



Sierra Borealis

alaska report

SIERRA CLUB ALASKA CHAPTER
SEPTEMBER 2010



HELP PROTECT ALASKA'S PREMIER LANDS -- *WRITE TO BLM AND NPS*

Scoping for Western Arctic Reserve Save the Wildest of the Wild – Act NOW!

Alaskans who care about the environment have a unique ability to appreciate being surrounded by our nation's wildest places. Now we have the rare opportunity to help some of our special places achieve real protection.

The 23.5 million-acre National Petroleum Reserve - Alaska on Alaska's North Slope—also referred to as "NPR-A" or "Western Arctic Reserve"—is the largest tract of public land in the United States and the wildest place in North America. The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) has just launched a new planning process for this vast reserve, and we need your help to ensure that these wild lands are protected for future generations.

Arctic Wildlife and Wilderness: Alaska's largest caribou herd, wolves, bears and wolverines; millions of fish species, marine mammals, millions of migratory water birds, and one of the densest populations of nesting birds of prey in the world: all these wildlife species and more call the Western Arctic Reserve home. Without a doubt, the wilderness values of the Western Arctic rank among the highest on the continent. Abundant wildlife provides the foundation for the historic and continuing subsistence culture of the Inupiat Natives who have lived in this area for thousands of years.

The large wetland complex of lakes, ponds, rivers and streams near the Western Arctic's coast is a globally recognized ecological resource that supports amazingly high densities of breeding birds. Species of concern under the Endangered Species Act known to use and/or breed within the Western Arctic Reserve are spectacled eider (threatened), Steller's eider (threatened), and yellow-billed

Managing ORVs in Wrangell-St.Elias National Parks deserve better: *see page 3*

loon (candidate). And apart from birds, there is the polar bear (threatened).

The Western Arctic Reserve also contains a considerable amount of coal. The best thing we can do—for the Arctic and for the global environment—is make sure that coal remains in the ground so we do not burn more CO2 into the air, contributing to the ecological climate change disaster.

There is no established oil production in the Reserve even though a significant amount of land has been leased for oil and gas exploration. Most of the highest-value habitat areas in the Western Arctic Reserve have not been disturbed. We need to keep it this way.

A New Plan for the Reserve: On July 28, 2010 the BLM officially started a new planning process for the *entire* Western Arctic Reserve. The new Area-wide Plan, when finalized, will guide land management in the entire

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photo: Dan Ritzman

The Western Arctic's long sweeping ridges stretch off into forever space

Scoping for NPRA: comment!

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Western Arctic Reserve.

The Opportunity for Balance: The new planning process provides a unique opportunity to ensure that future development in the Western Arctic Reserve is balanced with conservation of the biological and wilderness values

that support the area's abundant arctic wildlife, vital village subsistence resources, and remarkable recreation opportunities.

The Western Arctic's exceptional wilderness and wildlife

areas that need protection include "Special Areas" long identified for their biological values:

∅ **Teshkepuk Lake Special Area** - Teshkepuk Lake, the third largest lake in Alaska, lies at the heart of one of the single most productive and sensitive wetland complexes in the circumpolar Arctic. Its important wildlife values include prime habitats for waterbird nesting, molting and staging as well as critical caribou calving and insect-relief areas for the Teshkepuk Lake caribou herd.

∅ **The Colville River** - The Colville River drains a large portion of the North Slope and is one of the most important raptor nesting areas in the world, accounting for approximately 100 pairs of peregrine falcons, as well as gyrfalcons, rough-legged hawks, and golden eagles.

∅ **Kasegluk Lagoon** - Kasegaluk Lagoon provides a unique barrier island ecosystem along the northwestern coast of the Western Arctic. The coastal lagoon and barrier beaches are important for marine mammals, waterfowl, seabirds and other wildlife. The lagoon system provides a vital subsistence harvest area for the nearby communities of Point Lay and Wainwright. Up to 3,500 beluga whales gather in the Lagoon, which is also an important spotted seal haul-out area. Both polar bears (threatened under the ESA) and grizzly bears feed on marine mammals in the lagoon.

