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SierraBorealis

alaska report

SIERRA CLUB ALASKA CHAPTER
SEPTEMBER 2015



New Alaska Chapter Outings Program is born

photo: Dave Frankenfeld



Chapter outing in Anchorage "Hike for Clean Air" up Flattop

Once again, the Alaska Chapter has an active outings program. Across the country, Sierra Club Chapters and Groups lead local activities such as hikes, raft trips, climbs, and fishing excursions. Sierra Club calls them Outings. We've been doing it for more than a century, ever since founder John Muir discovered an essential truth while out hiking the high country. *If you want people to go to bat for the environment, you've got to get them into the wilderness.*

He was convinced that the best way to persuade people to fight to save valuable wild places was to take them into the wilderness so they could experience for themselves the beauty that needed defending. He said back in 1901:

"If people in general could be got into the woods, even for once, to hear the trees speak for themselves, all difficulties in the way of forest preservation would vanish."

The Sierra Club's National Outings Program was started by founder John Muir that year, with the help of

mountaineering leader Will Colby. And from the start the integration of conservation with outings has helped make Sierra Club unique among major conservation organizations.

This summer a few volunteers from Anchorage restarted the Alaska Chapter Outings program to reflect our shared love of the outdoors and the Chapter's commitment to making outdoor experiences safe, educational and fun.

Alaska's great outdoors brings visitors and new residents from around the world. Surprisingly, few programs exist in Anchorage to welcome new Alaskans safely into exploring our wild places. Something that sets Sierra Club's program apart is the volunteer leaders who scout, plan, and lead all of our outings. Fortunately Knik Group leader Julie Wahl stepped up. Together, she and other Knik Group members created a summer hiking schedule for the Anchorage area to meet the diverse needs of many Alaskans wanting to connect to the outdoors. So far, Julie, Ali Harvey, and Laura Comer are certified as Club outing leaders; additional volunteers are receiving training.

These summer hikes included slower walks on paved trails, visits through some of the Anchorage trail system's overlooked gems, and several longer excursions to Rabbit Lake and Eska Falls. In our inaugural year of the restarted Outings program, more than seventy people attended twelve outings. For many of the participants this was their first experience with the Sierra Club. For others, joining outings was what brought them into the Sierra Club years ago in other states.

Planning and scheduling for the winter outings season has already begun, and many participants look forward to revisiting these trails on snowshoes and skis together. ❖

-- Laura Comer

Alaska Chapter and Group Elections Ahead

YOUR chance to help run the show



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 active volunteers, in democratic processes. Every year, the members elect volunteers to serve as their local leaders.

Would you like to help decide Sierra Club policies and determine what issues are to be prioritized?? Elections will soon be held for positions on the Executive Committees of the Alaska Chapter and of the three regional groups within the Alaska Chapter.

Simply voting in the elections lets you help decide policy very indirectly, but how about going a step farther and running for office yourself?

Or nominating someone else? If you are a Sierra Club member and would like to run, or would like to nominate another member who is willing to run, please contact one of these members of the Chapter Nominating Committee for the 2016 term:

Lindsey Hajduk lhajduk@gmail.com ,
Pam Brodie pbrodie@gci.net , or
Patrick Fort, c.patrick.fort@gmail.com .

In addition to members elected "at-large", the Alaska Chapter ExCom includes a liaison from each of the three regional groups and its delegate to the Sierra Club Council of Club Leaders, *ex officio*, if that person is not already on the ExCom. Executive Committee terms are two years, with terms staggered so that half the committee is elected each year.

The three regional groups of the Alaska Chapter are the Tongass 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 13, 2015. The Nominating Committee will report the names of nominees to the Executive Committees on Tuesday, October 27. Members who wish to run but are not nominated may run if they submit to the nominating committee a petition to run signed by fifteen (15) members of the appropriate Chapter or Group. The deadline for candidate petitions to be received is Tuesday, November 10. 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 24; no candidates may serve on the Election Committee. Ballots will be printed and mailed on Friday, December 4. Marked ballots must be received at the Sierra Club office in Anchorage by Monday, January 11, 2016, and will be counted by the Election Committee starting at 5 pm. (This notice and schedule are in compliance with Sierra Club bylaws.) ❖

--by Pamela Brodie, Chapter Chair

"Thank You, President Obama, for restoring the name of Denali, The Great One."

