest system and cut through the heart of the productive estuaries at the head of the bay--estuaries inhabited by sea lions, wolves, bear, moose, whales, thousands of bald eagles, and tens of thousands of gulls.

--Cost:** The proposed Juneau road is costly: The Department of Transportation's updated cost estimate is now $374 million plus 4 to 5 percent annual inflation for each year of construction delay. The project is anticipated to start in 2008 and not be completed until 2020. The road would almost surely cost even more than the current high estimates; at present, the department doesn't know how much the road will ultimately cost because the geotechnical information is incomplete.

-- Priority: Instead of funding an exorbitant and dangerous road, dwindling transportation funds should be spent on fixing existing infrastructure, including the Alaska Marine Highway, and making needed safety improvements on hazardous Alaska roads such as the Seward and Glenallen Highways.

--Use: The proposed Juneau road would have very low traffic volume. It would still take two days of winter driving, two international border crossings (into and out of Canada) **and** a ferry ride to get to Juneau from Anchorage or Fairbanks--exploding the myth that direct road access would be provided to the capital.

⇨ WHAT YOU CAN DO:

EVEN IF YOU DON'T LIVE IN ALASKA, PLEASE TAKE THE TIME TO CALL GOVERNOR PALIN AND VOICE YOUR OPPOSITION TO THE JUNEAU ROAD. TELL HER THAT, AS A FUTURE VISITOR TO ALASKA, YOU PREFER THE UNIQUE CONVENIENCE OF A WELL-DESIGNED FERRY SYSTEM IN SOUTHEAST ALASKA TO A DANGEROUS ROAD WHICH WILL LEAVE A SCAR DOWN LYNN CANAL. *WRITE TO:*

ALASKA GOVERNOR SARAH PALIN

P.O. BOX 110001, JUNEAU, AK 99801-0001,

PHONE (907 465-3500; EMAIL: GOVERNOR@GOV.STATE.AK.US

***IN ALASKA,* PLEASE VOICE YOUR OPPOSITION TO THE GOVERNOR, AND ALSO TO YOUR STATE REPRESENTATIVE AND SENATOR. ASK THEM TO REDIRECT FUNDING SO THAT ALASKA'S EXISTING ROADS GET THE MAINTENANCE ATTENTION THEY DESERVE.** ◆

For more information, contact Sara Chapell, Alaska Chapter, (907)766-3204; <schapell@aptalaska.net

Help stop Alaska's state-sponsored wolf massacre

A ballot initiative has qualified for the August, 2008 ballot in Alaska that seeks, for the third time, to end aerial shooting of wolves and bears, the primary method used in the state's "predator control" programs administered by the Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADFG). Alaska citizens have twice voted to restrict the practice of aerial shooting of wolves--first in 1996 and again in 2000. Both times, the state legislature overturned the people's mandate and allowed the practice to continue.

Nearly 500 wolves have been shot by permittees in private aircraft over the past few years since the state's Board of Game, (BoG) newly appointed in 2003 by then-Governor Frank Murkowski, reinstated a controversial predator control program. Slowed down briefly by a legal challenge, this program really got going in full force in winter of 2006.

At its most recent quarterly meeting, in mid-November, the BoG released details of a new "public education" campaign designed to promote the state's predator control programs. The controversial campaign will be funded by $400,000 of public money, approved by Alaska Governor Sarah Palin and the state legislature. Pro-wolf advocates view such propaganda use of public funds as unethical and worry that the state's "education" campaign is timed to influence Alaska voters before they go to the polls next August to decide whether to end the aerial shooting of wolves and bears by private hunters under the guise of predator control.

The Sierra Club's Alaska Chapter vigorously supported the past two ballot measures against aerial wolf "control", both through volunteer efforts and financial help; and will advocate for next year's measure in the same way.

Background

Numerous scientific studies show that wolves are beneficial to the overall health of natural ecosystems. They help keep Alaska's moose and caribou populations healthy and strong. Wolf viewing is also important to Alaska's billion-dollar tourism industry.

Alaska contends its current aerial shooting program constitutes legitimate wildlife management with the goal of boosting wild moose and caribou populations. This artificial goal has drawn serious criticism from the scientific community.