∅ **Utukok River Uplands** - The Utukok River Uplands in the southwestern part of the Reserve contains the heart of the calving area of the 490,000-member Western Arctic caribou herd, Alaska's largest caribou herd. These caribou provide subsistence for some 40 villages in Western Alaska with approximately 15,000 caribou harvested each year for food. The Utukok Uplands is also important habitat for wolves and an unusually high density of wolverines.

Other key areas within the Western Arctic Reserve also deserve strong protection under the new Area-wide Plan. These include: the **Dease Inlet-Meade River** that provides important wetland habitat for waterfowl, loons, and shorebirds; **Peard Bay** and adjacent wetlands that provide outstanding shorebird and waterfowl habitat and denning for polar bears; and the **Ikpikpuk River** and adjacent wetlands which has exceptional values for fish and wildlife and high-density peregrine falcon nesting in the headwaters.



Caribou in the Western Arctic Reserve

-- photo: Dan Ritzman

➔ What You Can Do: TAKE ACTION TODAY

Please write now to let the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) know that you want to see the special areas of the Western Arctic Reserve protected. Send a letter today. The following is a sample, but please use your own words as much as possible:

- Mail your comments to:
BLM Alaska State Office
Attention – NPR-A Planning Team
222 West 7th Avenue, #13
Anchorage, AK 99513-7599
- Fax your comments to 907-271-5479
- E-mail your comments to nprascoping@blm.gov

Sample letter:

Subject: Scoping Comment for NPR-A Area-wide Plan

The new Area-wide Plan for the NPR-A (Western Arctic Reserve), provides a critical opportunity to balance development in America's Arctic with protection of special areas that have exceptional ecological importance.

In BLM's new Area-Wide Plan for the Western Arctic Reserve, I urge you to provide "maximum protection" for areas with high value habitats. The new Plan should balance *all* values in the Western Arctic Reserve including the important wildlife, subsistence, wilderness and recreation values in addition to consideration of oil and gas resource development.

Congress has required that "maximum protection" be given to the long-recognized Special Areas in the Western Arctic Reserve. These areas include:

- ∅ Teshkepuk Lake,
- ∅ The Colville River.
- ∅ Kasegaluk Lagoon
- ∅ The Utukok River Uplands

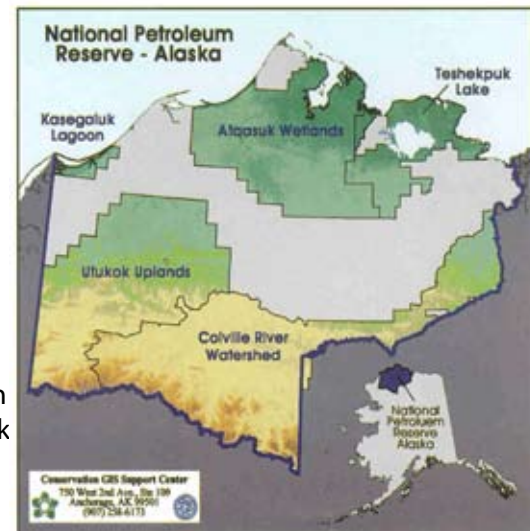
(Go to the description of these areas above and select a detail or two for your letter. Also mention other key areas--Dease Inlet-Meade River, Peard Bay and Ikpikpuk River.)

In its new Plan, the BLM should identify and analyze a full range of management alternatives that includes the strongest possible protections for the various areas mentioned above. This should offer some "no lease" areas to ensure "maximum protection" as Congress directed.

Thank you for this opportunity to comment.

Sincerely,
(Your name and address). ◆

-- Dan Ritzman
and Lindsey Hadjuk



Help protect Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve

Please Comment on Nabesna ORV Management Plan DEIS through Nov. 11

The National Park Service (NPS) has released the Nabesna Off-Road Vehicle Management Plan/Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS). The DEIS evaluates the impacts of several alternatives to manage ORV use/access in the Nabesna District of Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve.

