



# Sierra Borealis

## *alaska report*

SIERRA CLUB ALASKA CHAPTER  
DECEMBER 2014



### Chukchi Drilling and Climate Disruption

Chapter election! --- see candidate statements pp 4-5

Right now the Administration is reconsidering leasing in the Chukchi Sea in America's Arctic as it develops its next five-year offshore leasing plan (covering 2017 to 2022). The new Draft Environmental Impact Statement for the Chukchi Lease Sale 193 admits that there is a 75 percent chance of a major oil spill if the leases are fully developed. That's right, a 75 percent chance. Once oil is spilled, hundreds of miles of sea ice, dark winters, and harsh cold will prevent effective cleanup of a spill.

Climate disruption impacts are already felt more acutely in the Arctic than anywhere else. The plight of the polar bear has been well-publicized, but we're seeing now the ripple



Bull Walrus, Dale DeArmond © 1985

effect of ice loss and changes to the entire delicate Arctic natural balance. The walrus and other ice-dependent wildlife are thrown off balance because of the lack of ice; subsistence cultures are threatened; and coastal erosion threatens whole villages.

With a 75 percent chance of an oil spill and 100 percent chance of increased carbon pollution the risks to wildlife, to subsistence communities and to the world climate from Arctic Ocean drilling are clear.

On December 1, the Bureau of Ocean Energy

Management held a hearing in Anchorage on Shell Oil's Supplemental Environmental Impact Study (SEIS) on Lease 193 for oil and gas drilling in the Chukchi Sea. Dozens of Arctic activists attended the hearing at the Crowne Plaza Hotel, with 24 testifying in favor of protecting Native Alaskan communities and Arctic wildlife. Greenpeace USA held a rally outside the hearing where activists stood under a "Save the Arctic" projection lighting the side of the hotel.

#### Lawsuit challenges rule permitting harm to walrus

In the first week of December the Sierra Club joined with our coalition partners and filed a lawsuit against the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, challenging a rule that permits oil companies, like Shell Oil, to harm Pacific walrus during Arctic Ocean oil drilling in key walrus feeding areas beginning as early as next year. The Arctic Ocean's rapidly melting sea ice creates dire consequences for Chukchi Sea walrus which depend on the ice to rest, feed, raise their young, and avoid predators. This melting has increasingly forced walrus ashore. This October it happened again as 35,000 walrus crowded together on an Arctic beach near Point Lay. Walrus must swim distances up to 100 miles from these coastal haulout areas to reach Chukchi feeding grounds to find the clams and other bottom species they need.

The Obama administration has done more than any previous U.S. administration to reduce emissions, improve fuel economy, invest in clean, renewable energy, and work to set the first-ever carbon pollution standards for dirty power plants. However, even as the administration takes some specific steps to reduce carbon pollution, it continues to advance an 'all-of-the-above' energy plan that promotes more fossil fuel production, exporting

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## Alaska Society of Friends (Quakers) Takes On Climate Change

these fuels abroad, and opening new areas to dirty fuel extraction. Developing even a small fraction of the dirty fuels underneath our public lands and waters will undermine the administration's own goals to fight climate change. The administration must keep dirty fuels in the ground, and the Arctic is the right place to start -- now.

Whales, walrus, seals, polar bears and countless birds are already under siege from climate disruption -- they won't stand a chance in an oil spill disaster. *Please tell that to the Administration!*

*Background:* In early November the world's top climate scientists and government leaders came together, once again, to discuss climate disruption-- not *whether* it is happening, but *what* to do about it. Previous reports from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) have shown unequivocally that the climate is changing, that humans are the cause, and that ominous results are already being felt around the world. The latest IPCC report emphasizes that climate disruption effects are "serious, pervasive, and irreversible" and that we must act quickly.