In late September nearly 200 scientists from around the country, including in Alaska, signed a letter sent to Alaska Gov. Sarah Palin: The letter stated, "We urge the State of Alaska to consider the ecological role that large predators play in preventing eruptions and crashes [of prey populations] and to consider conservation and preservation of predators on an equal basis with the goal of producing more ungulates for hunters." In addition, the scientists pointed out, "We are concerned that objectives were often based on unattainable, unsustainable historically high populations. Accurate determination of habitat carrying capacity was seldom considered. The net result is to perpetually chase unattainable objectives with inadequately designed predator control programs that risk long-term sustainability of ungulate habitat integrity and sustainability of reasonable predator populations."

Alaska is the only state which allows private hunters to use planes to shoot wolves and assist in shooting bears. State-licensed marksmen can target entire packs. Last year alone, nearly 100 wolves were slaughtered from the skies—even though the state fell far short of their goals. This year, the state, anxious to make up for last year, could target hundreds more wolves.

(**alaska report** has followed the subject of wolf killing under the "predator control" flag for many years, in more articles than we can easily refer you to: check out Dec 03, May 00, Aug 99, to start with, then back to June and Dec 95, June, Sept and Dec 94, Sept and Dec. 93, March and Dec 92, March 90, March, June and Dec. 89, April and Dec. 88, and so on….)

Protect America's Wildlife (PAW) Act would help wolves

In September, Rep. George Miller (D-CA7) took a critical first step toward ending the use of aircraft to kill Alaska wolves and bears when he introduced the "Protect America's Wildlife (PAW) Act."

The act would close a loophole in the Airborne Hunting Act, which Alaska legislators and officials have exploited to permit private hunters to use planes to hunt, harass and kill wolves and bears. In some areas of the state, "land and shoot" can also be to kill grizzly bears and black bears. Aerial shooting is not only a serious ethical concern but also a growing national issue. Congress recognized this when it passed the federal Airborne Hunting Act to stop the practice.

➪ WHAT YOU CAN DO:

**** URGE YOUR CONGRESSIONAL REPRESENTATIVE TO SUPPORT REP. GEORGE MILLER'S "PAW" (PROTECT AMERICA'S WILDLIFE ACT—HR 3663.)**

**** URGE THE BUSH ADMINISTRATION TO ENFORCE THE AIRBORNE HUNTING ACT (THEIR FAILURE HAS ALLOWED ALASKA TO USE A LOOPHOLE TO LET PRIVATE GUNNERS KILL WOLVES FROM THE AIR.)** ◆

-- Vicky Hoover

Izembek Road plan resurfaces: Wilderness threatened

Delegation ploy would toss out Wilderness

In yet another legislative effort to strike a blow at designated wilderness in southwestern Alaska's Izembek National Wildlife Refuge, Alaska's Congressional delegation seeks a land exchange between federal wilderness and state lands.

For many years, the delegation has tried various maneuvers to get a road constructed across a portion of Izembek Wilderness. Their stated goal is to facilitate medical evacuation by residents of the small Native community of King Cove to reach the airport at the nearby community of Cold Bay. (see **alaska report,** Dec and Sep 03, Dec, Sep and May 01, Nov and Jan 99, Oct 98, Sep 97)

Although 1998 earlier legislation slightly extended the road and funded a hovercraft ferry to improve King Cove transportation, the delegation has renewed its attack in the 110th Congress. The delegation's bill (HR 2801 and S 1680) would grant the Izembek Refuge 61,000 acres of State of Alaska lands in exchange for 206 acres of critical wildlife habitat and wilderness. The state lands proposed for exchange are mostly unrelated, non-comparable habitat.

This anti-wilderness Izembek road bill received a hearing Oct. 31 in the House Natural Resources Committee.

At the hearing, US Fish & Wildlife Service Director Dale Hall testified that he supported the land exchange if an Environmental Impact Statement was prepared; this reverses agency policy of more than a decade. His surprising support had no basis in science.