The [massive] DEIS is available electronically on the National Park Service Planning, Environment and Public Comment (PEPC) website at <http://parkplanning.nps.gov/wrst>. The Glennallen, Alaska, library has copies for public review.

The National Park Service (NPS) will accept comments on the DEIS through November 11, 2010.

Electronic comments may be submitted online in the PEPC website by visiting:

<http://parkplanning.nps.gov/commentForm.cfm?parkID=21&projectID=20698&documentId=35478>

Or mail your written comments by U.S. Postal Service to: Bruce Rogers, Wrangell St. Elias National Park and Preserve, P.O. Box 439, Copper Center, Alaska 99573,

Sierra Club concerns: Since passage of the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA) in 1980, off-road vehicle (ORV) use in the road-accessible Nabesna portion of the park has been largely unregulated by the NPS. Now, the NPS is attempting to repair and re-route miles of heavily damaged trails in its preferred alternative 5.

While overall theirs is a reasonable plan, it has two major flaws. First, subsistence ORV users will not be required to stay on designated trails in the park or in areas eligible for potential wilderness designation. They will be required to stay on designated trails in existing park wilderness.

Second, despite Congress's directive in ANILCA, the NPS has not determined which of the estimated 6,000 residents living near the park are legitimate subsistence users and which are not. As a result, many recent arrivals with no customary and traditional subsistence use at the time of the park's establishment are able to drive anywhere they wish to hunt and fish in the park and in the process damage park resources and compete with the legitimate subsistence users whose interests Congress intended to protect.

The Alaska Chapter is now on Facebook!

Join us on Facebook!

Find us by searching "Sierra Club Alaska Chapter" and LIKE our page. Stay connected and up-to-date on different projects and opportunities starting today! Without our members and volunteers we can't move forward so this page is all about you. *Thanks!*



photo: Vicky Hoover

Off-road vehicles allowed on the Tanada Trail in the Nabesna District of Wrangell-St. Elias National Park have not been good for the fragile landscape.

⇒ HOW TO COMMENT:

In general, please thank the NPS for working to control ORV use; urge them to take strong measures to halt environmental damage to national park lands from off-road vehicle abuse. Tell the NPS you count on them to use their new plan to start strong enforcement and effective monitoring and management in America's largest national park.

In particular, tell the NPS the first essential step in any attempt to control ORV use is to weed out the illegitimate users, followed by requiring genuine subsistence users to stay on park trails. **Send your comment to NPS by November 11.** ◆

Update: opposition to proposed Pebble Mine

The latest in the long battle involves approaching the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). Six local tribes, commercial fishing groups, and the Bristol Bay Native Corporation (a powerful force in the region with 8,600 shareholders) have asked EPA to invoke a rarely-used power to protect lands that could put an end to the Pebble project. Alaska's greatest environmental threat may finally receive a national spotlight. If the EPA agrees to use its authority, there will be a national comment period and a real chance to engage concerned citizens across the nation who want to preserve Alaska's peerless wild lands.

In response, Alaska Congressman Don Young has filed a bill that could strip EPA of its authority to block Pebble. Young's action flies in the face of a state whose residents and visitors love to camp, fish and hike in its wild environment.

The proposed Pebble Mine, close to Lake Clark and Katmai National Parks and in the heart of a world-class salmon fishing region around Bristol Bay, would be the world's largest open-pit strip gold and copper mine, if permitted. (See Sierra Borealis Mar 2010.) The Alaska Chapter has firmly opposed this project from the start. Please contact Mike O'Meara for more details and background. <mikeo@HORIZONSATELLITE.COM> ◆

Getting on track with Commuter Rail for Southcentral Alaska

the State
Legislature
for a Regional

Alaska is experiencing climate change more rapidly than any other state. Yet when it comes to transportation policies that would reduce CO2 emissions, Alaska lags.