The administration now has the opportunity to put the Arctic Ocean off-limits to oil and gas drilling--as it takes public comments on its upcoming Arctic leasing plan. Halting Arctic drilling would prevent two-and-a-half times more pollution than would be saved by the new fuel economy standards. It would also demonstrate leadership on climate as the U.S. takes over chairmanship of the Arctic Council early in 2015. Recognizing



Polar explorer Eric Larson testifies via Skype at Anchorage BOEM hearing Dec. 1.

photo: Laura Comer

the seriousness of the climate crisis, the U.S. has rightly placed addressing the impacts of climate change among its top stated objectives for the Council. The important bottom line is not that of Shell Oil and other companies that want to drill in Arctic waters, but what's needed to prevent the world from reaching the tipping point on climate.

### WHAT YOU CAN DO:

The Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM) seeks comments **through Dec. 22** about the environmental risks associated with oil and gas drilling in the Chukchi Sea. Join with the activists who spoke at the Dec. 1 hearing in Anchorage and demand an end to Arctic drilling leases.

Tell the administration to heed the risks of drilling in the Arctic outlined in their own study and halt Arctic drilling for good.

**Comments are to be sent online:** <http://www.regulations.gov/index.jsp#/documentDetail;D=BOEM-2014-0078-0001>

-- Dan Ritzman

Quakers have been on the forefront of struggles for equality and justice for 350 years. From working to end war and the causes of war, to the abolition of slavery, to prison reform, to Native rights, to suffrage, Quakers have tried to "answer that of God in every person."

Now, Alaskan Friends (Quakers) are deeply concerned and actively working to find constructive responses to climate disruption. Members of Alaska Friends Conference, the statewide organization of Quakers in Alaska, met in Fairbanks on November 14-16, 2014, to answer the question of what we are called to do about climate change. We arrived there weighing three main options: advocacy, a Listening project similar to the one we did a dozen years ago about subsistence, or helping our community of Friends to walk its talk in terms of reducing our own carbon footprints. There was enough interest in each of those areas that we chose "All of the Above." As a result, Alaska Friends Conference now has three committees dealing with climate change.

An identified goal was to reach out to others who are also working on issues of sustainability and climate. That's why I jumped at the chance to write an article for this issue of **Sierra Borealis**.

Unprecedented rates of greenhouse gas emissions are leading toward global temperature rises, which, if inadequately checked, are likely to trigger a shift utterly catastrophic to life on Earth. Climate disruption is harming resources we depend on for food, livelihoods, and the very heart of who we are: the ocean and all its resources, including salmon and other fisheries; agriculture; and all ecosystems, including sea and river ice, migratory birds; northern coastlines and lakes; glaciers; and permafrost, to name a few. It will turn vast numbers of people into climate refugees, as coastal areas and low-lying island nations become uninhabitable. Other direct and indirect effects on human health can be expected.

Friends are convinced that catastrophic change is not inevitable; we can minimize the damaging effects of climate change and make the transition to sustainable communities if we act collectively and mindfully, now. Alaskans, including Native communities whose understanding of the land is immediate and accessible, are in a unique position to lead the way in a global transition to sustainability, climate repair, and a just society. ❖

-- by Jan Bronson (lifelong Alaskan, on behalf of the advocacy committee of Alaska Friends Conference [Quakers]. Email [bronson@gci.net](mailto:bronson@gci.net))

# Governor Walker Reaches Out

In these super-partisan times, Americans have a pretty good idea what policies to expect when a Democrat or a Republican takes office. With the election in November of Independent (formerly Republican) Governor Bill Walker and Democratic Lieutenant Governor Byron Mallott, the direction of the state's future environmental policies remain largely unknown to the public.

Two things appear clear from the start. One is that Walker is not beholden to the oil industry for his election, as industry money and support went to the losing incumbent, Gov. Sean Parnell. It is unusual but not unprecedented for a candidate to win without oil industry support. Since oil became the driving economic force in this state, only Wally Hickel and Sarah Palin were also elected as governors over industry supported candidates. The other unusual factor is Walker's commitment to abandon partisanship and promote cooperation and compromise.