The hearing testimony of the environmental coalition opposing the land exchange, including the Sierra Club, emphasized the clear problems with such a proposal:

- ***The proposed road is not needed.*** The Alaska delegation claims the road is necessary to address the transportation, health, and safety needs of King Cove. In fact, Congress met those needs by the 1998 King Cove Health and Safety Act, which provided $37.5 million to upgrade King Cove's medical facilities, purchase a hovercraft to provide regular ferry and emergency medical service between King Cove and Cold Bay, construct new marine terminals, and build an unpaved road between King Cove and the marine terminal. **This law specifically prohibited a road through Izembek's federally protected Wilderness.** Unsatisfied, Alaska's legislators still push to overturn Congress' explicit intent to protect the Refuge.
- ***The hovercraft is working.*** Hovercraft service began regular training runs in February 2007, and started full operation on August 7, 2007. By all accounts, the hovercraft service has met every medical evacuation need of King Cove residents since it began its first training runs--(15 effective evacuations.)
- ***The land swap would sacrifice quality—206 acres of critical, internationally recognized wildlife habitat—for quantity.*** The 61,000 acres of proposed exchange land does not offer comparable protection or habitat for the important wildlife species of the Izembek Lagoons Complex.
- ***A road is not compatible with purposes for which the Izembek Refuge was established: to*** conserve wildlife and their habitats; to fulfill the United States' international treaty obligations (such as the four migratory bird treaties and the Convention on Wetlands of International Importance); to provide for continued subsistence by local residents; and to ensure water quality and quantity within the refuge.
- ***The wildlife values of Izembek National Wildlife Refuge are globally significant*** and should not be compromised. Izembek Lagoon was designated as a Wetland of International Importance under the Ramsar Convention in 1987, during the Reagan administration. The area is a globally Important Bird Area, a State Game Refuge and part of the Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Network. A road would pose serious threats to the vast waterfowl and shorebird populations, to the Alaska Peninsula caribou herd, wolves, and the highest densities of brown bears on the lower Alaska Peninsula.
- ***Taking lands out of Wilderness designation for a road would set a terrible precedent for America's National Wilderness Preservation System.*** When Congress designates Wilderness, the intent is to keep these lands wild forever. In the 43 years since the Wilderness Act passed, no significant removal from Wilderness has taken place. If this bill passes, no Wilderness area in our nation is safe from attack.

Maribeth Oakes, formerly public lands director of the Sierra Club and now director of The Wilderness Society's national wildlife refuges program, traveled to the remote Izembek Refuge in October. "I was alarmed to see how narrow this isthmus really is. And the land is true tundra, a spongy wetland. Putting a road there would require massive engineering via culverts and other structures and would drastically alter the appearance and productivity of the tundra," Oakes reflected.

⇨ WHAT YOU CAN DO:

** PLEASE CONTACT NICK RAHALL, (D-WV) CHAIRMAN OF THE NATURAL RESOURCES COMMITTEE, AND URGE HIM TO OPPOSE THIS BILL VIGOROUSLY—GIVE A COUPLE OF REASONS ABOVE.

CALL HIS OFFICE (202)225-3452 OR SEND HIM A BRIEF FAX (FAXES ARE GOOD!) AT (202)225-9061.

IF YOU SEND HIM A FAX, ALSO SEND IT TO YOUR OWN REPRESENTATIVE, AS WELL AS TO SEN. JEFF BINGAMAN, (D-NM) CHAIRMAN OF THE ENERGY AND NATURAL RESOURCES COMMITTEE-WHICH OVERSEES THE SENATE VERSION OF THIS BILL.

** REACH YOUR OWN CONGRESSIONAL REPRESENTATIVE THE CAPITOL SWITCHBOARD AT (202)224-3121, OR WRITE TO HIS OR HER DISTRICT OFFICE. ASK YOUR REPRESENTATIVE TO OPPOSE THIS IZEMBEK ANTI-WILDERNESS BILL IF IT COMES TO A VOTE.

** REACH CHAIRMAN JEFF BINGAMAN BY PHONE AT (202)224-5521, OR BY FAX AT (202)224-2852. ◆

-- Vicky Hoover

Oppose Tongass Land Grab: *Prince of Wales Island threatened*

Sierra Club and other conservation organizations are strongly opposing an effort by Alaska Rep. Don Young to privatize key old-growth forest sections of the Tongass National Forest, particularly on huge Price of Wales Island.

Southeast Alaska's regional Native corporation, Sealaska, has not completed the land selection and transfer granted to it in 1971 under the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA). This September Congressman Don Young introduced H.R. 3560, a bill to finalize Sealaska's outstanding land claims estimated at 60,000 to 65,000 acres.