-- Pamela Brodie, Chair, for Sierra Club Alaska Chapter



photo: Alan Carlton

➡ Let us e-mail to you!

Sierra Borealis/Alaska Report is published quarterly in electronic version by the Sierra Club Alaska Chapter and can be found on the Chapter website: <http://www.alaska.sierraclub.org/> (click on newsletters). We also mail the September issue to our members for whom we do not have e-mail addresses, as our bylaws require we notify members each fall of our upcoming elections.

We are eager to have the e-mail addresses of more Chapter members, so we can let you know directly when a new issue of *Sierra Borealis* is posted on the website. To help us save paper and postage, **please send your e-mail address to Chapter chair Pam Brodie, pbrodie@gci.net**. Include your name and mail address and 8-digit member number from the mailing label for identification.

Thanks, *Pam*

Memorial to Jerry Ganopole, a founder of the Alaska Chapter

As the 35th anniversary of the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA) approaches on December 2, 2015, it is appropriate to recognize Sierra Club members who played important roles in the enactment of the largest single public lands conservation act in this nation's history.

One of these members is the late Gerald (Jerry) Ganopole, Alaska oilman and co-founder of two Sierra Club Chapters, who died July 12 at the age of 94.

Following distinguished service in WW II as a B-24 navigator/bombardier in the European campaign, Jerry was an exploration petroleum geologist in the Bakersfield, California, oilfields. Moving to Anchorage in 1957, he headed Texaco's first Alaska office and later did consulting work and had his own Alaska Exploration Corporation with partner Jack Roderick.

While in Bakersfield, Jerry and his wife Mark co-founded the Kern-Kaweah Chapter of the Sierra Club, for which he was the first chairman. In Alaska the couple were actively involved in conservation issues, and in 1967-68, with other SC members, founded the Alaska Chapter.

Independent of employment with the oil and gas corporations then descending on Alaska, Jerry saw no conflict between environmentally responsible resource extraction and a commitment to environmental and public land conservation. In contrast, a later Chapter chairman who worked for one of the major oil and gas corporations was obliged by his employer to drop his chairmanship.

Dr. Edgar Wayburn, then president of the Sierra Club, relates in his memoirs the Ganopoles' role in the establishment of the Alaska Chapter. On visiting Alaska for the first time in 1967, Ed and his wife Peggy arranged to meet with as many of the ninety-nine Club members in Alaska as possible. Ed described the key meeting:

"In Anchorage, we had dinner with Club members Mark and Jerry Ganopole, Mr. and Mrs. George Dixon, and Mr. and Mrs. Jim Harle. They were interested in forming a local chapter, and I encouraged them to

round up the requisite fifty signatures and petition for chapter status."

They did, the Chapter was established, and Jerry became the first chairman. Later on that same trip, the Wayburns met in Juneau with Sierra Club members who decided to form the Juneau (now Tongass) Group of the Chapter, and after they visited Fairbanks, the Denali Group emerged.

Chapter status meant that Alaska members would have the financial, legal, and most importantly the political clout of the parent Club to support their conservation work; and the Club in return would benefit from the first-hand knowledge and experience of Chapter members to contend with several emerging national-scale Alaska issues. Primarily from the late 1960s these were Congress's settlement of Alaska Native land claims accompanied by the resumption of state land selections following the lifting of the federal land freeze; the battle over Admiralty Island in the largest timber sale in the history of the national forests; the Prudhoe Bay oil and gas strike and the Trans-Alaska Pipeline fight; and the epic and successful effort in Congress 1977-80 to set aside new Alaska national parks, wildlife refuges, wild & scenic rivers, and wilderness areas.