Before taking office, Walker organized a weekend of Transition meetings in Anchorage, including 250 invited Alaskan activists, widely diverse in their perspectives. The committees were not mirrored on the Departments of state government, but instead divided into seventeen topics of importance to Alaskans. Environmental issues, and some environmental activists, were included in many committees – oil and gas, natural resources (other than petroleum), arctic policy and climate change, consumer energy, economic development, fiscal policy, fisheries, infrastructure, and wildlife (note that it was not called "game"). Most who participated appeared to consider the process useful and left optimistic that bi-partisan cooperation would lead to improvements in state governance. The governor's appointments so far also reflect a non-partisan approach.

Because the price of oil determines the state's ability to spend money, it will have a major impact on environmental and all other policy. This price is beyond Walker's control, but the price of oil and the economics dependent on it was a big topic at the weekend meetings. Activities started with a general presentation by a panel of economists of the impact on state spending and on the state economy of low and dramatically falling oil prices – about \$66/barrel as of the December 1st inauguration, having fallen from over \$100 in less than six months. Oil price volatility is not new. As a recent example, from the start of 2007 to mid 2008, oil prices rose from about \$60 to \$140/barrel, then fell to less than \$45 by the end of that year, all due to the country's fiscal ballooning and collapse. But within two years, prices recovered largely into the range of \$90 to \$110. Today's low prices, by



contrast, are due not to fiscal instability but to an excess oil supply, and none of the panel economists expect prices to recover soon.

A surprising unanimity arose from the economists and the diverse participants to the State's current woes – big ticket capital projects are the "low-hanging fruit" for the first round of budget cutting – although \$ billions more will have to be cut to balance the budget without further spending from diminishing state reserves. As economist Gregg Erickson pointed out, ever since the Delta Barley project under Gov. Hammond, Alaska has a long history of government supported mega-projects that were supposed to stimulate economic growth, but not one has actually paid for itself, and many require costly maintenance. In fact, one could go back even farther to the Alaska Railroad built a century ago with federal dollars.

## State spending affects the environment

Economic ups and downs affect environmental protection in complex ways, with each direction bringing some good and some bad effects.

A reduced spending ability by the state gives environmentalists reason to hope for indefinite postponement of such ill-conceived projects as the Juneau access road, the Knik Arm bridge, the Susitna-Watana dam, and the Ambler road. Funding of roads is complicated, however, by the fact that the federal government subsidizes road building at a 90 percent to 10 percent match, and it is hard for a state to pass up the opportunity to spend ten cents on the dollar, up to whatever will be the cap on federal spending. Federal road money is no longer "ear-marked" to particular projects; that decision is left up to the states. Meanwhile, the future of federal highway funding has become highly controversial in Congress.

One state mega-project that is more likely than others to survive budget cutting is some kind of a natural gas pipeline. However, with the disappearance of arctic sea ice, North Slope producers now anticipate a different kind of transportation for a liquified natural gas mega-project, as potentially more efficient than a pipeline across the state. They are investing in infrastructure for LNG tankers to carry product from the North Slope.

The downside to environmental protection of low oil prices and a correspondingly reduced state budget will be increasingly desperate hunger for resource exploitation, including logging and mining, as well as cuts to fisheries management and to state parks and conservation units, along with a lack of resources or motivation for transition to alternative local energy sources. ❖

-- Pamela Brodie



# Chapter Executive Committee Election happening NOW

## Look For Your Ballot in the Mail

This month, Sierra Club Alaska Chapter members will receive ballots in the mail for the annual Chapter executive committee election. Please mark and return yours. Executive Committee members are volunteers who are responsible for deciding Chapter policy, priorities, and expenditures. They deserve your support.

If you do not receive occasional e-mails from the Alaska Chapter, particularly quarterly announcements of the posting of the newsletter, it is because we do not have a valid e-mail address from you. Please send your e-mail address to Pam Brodie (chapter chair) [pbrodie@gci.net](mailto:pbrodie@gci.net) so we can easily get important messages to you. (We will not pack your Inbox; we send e-mail messages only occasionally.)