No one disputes Sealaska's right to additional land selections. However ANCSA clearly defines the withdrawal areas from which Sealaska is to select its entitlement. Roughly 327,000 acres are still available to Sealaska for selection from these withdrawal "boxes." Rep. Young's bill, H. R. 3560, however argues that these remaining lands are not of high enough quality and that Sealaska should be allowed to select all of its remaining entitlement "outside the box." The land Sealaska is eying is among the richest and most biologically productive in the Tongass and also includes some of the forest's most popular bays and river valleys.

Sealaska has stated plans to intensively log the following areas on or near Prince of Wales Island outside of its legislatively permitted withdrawal areas:

- North Prince of Wales – still one of the most biologically productive areas in the Tongass despite the fact that much of this area was logged once before. An existing road infrastructure makes it even more valuable for Sealaska.
- The Southwest portion of Kosciusko Island – among the largest remaining old growth forests growing on karst (limestone cave formations) left in the Tongass.
- Kassa Inlet, Mabel Bay, Nutkwa Inlet – a long-time conservation and local community priority. These areas were slated for permanent protection in the House-passed version of the 1990 Tongass Timber Reform Act but were removed from the final bill before they passed through the conference committee.

"Enterprise sites." Separate from the above logging areas, Rep Young's bill identifies 26 sites scattered across the Tongass that would essentially be owned and managed by Sealaska as "Native Enterprise sites." While the bill specifically prohibits logging at these sites, other uses are not clearly defined.

- All of the sites are in the middle of highly popular anchorages much used by local residents, hunting and fishing hotspots, and/or sit on the edge of wilderness areas.
- It is unclear from this bill how these sites will be managed, i.e. if massive hotels, cruise ship docks, or upscale marinas could be built on the sites.
- The bill states that Sealaska shall have a "right of access" within 15 miles of the sites.
- It is unclear whether the public and/or outfitters and guides will continue to have access to these areas.

H.R. 3560 claims that Sealaska should be allowed to high-grade the best of the Tongass because the corporation was treated unfairly in the past. This claim is weak considering that Sealaska has already received about 220,000 acres of mature timber land, much more than other regional Native corporations received and Sealaska has contributed approximately $300 million or 42 percent of the total share of all 13 regional Native corporations under a revenue sharing provision of ANCSA.

Alan Stein, former Director of the Salmon Bay Protective Association and President of the Point Baker Association, submitted a detailed statement for the hearing that cited his own experience and past efforts to protect areas on Prince of Wales Island and emphasized the stressed condition of much of the Island due to past Native Corporation logging. He said, "…because of 25 years of past logging, **existing clear cuts already pose a severe threat to wildlife in the area Sealaska wants to log**. This bill would do nothing but seal their doom. The deer are the soul of this place, the American eagle its spirit, and the raven its voice. Passing this bill will silence the raven, down the eagle, and bring the demise of deer…."

⇨ WHAT YOU CAN DO:

PLEASE WRITE REPRESENTATIVE DON YOUNG AND COPY THE CHAIR OF THE HOUSE NATURAL RESOURCES COMMITTEE, REP. NICK RAHALL.

THE HONORABLE DON YOUNG
510 L ST, SUITE 580
ANCHORAGE, ALASKA 99501-1954
PHONE: (202) 225-5765 FAX: (202) 225-0425

THE HONORABLE NICK RAHALL
PHONE: (202)225- FAX: (202)225-9061.

ALSO, ASK YOUR MEMBER OF CONGRESS (202-224-3121) TO OPPOSE HR 3560 IF IT COMES UP FOR A VOTE IN THE HOUSE NATURAL RESOURCES COMMITTEE OR ON THE HOUSE FLOOR. EXPRESS YOUR CONCERN THAT THE LEGISLATION SEEKS TO REMOVE FROM THE PUBLIC DOMAIN BIOLOGICALLY AND CULTURALLY VALUABLE AREAS, SOME RIGHT NEXT TO DESIGNATED WILDERNESS, AND OPEN THEM TO CLEAR-CUT LOGGING BY SEALASKA CORPORATION. ◆

Alaska Wilderness League helped provide information for this article.