In 2002, the national Sierra Club sponsored a contest called "Smart Choices, Less Traffic" in which chapters around the country submitted nominations for the nation's best and worst transportation projects. Forty-nine projects were chosen, and a "Smart Choices Less Traffic" map was created (www.sierraclub.org/sprawl/report02/map_request.asp)

Southcentral Alaska commuter rail was chosen as one of the "best projects", and a Glenn-Parks Highway interchange (subsequently built) was chosen as one of the worst. The Smart Choice map led to the 2002 formation of the Commuter Rail Steering Committee, which the Alaska Chapter spearheaded. The Steering Committee, made up of local leaders, businesses, the Alaska Railroad Corporation and community activists, helped mobilize citizens, pass local resolutions, and draft proposed state legislation (see below).

Commuter rail would be relatively easy to implement because the Alaska Railroad track is already there, paralleling the highway between Anchorage and Palmer/Wasilla. Both freight and passenger trains (currently geared to tourists) run daily along this track. In recent years \$ 78 million has been spent to straighten this track, making potential commuter rail time-competitive with driving.

The Alaska Railroad was built between 1914 and 1923, before the car-highway era. Anchorage, Palmer and

Wasilla all began as Railroad towns. Until the late 1930s, the train was *the* way to travel between these communities.

Nowadays, in our highway oriented society successful commuter rail requires connecting buses and

vans so that people can reach their work places. It also requires operating subsidies, as typically, passenger fares cover just 15-25 percent of operating costs. Yet the State-owned Alaska Railroad was set up to make an operating profit. Therefore, our Commuter Rail Steering Committee has been lobbying the State Legislature to set up a Regional Transportation Authority (RTA) -- an agency to accept money from the Alaska State legislature and any federal funds available, and to coordinate public transportation with Anchorage and the Matsu area's bus systems, the Alaska Railroad, private van pools, and other interested parties.

The Sierra Club is a member of both the Alaska Conservation Voters and the Renewable Energy Alaska Project (REAP), two organizations that have been lobbying

Transportation Authority. In spring 2009, Senator Charlie Huggins from the Matsu Valley introduced legislation to set up a Regional Transportation Authority. This legislation passed the Senate Transportation Committee unanimously in 2010, but died in the Senate Finance Committee. It needs to be reintroduced in the State Senate in January 2011, and a similar bill needs to be introduced on the State House side. Two senators, Johnny Ellis and Bettye Davis, co-sponsored the legislation, and positive communication has occurred with other state legislators, but the crucial thing that will be needed is more citizen lobbying.

Although the Alaska Railroad cannot actually fund the operation of commuter rail, it has been laying the groundwork for commuter rail by investing in several capital improvements, paid for with federal grant money matched by the Railroad's passenger and freight revenues. In addition to the track straightening, the Railroad has built an Airport Rail station and inter modal facilities and secured a new Diesel Multiple Unit (DMU) self-propelled railcar. It has requested American Recovery and Reinvestment Act funding of \$21 million to purchase three additional DMUs, and has also requested DMU funding be included in Green-TEA, national surface transportation legislation which may well come before Congress in the next 18 months.

Why commuter rail is needed

Successful commuter rail would reduce the pressure on the State of Alaska to add lanes to the highway connecting Anchorage and Palmer/Wasilla, and to build expensive new freeway connections near Anchorage. These highway projects have been in planning for years. Commuter rail would also foster transit-friendly development, cutting down on sprawl.

In the short term, pressure to add lanes to the Glenn Highway could be met by adding bus rapid transit (transit that travels in its own, bus-only lane) and more vans during peak hours. However, I believe in the long run commuter rail is the most energy efficient solution because it will attract more riders than bus rapid transit -- for several reasons:

1) Commuter rail would be safer. The multi-lane Glenn Highway can be dangerous, particularly in winter when snow and ice conditions combine with darkness both morning and evening (17,000 vehicles per day use the highway).

2) Rail is more comfortable and time efficient. One can read, sit at a table and work, use a computer, walk around. These things are all harder or impossible on a bus.