There are six candidates running for the Alaska Chapter Executive Committee.

Three are at-large candidates:

**Jack Hession**

**Mike O'Meara**

**Pamela Brodie**

Three are running as Regional Group Liaisons:

**Mark Rorick:** Tongass Group (Southeast)

**Nancy Kuhn:** Denali Group (Fairbanks & Interior)

**Lindsey Hajduk:** Knik Group (Anchorage & South Central)

Please see their statements (in alphabetical order) on this and the following page.



### **Pamela Brodie:** **At-large candidate**

I have worked to protect Alaska's environment both as staff and as a volunteer with the Sierra Club, for 25 years. I coordinated the successful grassroots effort to persuade the Exxon Valdez Oil Spill Trustee Council to use Exxon's fines to purchase more than 600,000 acres of privately-owned coastal wildlife habitat and protect it as new state and federal park, refuge and forest lands. I also organized the Sierra Club's actions, in coordination with other conservation organizations, to improve management of the Tongass National Forest, leading up to the major reforms of the Tongass Land Management Plan revision of 1997. More recently, I have served on the Alaska Chapter's Executive Committee and as Chapter Chair. I appreciate the wonderful activists we have here and around the country, who work to maintain Alaska's beauty and biological diversity, particularly by protecting our public lands and curbing global warming. ❖



### **Lindsey Hajduk:** **Knik Group liaison candidate**

I am interested in joining a volunteer leadership role in the Anchorage Knik Group. I believe we need a grassroots movement in Alaska to address environmental justice issues in the face of climate change, so I will focus on drawing in new volunteers to the Alaska Chapter, prioritize campaigns to fight climate change, and continue efforts to protect Alaska's public lands. In particular, I want to advance our conservation mission in the Arctic and right here in Anchorage during the Chugach National Forest planning process. I'm interested in making sure Alaskans across the state and here in Southcentral know how to engage on important decisions that affect us all.

I currently work as the Alaska Program Director with Conservation Lands Foundation. Previously, I worked on conservation campaigns for the Sierra Club for five years, coordinating our statewide and national grassroots efforts to protect Alaska's public lands. ❖



### **Jack Hession** **At-large candidate**

On the Excom I focus on defense and implementation of the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA), and on other public lands issues. I keep track of Alaska bills in Congress and keep Chapter members informed on these, and ask them to weigh in when needed. I work with our Washington, D.C. land protection team, including representing the Chapter before congressional committees; monitor actions of the federal land management agencies charged with implementing ANILCA; and identify potential litigation in cooperation with Sierra Club attorneys.

With your support I will continue these efforts. Next year, Alaska members of Congress who oppose retention and permanent protection of the public lands will control the Congress and we can expect a substantial increase in their attacks on ANILCA, BLM areas, and the national forests. ❖

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## Executive Committee candidate statements, *continued*



### **Nancy Kuhn:** **Denali Group liaison** **candidate**

I came to Fairbanks in 1975 because of my desire to raise a family where the air, water and land were clean. Over the years I discovered that just wanting something and believing that the status quo would remain was not to be, if I want something, I have to take an active role and contribute my time and effort....Pristine wilderness is NOT free. I would like to contribute by serving on the ExCom and becoming more active in creating change. I have recently given up my business and anticipate having more time and energy. Sierra Club is my first choice for information of what I can do to effect meaningful change. Now is the time for me to ask for your vote of confidence that I will be more involved and will become educated about local environmental issues. ❖



### **Mike O'Meara** **At-large candidate**

After 45 years tilting at wind mills in Alaska I admit I'm tired. When I lived in Anchorage during the early '70s I joined the old Alaska Conservation Society. I served on the first Sierra Club Alaska Chapter ExCom during the pipeline, D-2, and other major debates of the time. When oil leases were sold in Kachemak Bay I got involved with the KB Defense Fund which helped force the buyback of those leases. After moving to my homestead near Homer I became active in the Kachemak Bay Conservation Society and helped start both the Alaska Marine Conservation Council and Cook Inlet Keeper. I still serve on the CIK Board.