Togiak National Wildlife Refuge plan out for comment

Draft Revised Conservation Plan lacks teeth

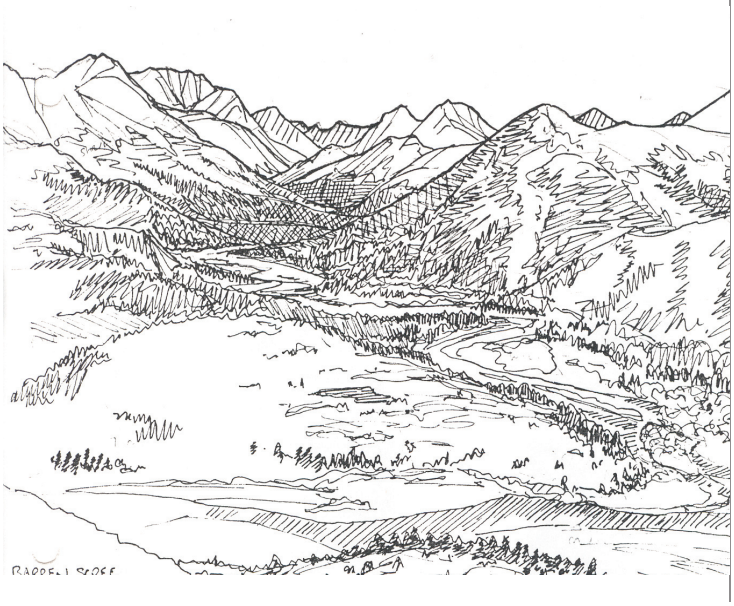
The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is asking for public comments on its draft Revised Comprehensive Conservation Plan. Only slightly different from the current plan published in 1986, the revision, like its predecessor, proposes only a relatively small addition to the existing Togiak Wilderness. It misses the boat entirely on potential additions to the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act.

Wilderness recommendation

In the existing Plan the agency recommended 334,000 acres of proposed wilderness for the Cape Newenham/Cape Pierce peninsula and nearby S. Fork Goodnews River areas. But the Reagan Administration did not accept the proposal and shelved it--as it did with all other refuge and national park wilderness recommendations. In the revision the Service is content to "honor" its earlier 334,000-acre recommendation and forgo proposing any additional wilderness--in spite of having documented the eligibility for wilderness of nearly the entire non-wilderness portion of the refuge. The Administration should comply with ANILCA and submit a meaningful agency wilderness recommendation to Congress.

Wild and scenic rivers review

In its first Plan the Service didn't consider wild/scenic river status for rivers outside the Togiak Wilderness despite the requirement of the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act that the Department of Interior (and other federal land management agencies) determine eligibility of rivers as potential additions to the wild and scenic rivers system as part of comprehensive management plans. In the revision only one river-lake system outside the Togiak Wilderness is reviewed as a potential wild and scenic river.



Fred Paillet

All-terrain (off-road) vehicles

Snowmobiles, motorboats, and "other means of surface transportation traditionally employed" are permitted for subsistence hunting, fishing, trapping and gathering by qualified local residents in Alaska refuges and other conservation system units, including wilderness. Thus ATVs are permitted "subject to reasonable regulation" provided they were "traditionally employed" prior to the Act.

In the revised Plan the Service reviewed previous studies and reports on subsistence and found that "The consistent message from...early 1980s subsistence reports and from FWS documents [from the 1970s] is that three-and-four wheeled ATVs were common in the villages and along certain coastal areas, but they were not used for subsistence on Refuge lands."

In other words, the FWS has determined that subsistence ATVs were not "traditionally employed" prior to the Act on what became refuge lands, which means that the use of subsistence ORVs on refuge lands, if it is occurring, is illegal. But since 1980 the agency has been looking the other way in the hope that the ATVs are not being used on refuge lands. The revision fails to indicate whether such use is or is not occurring, and if it is what action the Service intends to take.

Background

Togiak National Wildlife Refuge covers 4.7 million acres adjoining Bristol Bay. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service manages 4.1 million acres

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WHAT YOU CAN DO

PLEASE SEND YOUR COMMENTS TO THE FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE BY THE COMMENT DEADLINE, *JAN. 18, 2008*. ALTHOUGH THE PROPOSED REVISION FAILS TO LIVE UP TO SOME KEY ANILCA MANDATES, IT CAN BE BROUGHT INTO COMPLIANCE. ASK THE SERVICE TO:

**** UNDERTAKE A NEW REVIEW OF THE NON-WILDERNESS REFUGE AREAS AND RECOMMEND ELIGIBLE AREAS FOR THE WILDERNESS SYSTEM--BEYOND THE EXISTING 334,000 ACRE RECOMMENDATION;**