3) The Diesel Multiple Unit (DMU) is equipped for on-board food services and restrooms.

4) Rail avoids the slowdowns due to icy road conditions and accidents, and the highway congestion and stoplights that even bus rapid transit would encounter.

The capital funding that the Railroad has used to straighten its track also helps its regular passenger service and its freight rail by taking both off the highway, reducing



The Alaska Railroad

Alaska Chapter and Group Elections Ahead

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

The upcoming Chapter elections give you an excellent chance to help decide Sierra Club policy! Elections will soon be held for positions on the Executive Committees of the Alaska Chapter and the regional groups within the Alaska Chapter. If you are a Sierra Club member and would like to run for office, or would like to nominate another member who is willing to run, please contact a member of the chapter Nominating Committee. (Chapter Nominating Committee members will forward nominees for Group Executive Committee to appropriate Group nominating committees.)

Alaska Chapter Nominating Committee members are: Pam Brodie, chair: pbrodie@gci.net (907)235-3855, Jack Hession: sgtpreston68@gmail.com, Patrick Fort: cpfort@uaa.alaska.edu.

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

Commuter Rail

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highway maintenance subsidies and CO2 emissions. It's a win-win situation for Alaska, the Railroad, and the environment.

A 2002 study estimated the start-up costs for commuter rail at \$28 million, plus \$3 million per year for operating costs. Yet \$50 million has already been spent by the Knik Arm Bridge and Toll Authority on the proposed Knik Arm crossing (one of Alaska's "bridges to nowhere"), which is in Anchorage's Long Run Transportation Plan. The spending continues, for salaries for KABTA's staff of eight and planning alone—for a proposal that would cause more highway-oriented sprawl and destroy pristine wilderness.

The Commuter Rail Steering Committee, led by former Alaska Chapter transportation staffer, Maryellen Oman, is no longer meeting regularly, due to loss of this position. However, lobbying for the Regional Transportation Authority will continue in winter 2010-2011 through the Alaska Conservation Voters, the Renewable Energy Alaska Project, and the Alaska Center for the Environment. Sierra Club volunteers are urgently requested to help lobby, through all these organizations. For more information on these groups, contact Lindsey Hajduk at 276-4088, or Cynthia Wentworth at cynthiawentworth@mac.com. ♦

-- Cynthia Wentworth

The three regional groups are the Juneau Group



representing Southeast Alaska, the Knik Group representing Anchorage and Southcentral, and the Denali Group representing Fairbanks and Interior Alaska.

The deadline to submit names to the Nominating Committee is **Tuesday, October 12**. The Nominating Committees will report the names of nominees to the

Executive Committees on Tuesday, October 19. Members who wish to run but who are not nominated by the nominating committee may run if they submit to the committee a petition to run signed by fifteen (15) members of the chapter or relevant group.

The deadline for candidate petitions is **Tuesday, November 2**. This is also the deadline to submit ballot issue petitions. The chapter Executive Committee will appoint an Election Committee at its regular teleconference meeting on Tuesday, November 16; no candidates may serve on the Election Committee.

Ballots will be printed and mailed Friday, December 3.

Marked ballots must be received at the Sierra Club office in Anchorage by **Tuesday, January 4**, and will be counted by the election committee at 5 pm.

(This notice and schedule are in compliance with Sierra Club bylaws.) ♦

-- by Pamela Brodie

Seeking Email Addresses

The Alaska Chapter is going electronic.

It's about time! Don't miss out. Send us your email address. Please help the Sierra Club conserve paper and save postal costs by moving more communications on-line. Check the Alaska Chapter's website <http://alaska.sierraclub.org/> for environmental news, background on issues, action alerts and newsletters. Our January and March newsletters are published electronically only. Our September and December issues are still printed and mailed. **Please e-mail us your own e-mail address.** We will use it sparingly! Send E-mail to chapter chair Pam Brodie pbrodie@gci.net. Include your name and mail address or eight-digit membership number for identification purposes. Thank so much for your help!