Throughout those years we've had a hard scrabble fight with every kind of carpet bagger, corporate raider, and corrupt politician imaginable. We got beat up too many times but, every now and again, we had a win. It's not enough, though. With the human population out of control and much of the rest of the world's resources depleted, more hungry eyes than ever are turned on Alaska. The fight never ends. That's why at 72 I'm tired, but, as Robert De Niro said, "You'll have time to rest when you're dead!" Old isn't dead. There's more to do than ever. So I'm up for another term on the Alaska Chapter ExCom -- assuming you want me there. ❖



### **Mark Rorick:** **Tongass Group** **liaison candidate**

From my home in Juneau, I have worked on timber sales, mining, and the Juneau Road to nowhere for the Sierra Club for 20 years. During this time, I have become very knowledgeable on the technical and advocacy details of these topics, and I wish to continue to use this expertise to benefit Alaska's environment through the Sierra Club, especially in protecting Tongass roadless areas. I am currently chair of the Sierra Club's Tongass Group. ❖

-- End of candidate statements

### **Alaskan activist** **gains Sierra Club** **Special Service** **award**

Former Alaska Chapter executive committee member Russ Maddox received a Special Service award at the Nov. 21 Sierra Club national award ceremony in San Francisco. Maddox was recognized for his years of dedicated efforts to combat harmful coal dust in Seward and his exemplary work to oppose coal-fired power generation in Fairbanks. Russ was pleased that his mother Sondra could join him at the awards ceremony. ❖

*Congratulations and best wishes, Russ!*



Russ Maddox and mom in San Francisco

photo: Wicky Hoover





# Alaskans keep on celebrating American Wilderness From Albuquerque to Anchorage



Yearlong celebration of the 50th anniversary of the Wilderness Act – 1964 – 2014 – is in its last month. December is a good time to promote Wilderness as *a grand gift to the American people that brought the power of the law to preserve our natural heritage.* It is a uniquely American achievement, based on our historic close connections with wild nature during centuries of settlement and westward expansion.

In November the special travelling art exhibit, *Voices of the Wilderness*, came to Anchorage. Earlier in the year it was in Ketchikan, Sitka, Juneau, Fairbanks, Kenai, and Homer

photo: Barbara Lydon



Voices of the Wilderness Opening at Anchorage Museum

– each with a well-attended opening reception. Anchorage is the last venue with the longest time interval; after its Nov. 21 opening, the show will be at the Anchorage Museum until Feb. 22, 2015.

In mid-October, Alaskans joined nearly 1200 participants at the big National Wilderness Anniversary conference in Albuquerque, NM— Alaskans observed there included Adam Andis, Amy Gulick, Cathy Hart, Kevin Hood, Roger Kaye, Fish & Wildlife Service (FWS); Bart and Julie Koehler, Tim and Barbara Lydon, Forest Service; Pam Miller, Nicole Whittington-Evans, TWS.

Roger Kaye, active on the Wilderness50 national team from its start, was a speaker; Bart Koehler played banjo and sang at the conference's opening ceremony. Sarah James of Arctic Village, longtime Gwich'in leader, delivered a plenary talk;



Bart Koehler performs in Albuquerque's Kimo Theatre

photo by Sandy Marviney, courtesy of Bart Koehler



photo: Kevin Porescholdt

Sarah James is a keynote star in Albuquerque

fellow Gwich'in activist Kay Wallis was present too. Allison Warden performed with other Native American dancers in the Get Wild Festival. FWS Alaska regional director Geoff Haskett attended, as did other FWS Alaska staff Mitch Ellis, Brian Glaspell, and Doug Damberg.

Ann Mayo-Kiely of Alaska Geographic mentored a group of youngsters from the Chugach Children's Forest. Other Alaska Geographic staff present were Elizabeth Gustafson, Jacquie Braden, and students Calesia Monroe, West High, and Alejandro Soto, UAA.