Jerry and Mark, aided by knowledgeable Club members, other conservationists, and federal agency personnel, identified Alaska's unreserved (BLM) public lands and national forest areas eligible for permanent (statutory) protection as new national conservation system units. Jerry and Mark's recommendations and counsel were readily accepted by the national Alaska Coalition of citizens and environmental groups including the Sierra Club that urged Congress to protect these lands. President Carter adopted many of the Coalition's proposals in his own excellent recommendations to Congress.

Alaskans and citizens of the nation who treasure Alaska wilderness can be thankful that Jerry was on hand to help preserve Alaska's globally important public lands. Mark Ganopole Hickok died in June, 2006. ❖

-- Jack Hession

Ninth Circuit decision protects Tongass roadless areas Court denies exempting Tongass National Forest from the Roadless Rule

In a major victory for America's largest rainforest, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit in late July struck down a Bush administration exemption of the Tongass National Forest from the Roadless Area Conservation Rule (known as the "Roadless Rule,") a landmark conservation rule adopted in 2001 to protect nearly 60 million acres of wild national forests and grasslands from new road building and logging. (**Sierra Borealis** Sept 2014) The Court held that the Bush administration failed to provide a reasoned explanation for reversing course on the Tongass. It concluded the Roadless Rule "remains in effect and applies to the Tongass."

"Today's decision is great news for the Tongass National Forest and for all those who rely on its roadless

areas. The remaining wild and undeveloped parts of the Tongass are important fish and wildlife habitat and vital to residents and visitors alike for hunting, fishing, recreation, and tourism, the driving forces of the regional economy," said Earthjustice attorney Tom Waldo.

This is yet another step in the longstanding efforts of Sierra Club and other activists—in Alaska and around the nation—to preserve the irreplaceable old-growth stands of America's largest national forest. The battle goes on: The state of Alaska could appeal the recent Ninth Circuit decision to the Supreme Court. And a separate court case waits in the DC circuit court challenging the national roadless rule. ❖

(In part, from a press release from Earthjustice.)



Court ruling protects Izembek Refuge Wilderness

Federal judge upholds Interior Department prohibition against proposed road

In a victory for conservation of Alaska's wild public lands, the U.S. District Court on September 8 upheld U.S. Secretary of the Interior Sally Jewell's decision to protect Izembek National Wildlife Refuge from construction of a road in its designated wilderness.

Last year, the court dismissed most of the legal claims made by the village of King Cove and the state of Alaska. The federal government has repeatedly studied a land swap and road proposed through refuge wilderness to ease King Cove access to the large Cold Bay airstrip for emergencies, and has consistently rejected the project because of its negative effects on the outstanding ecological resources and the wilderness values of the refuge.

Izembek's lagoon complex is a globally important ecosystem that contains one of the largest eelgrass beds in the world, providing food and habitat for fish and crabs that feed migratory birds from multiple continents. Virtually the entire world populations of Pacific black brant and emperor geese, and a significant portion of the threatened Steller's eider population visit the refuge each year to rest and feed during spring and fall migrations.

Almost all of the Izembek Refuge is congressionally designated wilderness. Of its total 315,000 acres, only an area of about 15,000 acres surrounding the village of Cold Bay and the refuge office and Visitor Center, with a minimal nearby road system, is outside of wilderness.

Since passage of the landmark Wilderness Act in 1964, no wilderness area has been stripped of protection for the purpose of constructing a road. (Since roads are prohibited in wilderness by law, the state of Alaska had proposed a land



Izembek Refuge location map in Cold Bay air terminal

exchange to remove the area of the proposed road from wilderness status.)

Organizations dedicated to protecting Izembek intervened in the case to preserve the exceptional values of the refuge and its wilderness. The groups were represented by Trustees for Alaska, a nonprofit, public interest law firm.