Pam

An Alaska newcomer's perspective

A New Alaska Chapter member shares thoughts, on arriving from Norway

"To the lover of wilderness, Alaska is one of the most wonderful countries in the world."

John Muir , The Sierra Club's founder

Ten years ago I moved from the US to Norway. Scandinavia in general, but especially Norway, has a lot of similarities with Alaska. Both cover approximately the same latitudes, and have comparable geological history only that Norway lacks volcanoes and significant earthquakes. Both are mountainous with fjords and glaciers, contain tundra, taiga, temperate rainforests, a huge fishery, and similar wildlife. Both are to outsiders considered out-of-this-world beautiful in their rugged natural beauty. But Norway has been highly developed in a poorly planned fashion. In the 20th century Norway went from being a poor country to the richest per capita (oil money), and with this it has been piecemeal logged, dammed, drained, and zigzagged with roads and power lines. Despite its acclaimed beauty to outsiders, one can't view Norway as intact. The combination of intactness and accessibility is where Alaska takes the cake at this latitude. As a kid I dreamed of moving to Alaska and living fancy free as a hunter and trapper in a cabin I built on my own (yeah I was a strange kid).

That dream faded, but, in a strange twist of fate six months ago I found out that I'd be moving back to the States. And not just any state... Alaska.

In Norway, this March, the woman I cherish has returned from a week in the Canary Islands, and she's returned with more than a tan and trinkets for our kids. She's returned with something that I, the first of many shocked beneficiaries of the enthusiastic news, can only define as an epiphany. The short version of which was; "I'm going to study outdoor recreation. In Alaska. *Carpe Diem!*"

I would have honestly been less shocked if she had told me she was a secret agent for Interpol. This woman, a theatre student in Norway when I met her ten years ago, and a fantastic homemaker since, now insists that we uproot to the other side of the world where she can study the same topic that I originally came to Norway to study. This woman, who has me check the linens for spiders, now wants to learn how to trek through bear country, paddle with orcas, and rapel off mountains while soaking up the wild beauty of Alaska! I might have been shocked, but I was on board. *Carpe Diem!* Long story short, she applied to a university in Anchorage and was accepted. But what am I to do? Is my wife to have all the fun? With my background in ecology and natural resource management I couldn't help but think that Alaska is the place to work, and I hope to experience as much of it as possible through whatever environmental work I end up in. Alaska's greatness has lured yet another family.

In mid-August we arrived in Anchorage -- with three children and 12 full sized suitcases containing all our

possessions, as well as a bike. Our exceedingly kind landlord and her daughter, previously strangers to us, actually pick us up and drive us to our new home. Our new life starts and at once we note differences.

Allemannsrett= Every-man's-right. This is a wonderful concept unique to Scandinavia. However I also dare to think it is likely to appeal to Sierra Club members. My American logic did a double take when I first heard of this in Norway. Essentially it's the right to trek wherever one likes in undeveloped areas, regardless of private or public land ownership, completely free of cost. I have an aunt and uncle in Norway who are private owners of a huge property, much of which is forest. Any person who so desires can trek and camp in my aunt and uncle's forest, and my uncle cannot refuse them this right. What's more, with the exception of hunting and limited fishing one can also conduct some extractive activities -- like berry picking, mushroom gathering, flower picking, etc -- as long as this does not threaten the landowner's economic value. I personally like to think of *Allemannsrett* as a human right, and would love to see it introduced to the US, but I fear that the "trespassers will be shot" mentality here might make it difficult. Alaska

however, with its huge expanses of accessible wilderness in comparison to the Lower 48, seems to resemble Norway in that one is free to trek through beautiful country with little regard for privatization and exclusion. Alaska should maintain this freedom at all cost.