**** STUDY AND RECOMMEND QUALIFIED RIVER-LAKE SYSTEMS OUTSIDE THE TOGIAK WILDERNESS FOR POTENTIAL ADDITION TO THE WILD AND SCENIC RIVERS SYSTEM; AND**

**** STATE CLEARLY WHETHER OR NOT SUBSISTENCE ATVS ARE BEING USED ON REFUGE LANDS, AND IF THEY ARE WHAT THE SERVICE INTENDS TO DO ABOUT IT..**

Send comments via mail, email or phone by Jan. 18, 2008, to:

Maggi Arend, Planning Team Leader
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
1011 E. Tudor Road, MS-231;
Anchorage, AK 99503-6199
fw7_Togiak_planning@fws.gov
(907) 786-3393

(You can request a paper or CD copy of the Togiak Draft plan.)

Arctic Wilderness bill Introduced in Senate

Conservationists applaud Lieberman legislation

On Nov. 7, Senator Joseph Lieberman (I-CT), joined by 25 Senate cosponsoring colleagues, introduced legislation that would designate the Coastal Plain of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge as Wilderness. Wilderness designation would permanently protect what scientists have called the "biological heart" of our nation's largest and wildest Refuge, placing it off limits to oil and gas development while continuing to allow vital subsistence uses.

Sen. Lieberman's bill, S 2316, is the Senate version of the Udall-Eisenhower Arctic wilderness bill, HR 39, introduced into the House of Representatives early in 2007 by Rep. Edward Markey, MA- 7 (see **alaska report,** May 2007**.)** The purpose of both bills is clearly laid out in the preamble of HR 39: "*To preserve the Arctic coastal plain of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, Alaska, as wilderness in recognition of its extraordinary natural ecosystems and for the permanent good of present and future generations of Americans.*"

The Arctic Refuge, including the Coastal Plain, was first set aside for protection in 1960 as a Wildlife Range by President Dwight D. Eisenhower, and later expanded and renamed the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge by Congress, and signed into law by President Carter in 1980. Since that time, pro-development forces have repeatedly tried to open the area as part of short-sighted energy proposals. And conservation champions have introduced the Arctic Wilderness bills in every Congress.

The Arctic Refuge is a spectacular wilderness sacred to the Gwich'in, Athabascan Indians who depend on the caribou for subsistence and as a link to their traditional way of life. "We are not willing to gamble with the calving and nursery grounds of the Porcupine Caribou Herd," states Sarah James, Chairwoman of the Gwich'in Steering Committee.

"Oil rigs on the Coastal Plain would cause irreparable damage to the fragile tundra of this unique area while doing nothing to solve our long-term energy problems," said Trish Rolfe, Sierra Club Alaska Representative.

The introduction of the Arctic Wilderness bill, S. 2316, complements Senator Lieberman's current efforts to fight global warming by enacting the first major bi-partisan legislative proposal that would cap heat-trapping emissions from the largest contributors in the country.

Original Senate Cosponsors of S. 2316

Joe Biden (D-DE)
Maria Cantwell (D-WA)
Robert Casey (D-PA) `
Chris Dodd (D-CT)
Russ Feingold (D-WI)
Edward Kennedy (D-MA)
Herb Kohl (D-WI)
Patrick Leahy (D-VT)
Patty Murray (D-WA)
Jack Reed (D-RI)
Bernie Sanders (I-VT)
Debbie Stabenow (D-MI)
Ron Wyden (D-OR)
Barbara Boxer (D-CA)
Ben Cardin (D-MD) `
Hillary Clinton (D-NY)
Dick Durbin (D-IL)
Tom Harkin (D-IA)
John Kerry (D-MA)
Frank Lautenberg (D-NJ)
Robert Menendez (D-NJ)
Barack Obama (D-IL)
Ken Salazar (D-CO)
Chuck Schumer (D-NY)
Sheldon Whitehouse (D-RI)

➪ WHAT YOU CAN DO:

IF YOUR SENATORS ARE MENTIONED ABOVE, PLEASE THANK THEM! IF THEIR NAMES ARE *NOT* LISTED, PLEASE URGE THEM TO BECOME COSPONSORS OF SENATOR LIEBERMAN'S ARCTIC WILDERNESS BILL, S. 2316. CONTACT YOUR SENATOR THROUGH THE CAPITOL SWITCHBOARD AT (202)224-3121.