"The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Department of the Interior have studied this issue exhaustively, and ruled that the road should not be built," said Nicole Whittington-Evans, Alaska regional director for The Wilderness Society. "We hope that this issue can finally be resolved by all parties working together to find a non-road alternative that will address local residents' concerns while leaving Izembek's globally significant resources intact."

"We are gratified by the U.S. District Court ruling which upholds the decision made by Secretary Jewell against building a road across the Izembek Wilderness," said Fran Mauer, Wilderness Watch Alaska chapter

representative. "We will continue to work to assure that this great wildlife refuge and wilderness remains as it is, wild and free of human developments."

The Sierra Club has long opposed a land exchange designed to allow a road across the wilderness refuge. The trade would damage internationally important wildlife habitat and set a dangerous precedent for other units of the Wilderness System in Alaska and other states. (See **alaska report** Sept 1997, Oct 1998, Jan 1999, May, Sept & Dec 2001, Sept 2003, & Dec 2007.)

We have supported other ways to connect the village of King Cove and the community of Cold Bay, including expanded ferry service, other marine vessels, and increased air service. ❖

(In part, from a Trustees for Alaska release)



In Cold Bay-view over lagoon from Grants Point

President Obama comes to Alaska

He highlights severity of climate change but fails to stop Shell drilling

As the summer started, rumors flew in Alaska that President Obama was planning a visit to our state. Since he had previously only stopped momentarily in the state to refuel, a real presidential visit to Alaska was truly big news.

The rumors stopped swirling after the president made his official announcement in mid-summer: he planned a three-day trip to Alaska starting August 31, to focus almost exclusively on climate change. He would participate in the GLACIER international climate conference in Anchorage, visit Seward to see glaciers, film a reality TV segment with survivalist Bear Grylls, and then visit the communities of Dillingham and Kotzebue. The trip north to Kotzebue would make President Obama the first sitting president to ever visit the Arctic.

In a video explaining his visit and the connections he hoped to make, the president said,

"A lot of these conversations begin with climate change, and that's because Alaskans are already living with its effects...In fact, Alaska's governor recently told me four villages are in imminent danger and have to be relocated. Already rising sea levels are beginning to swallow one island community. Think about that. If another country threatened to wipe out an American town, we'd do everything in our power to protect ourselves. Climate change poses the same threat, right now. Because what's happening in Alaska is happening to us; it's our wake-up call."

In the weeks leading up to his visit, the reaction to his announcement and anticipation of his arrival in state was mixed. Some Alaskans questioned the president's "use" of the state as a backdrop to highlight the impact of climate change. Others hoped his visit would result in increased federal funding for villages to help them mitigate and adapt to the impacts of climate change.

And then, of course, the conservation community was both excited and disappointed about the president's leadership in Alaska. While we applauded his administration's vision in recommending the coastal plain of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge as wilderness recently, the latest decision of the Obama Administration to green-light Shell Oil to drill for oil offshore in the Chukchi Sea did not stack up with his stated goal to fight climate change. It would put coastal communities at high risk of an oil spill. This sense of a contradictory path was underscored when the president announced early on in his visit that his administration would prioritize new ice breaking vessels to bolster the U.S. presence in the Arctic Ocean.

However, it was good news when the night before his arrival in Alaska, the president announced that Mt. McKinley, the tallest mountain in the United States would officially be re-named Denali. This announcement was heralded because it restored the name of the mountain to

its original, Athabascan name. Even Senator Lisa Murkowski was pleased.

"I'd like to thank the president for working with us to achieve this significant change to show honor, respect, and gratitude to the Athabascan people of Alaska," she said in a video.

Other announcements in advance of his visit included funding to expand demonstration fisheries projects to address declining salmon stocks, particularly on the Kuskokwim and Yukon Rivers, and funding to increase internships and senior level advisory positions to support future careers in wildlife management.