Although the wildlife is similar, their distribution and abundance are very different. This is one aspect that makes Alaska, even for Norwegians, the exotic paradise that it is perceived to be. Though Norway has moose, red and roe deer, as well as reindeer, most large predators were more or less eradicated in Norway and Sweden between the 1850s and 1950. The original Scandinavian wolves were in fact extirpated, and modern Scandinavian wolves are actually Russian stock. Now however the predator populations are rising again in Norway, though it's controversial for a people no longer accustomed to living with them. Thus Alaskan wildlife, though facing its own challenges, has by comparison far more vitality. It's wilder and in a way more spirited. And bigger! Alaskan brown bear and moose dwarf their Scandinavian counterparts. And like it or not they're literally as close as your own back yard. You Alaskans are crazy with your urban moose and bears... Our landlord told us that prior to our arrival she had found a black bear basking on her balcony. One afternoon my son, visible to my wife through a window while taking his bicycle out of the garage, froze in his tracks. Going outside to investigate, she too froze. Five feet from them was a huge moose munching on our bushes! This is very new to us. ◆

(continued next issue.)

-- Nils Boisen, Ecologist

<nihabo@gmail.com>, (907)717-4250

Alaska reaches for low-hanging fruit: energy efficiency



Energy efficiency is the quickest and cheapest way for people to lower their electric bills; it truly is a low-hanging fruit. Efficiency is not just a good idea that will never happen—Energy efficiency is taking off in Alaska right now! For years different groups—from homeowners to energy utilities and now to lawmakers—have been working hard to make Alaska’s energy use much more efficient. Just this year there was a great success in the Alaska Legislature that passed two significant bills: “The Alaska Sustainable Energy Act” (SB 220) and “An Act declaring a state energy policy” (HB 306).

Sustainable Energy Act

This includes a broad range of policy tools to attract investment in our energy sector while stimulating our economy. Numerous renewable energy incentives are also included, but energy efficiency is at the forefront.

The Sustainable Energy Act takes a huge step forward in funding energy efficiency. The law allows for an energy efficiency revolving loan fund to be used as low-interest loans for upgrades and improvements in public buildings, like schools, municipalities, state governments, and University of Alaska. This is a \$250 million program through the Alaska Housing Finance Corporation—it sounds like a lot but we’ll actually save much more in energy bills. This can also create 1,500 - 2,000 new jobs for Alaskans in the construction industry.

Another leap the Sustainable Energy Act makes is to have Alaska lead by example. The State will retrofit at least 25 percent of the largest state buildings by 2020 to massively reduce energy costs overall. For example, the

Department of Transportation and Public facilities already began upgrading eight buildings for which they estimated \$278,000 in energy savings: but they have already averaged almost double that with \$497,000!

State Energy Policy

Alaska now has energy efficiency and renewable energy goals. Alaska aims to achieve a 15 percent increase in energy efficiency on a per capita basis between 2010 and 2020. This target is very realistic and within our grasp. Another great goal of this policy is to have renewable and alternative energy sources account for 50 percent of Alaska’s electric generation by 2025.

Although there is still a long way to go to achieve the energy efficiency set by the new policy goal, we have a stronger framework to build on with the passage of these forward-minded laws. We can also do much in our own homes to reduce our own power bills. We can continue to strive for better use of our energy now, as it’s the cheapest and fastest way to save.

Energy efficiency is the first step we should be taking throughout Alaska. It’s cheap; it’s cleaner; and it’s healthier than any other alternatives. Throughout the summer volunteers, other organizations, and Sierra Club have been working in the Interior to talk to Alaskans about the best way to power our homes. We’ll continue to work throughout the state to make sure families, utilities, and lawmakers hear the message so we can all save money and energy today. ♦

-- Lindsey Hajduk

⇒ Coal Ash Rule Public Comment Period Extended: *Your Comments needed*

The Environmental Protection Agency needs your input to achieve strong, federally enforceable safeguards for generation and disposal of coal ash, the byproduct of burning coal. Coal ash contains heavy metals and toxic chemicals, such as arsenic, mercury, chromium, cadmium and lead. This hazardous material is currently less regulated than household garbage. EPA offers two options to remedy that situation.