Vicky Hoover with Alaskans Sarah James and Kay Wallis

Alaska Geographic- Chugach Children's Forest students from Anchorage who attended and presented at the conference were Anna Warnock and Dawson Ellingworth (West High) and Gloria Alsworth (South High). Two Alaskan college/graduate students were there as youth scholars: Aviva Hirsch and Nikki Navio. (The Children's Forest is a collaborative project led by Alaska Geographic and the Chugach National Forest aiming to engage Alaskan youth in public lands stewardship. (see [www.chugachchildrensforest.org](http://www.chugachchildrensforest.org)).

(Sorry for Alaskan names missed—in Alaska's proud presence in this major national event for Wilderness. ) ❖



Alaska Chugach Children's Forest students in Albuquerque

photo: Alaska Geographic

# John Muir and Alaska:

## Recognizing John Muir on the centennial of his passing



John Muir died on Christmas Eve, 1914. Considering his extensive travels in Alaska, especially Southeast Alaska where he generally exulted in wild nature and particularly studied glaciers, it is fitting to remember Muir in this issue of *Sierra Borealis* by some quotes from his *Travels in Alaska*:

p. 11: To the lover of pure wildness Alaska is one of the most wonderful countries in the world. No excursion that I know of may be made into any other American wilderness where so marvelous an abundance of noble, newborn scenery is so charmingly brought to view as on the trip through the Alexander Archipelago to Fort Wrangell and Sitka....Never before this had I been embosomed in scenery so hopelessly beyond description.

p. 15: Thus perfectly beautiful are these blessed evergreen islands, and their beauty is the beauty of youth, for...the very existence of these islands, their features... are all immediately referable to ice-action during the great glacial winter just now drawing to a close.

p. 38: *Wonderful, too, are the changes dependent on the seasons and the weather. In spring, when the snow is melting fast, you enjoy the countless rejoicing waterfalls... the shining of the leaves and streams and crystal architecture of the glaciers; the rising of fresh fragrance, the song of the happy birds... In summer you find the groves and gardens in full dress; glaciers melting rapidly, waterfalls in all their glory, the river rejoicing in its strength... bears enjoying salmon and berries.... In autumn comes rest, as if the year's work were done.... And so goes the song, change succeeding change in sublime harmony...*

p. 53: Arriving opposite the mouth of the fiord, we steered straight inland between beautiful wooded shores, and the grand glacier came in sight in its granite valley, glowing in the early sunshine and extending a noble invitation....No words can convey anything like an adequate conception of its sublime grandeur.

p. 56: *...one learns that the world, though made, is yet being made, that this is still the morning of creation; that mountains long conceived are now being born, channels traced for coming rivers, basins hollowed for lakes... So abundant and novel are the objects of interest in a pure wilderness that... it matters little where you go, or how often to the same place. Wherever you chance to be always seems at the moment of all places the best, and you feel that there can be no happiness in this world or in any other for those who may not be happy here.*

p. 78....One of the greatest and most sublime views I have ever enjoyed came full in sight—more than 300 miles of closely packed peaks of the great Coast Range.... I never before had seen so richly sculptured a range or

so many awe-inspiring inaccessible mountains crowded together.

173: *How delightful it is, and how it makes one's pulses bound to get back into this reviving northland wilderness. How truly wild it is, and how joyously one's heart responds to the welcome it gives, waters and mountains shining like enthusiastic human faces!*

p. 178: Whatever may be said of other resources of the Territory, it is hardly possible to exaggerate the importance of the fisheries. Not to mention cod, herring, halibut, etc., there are probably not less than a thousand salmon-streams in southeastern Alaska...