(EDITOR'S NOTE: THE NAMES ABOVE INCLUDE *BOTH* SENATORS OF 9 STATES: WHAT DOES THAT SAY FOR THOSE STATES?) ◆

Togiak Refuge

-- from previous page

with nearly all the rest owned by Alaska Native corporations.

Togiak features world-class viewing of cliff-nesting sea birds and walrus at highly scenic CapeNewenham and Cape Pierce on the Bering Sea; clear river-lake systems hosting all five species of pacific salmon and trophy rainbow trout, and high mountain country of national park quality. Subsistence economies of the six Alaska Native villages along the coast depend on the fish and wildlife of the refuge.

At 2.4 million acres, the Togiak Wilderness in the mountainous northern section of the refuge is the second-largest wilderness area in the national wildlife refuge system system after the 9 million acres of wilderness in the Arctic National Wildlife-Refuge. ◆

-- Jack Hession

Ken Madsen and Arctic "Bird Year" Update

On Thanksgiving day, Bird Year activists (Malkolm Booothroyd and his parents Wendy Boothroyd and Ken Madsen) were at the Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge in New Mexico. They have traveled 5598 self-powered miles and identified 367 bird species. They have also given many presentations about protecting bird habitat in the Arctic—as well as closer to home. In December they will be traveling through Texas, then through the Gulf States to Florida in January, February and March. For more information and how to join them, visit their website: ***www.birdyear.com.*** ◆

Alaska Wins one against the Coal Rush

Once again the Sierra Club and a concerned local Alaska community have defeated a proposed coal-fired power plant! The Matanuska Electric Association (MEA), a member-owned cooperative based in the Matanuska-Susitna (Mat-Su) Valley northeast of Anchorage, tried its hardest to present a proposed coal plant as inevitable. Fortunately, dedicated volunteers from Sierra Club, and local groups like MEA Ratepayers, Friends of MatSu, and Cook Inlet Keeper educated the community and pressed local government to oppose this terrible idea.

Serving the communities between Anchorage and Fairbanks, MEA is one of a number of small electrical cooperatives that serve Alaska's rail belt. Most of these co-ops rely on Cook Inlet natural gas to make electricity. Natural gas prices however, have been increasing at 20-30 percent a year. Alaska has a lot of coal, and many utilities see coal as a cheap and easy way to generate power.

According to MEA's decision memo, building the coal plant has become terribly expensive. New government regulations encouraged by the Sierra Club also make it more difficult to force a coal plant on the community. In Alaska, a state already gravely affected by global warming, large investments in outdated, dirty, highly polluting and toxic energy developments--like new coal-fired power plants--are the last things that should be considered. ◆

-- Will Taygan, chair, Knik Group, Alaska Chapter

Sierra Club Teams Up with Alaska Sportsmen

Sierra Club in Alaska treaded new waters this fall to address the future of Alaska's sport hunting and fishing opportunities. The two-day Alaska Sportsman's Outdoor Summit, Nov. 2 and 3, organized through the Club's Building Environmental Communities program, brought together 70 of the strangest of bed fellows. Participants found that they shared values around the conservation of Nature and healthy wildlife populations. Sierra Club staff and volunteers and participants who had "never in my mind thought I'd ever be calling the Sierra Club" all dismantled stereotypes.

Shane Mahoney, an internationally known sportsman and wildlife conservationist, was the keynote speaker. A day of workshops followed, with topics that included: skills and ethics about waterfowl hunting; salmon stream restoration projects; wood bison restoration program for Alaska; youth programs and opportunities, and more..

The Summit aimed to build on Sierra Club's long history of working with sportsman's' groups on conservation issues. When John Muir and Teddy Roosevelt hiked into the Yosemite Valley together in 1903, they shared a first-hand interest in protecting America's wild places. Muir was a hiker who wanted to wander in places that were free of industrial development. Roosevelt was a hunter who wanted to explore wild forests. They were natural allies. In their spirit of partnership, Sierra Club continues to work with hunting and angling organizations to ensure the future of healthy wildlife and ecosystems. ◆

-- Katherine Fuselier

alaska report

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ACTION NEEDED