One option, known as Subtitle C, proposes to regulate coal ash as “special waste” under the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act (RCRA). Control of the waste under Subtitle C would involve permitting and comprehensive “cradle-to-grave” oversight. The other option, Subtitle D, would also set up standards but would treat toxic coal ash like household garbage rather than a unique and dangerous waste. Subtitle D would grant EPA no authority to enforce its standards. Moreover, Subtitle D covers only ash disposal, while Subtitle C would cover generation, storage, transportation, treatment and disposal—which are all grossly unregulated in Alaska.

The EPA has extended the public comment period to **November 19**—allowing citizens more time to comment.

Alaska produces a mere fraction of the nation’s coal

ash. However, with widespread use of coal around Fairbanks since 1916 for heat, energy production, and as steam engine fuel, a significant volume of toxic ash has been haphazardly spread all over the Interior. This is a real threat to the environment and unnecessary risk to public health that can result in increased risk of cancer, learning disabilities, and other illnesses. Without Federal guidelines and enforcement we will continue to put our community health at risk.

⇒ What You can Do:

Please comment by **Nov 19!** Tell EPA to regulate coal combustion wastes under Subtitle C and to stop supporting coal ash reuse without adequate environmental and human health safeguards.”

Send comments by e-mail, fax, or mail: (Identify your comments by Docket ID No. EPA-HQ-RCRA-2009-0640.)

Email to rcra-docket@epa.gov; **Fax** to 202-566-0272; or mail two copies to:

Hazardous Waste Management System;
Disposal of Coal Combustion Residuals from Electric Utilities
Docket, Attention Docket ID No., EPA-HQ-RCRA-2009-0640,
Environmental Protection Agency, Mailcode: 5305T,
1200 Pennsylvania Ave., NW,
Washington, DC 20460.

[For more information, contact Russ at russmaddox@yahoo.com,](mailto:russmaddox@yahoo.com)
[or Lindsey Hajduk at lindsey@sierraclubalaska.org.](mailto:lindsey@sierraclubalaska.org) ♦

-- Russ Maddox

The Most Important Way to Protect the Environment...

The most important single thing you can do to protect the environment costs nothing and takes just five minutes: vote November 2.

If you have just a small amount of time or money available to dedicate to protecting the environment, volunteer in and contribute to the election campaign of a candidate who will work to prevent global warming and protect Alaska's wildlife habitat. Go door to door; make phone calls. I've done it countless times, and it's always an interesting, worthwhile experience.

Alaska is a land of many things -- including close votes and election upsets. This may seem surprising, as we've been considered a one-party state throughout our short history (Democratic until 1968, Republican since then). But in the 21 years I've lived in Alaska, I've seen numerous "nail-biter" elections: Don Young vs. John Devens for U.S. House (1990), Tony Knowles vs. Jim Campbell for Governor (1994), Lisa Murkowski vs. Tony Knowles for U.S. Senator (2004), Don Young vs. Ethan Berkowitz for U.S. House (2008), Mark Begich vs. Ted Stevens for U.S. Senator (2008). This year it was Lisa Murkowski vs. Joe Miller in the Republican primary for U.S. Senate. Meanwhile, some State legislative races have actually tied, and been decided by coin tosses.

Not all of these contests were expected to be

close, and not all turned out as the pollsters expected. Our whole system of telephone polling is becoming suspect as fewer people own "land lines" or answer the phone without screening calls. Some elections were lost only because candidates couldn't convince supporters the race would be close.

Our elected officials decide public policy, including what happens to our forests and our fish. The huge effort environmentalists put forth between elections manages to move a few officials a little way -- sometimes enough to make the critical difference.

But most of what these officials decide is determined by their basic beliefs and values, and these usually vary widely between contestants. Don't be deceived if the election rhetoric of competing candidates sounds the same, or sounds so vague as to be meaningless. Look at the candidates' actual records, then join a campaign and make a difference. ♦

-- by Pamela Brodie, Alaska Chapter chair

Alaska Chapter members -- please note!
The Sierra Club's Alaska office has moved! Come see us at our new location, also in downtown Anchorage.
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Sierra Borealis / alaska report

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