p. 193: *.... the sun shone free and warm. No wind stirred. The water spaces between the bergs were as smooth as glass... doubling the ravishing beauty of the bergs as the sunlight streamed through their innumerable angles in rainbow colors.... In all of them old and new there are azure caves and rifts of ineffable beauty....*

p. 201: After sailing two or three miles along the left side of the fiord, we were so fortunate as to find a small nook... where firewood was abundant, and we could drag our canoe up the bank beyond reach of the berg-waves. Here we were safe, with a fine outlook across the fiord to the great glaciers and near enough to see the birth of the icebergs and the wonderful commotion they make, and hear their wild, roaring rejoicing. The sunset sky seemed to have been painted for this one mountain mansion... the divine alpenglow still lingered on their highest fountain peaks as they stood transfigured in glorious array. Now the last of the twilight purple has vanished, the stars begin to shine, and all trace of the day is gone.

p. 222: *Of these [flowering plants] *cassiope* is at once the commonest and the most beautiful and influential. In some places the delicate stems make mattresses more than a foot thick over several acres, where the bloom is so abundant that a single handful plucked at random contains hundreds of its pale pink bells. The very thought of this Alaska garden is a joyful exhilaration.*

p. 241: Not a cloud in the sky today... the magnificent mountains around the widespread tributaries of the glacier; the great, gently undulating, prairie-like expanse of its main trunk, bluish on the east, pure white on the west and north... the hundred fountains; the lofty, pure white Fairweather Range; the thunder of the plunging bergs, the fleet of bergs sailing tranquilly in the inlet—formed a glowing picture of nature's beauty. ❖

(page numbers refer to the John Muir Library/Sierra Club Books paperback edition of *Travels in Alaska*, © 1988. Selections by Vicky Hoover)



# Outlook for Alaska conservation in 114th Congress

## As U.S. Senate changes hands



In 2015, Sen. Lisa Murkowski (R-AK), currently ranking minority member on the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee, will become the chairwoman of this key committee. Senator-elect Dan Sullivan (R-AK) can be expected to support Sen. Murkowski's initiatives. Over in the House of Representatives, Rep. Don Young (R-AK), who earlier chaired the House Resources Committee, remains the senior Republican on that body.

Sen. Murkowski can be expected to move several bills she has been unable to advance due to Democratic control of the Senate. One is a state-federal land exchange designed to push a road across the present Izembek National Wildlife Refuge Wilderness. Another would open the coastal plain of the Arctic Refuge to oil and gas leasing. She also has a bill to authorize slant drilling into the coastal plain from adjacent state lands.

Attempts to weaken the provisions of the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA) in the 114<sup>th</sup> Congress are also possible, as well as oversight hearings for investigating Interior and Agriculture department policies and regulations that displease Sen. Murkowski and her colleagues who favor all-out resource extraction on the nation's public lands.

The Sealaska bill would allow the Sealaska Native regional corporation, which has 70,000 acres left to select under its Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA) grant, to take the acreage outside the congressionally

authorized selection areas. The corporation wants commercially valuable old and second growth trees, having already clear-cut the valuable timber on its existing selections within the authorized areas. The areas it wants contain productive salmon streams, other important wildlife habitat, and scenic and wilderness values. Its bill is opposed by the Sierra Club, other conservation organizations, sport, commercial, and subsistence groups, and local communities who fear what Sealaska would do to the forest that sustains their livelihoods. Sealaska is known for the worst logging practices on the Tongass.

As December began, the Sealaska bill and several other public lands bills were tacked onto the House's Defense authorization bill--a "must-pass" measure, which easily cleared the House. Conservationists still sought to derail the Sealaska and other objectionable attached bills, but the Senate was preparing to vote as **Sierra Borealis** went online.

Republicans controlled both houses of Congress for several years during the Clinton-Gore Administration. Veto threats proved effective in fending off Alaska bills President Clinton opposed, and his veto blocked a concerted attempt, led by the late Senator Ted Stevens, to open the Arctic Refuge to oil and gas leasing. Facing a similar, perhaps even more aggressive, Senate and House in the remainder of his term, President Obama may regularly have to use the Clinton formula to defend America's public lands. ❖

-- Jack Hession

## Sierra Borealis / alaska report

is the newsletter of the Alaska Chapter of the Sierra Club

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