Also, Anchorage was announced as one of ten pilot cities nationwide to try out a new AmeriCorps program to help low-income areas become more resilient to extreme weather events. Volunteers in the program will work on "increasing the energy efficiency of Anchorage's aging housing stock, enhancing energy grid resilience through microgrid development, and encouraging more local food production," the White House said.

On August 31, I was in downtown Anchorage when Air Force One landed. The sky was blue and clear, and eerily quiet for

a place usually filled with commercial, private, and military planes. We saw the plane descend in the skies behind a performer at

an "Our Climate, Our Future: Rally to Confront the Glacial Pace of Political Action [On Climate]" at the downtown Anchorage Delaney Park Strip, attended by about 300 people.

This climate-action rally was remarkably well attended for an Anchorage environmental demonstration, and the mood downtown was excited. People eagerly waited behind barricades to spot the presidential motorcade.

The president's first stop was at the Denai'na Center for the GLACIER conference, a high-level scientific conference focused on climate change.

"There is such a thing as being too late"

In his remarks at the conference, President Obama said, "On this issue, of all issues, there is such a thing as being too late. That moment is almost upon us. That's why we're here today. That's what we have to convey to our people -- tomorrow, and the next day, and the

-- continued page 6



President Obama takes a break while hiking at the Exit Glacier, Seward

photo: Official White House photographer Pete Souza
(from Behind the Lens online gallery)

Arctic Drilling? Shell gets the go-ahead

In mid-August, the Obama administration granted Shell the final permits required to begin drilling for oil in the Arctic's Chukchi Sea.

Previously, Shell had received conditional approval to drill offshore in the Arctic but was barred from hitting oil and gas bearing zones, until arrival of the capping stack, a device used to stop oil spills such as the Deepwater Horizon spill in 2010. The capping stack was aboard the icebreaker Fennica, which had been sent to Portland, Oregon, for repairs.

The return of the Fennica was delayed for nearly two days as activists suspended from Portland's St Johns Bridge, "kayaktivists" in the water, and protesters on land prevented the icebreaker from being able to leave. This event was one of several dozen very visible protests that took place around the country, as many thousands of activists demanded that the President stop Shell from drilling in the Arctic.

In response to the final permit, Sierra Club Executive Director Michael Brune said:

"President Obama's decision to grant Shell the final drilling permits goes against science, the will of the people, and common sense.... There's a 75-percent chance of a major oil

spill if Shell drills in the Arctic, and a 100-percent chance of further climate disruption. That's why many thousands of Americans have said 'Shell No' to drilling in the Arctic."

And California Congressman Jared Huffman (D-CA-2) champion of H.R. 239, the current Arctic coastal plain Wilderness bill, stated: "While climate change is bringing devastating drought and sweeping wildfires to California, the Arctic region is feeling even greater climate impacts -- permafrost thawing, shorelines and entire islands washing away, Arctic sea ice disappearing. Protecting our wild Arctic lands is something we must do for future generations. We can ensure that the vast deposits of fossil fuels in that area are left in the ground -- not extracted, burned and sent into the atmosphere to further warm our planet. We can ensure a place of refuge to help the Arctic's unique and fragile wildlife survive the stresses of climate change.

That's why I'm proud to be the lead author on a bipartisan bill to permanently protect the Coastal Plain of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge from oil drilling and other damaging activities. Wilderness protection is an important step for America's Arctic, and for the planet." ❖

President Obama in Alaska

-- from page 5

day after that. And that's what we have to do when we meet in Paris later this year."

photo: Official White House photographer Pete Souza



Sign marks old terminus now far from Glacier

The next day the president was welcomed in Seward, where he hiked at Exit Glacier. As he walked, he remarked on the frequent signs showing retreat of the glacier:

"So you guys have been seeing these signs as we've walked that mark where the glacier used to be -- 1917, 1961. This glacier has lost about a mile and a half over the last couple hundred years. But the

pace of the reductions of the glacier is accelerating rapidly each and every year. And this is as good of a signpost of what we're dealing with when it comes to climate change as just about anything....It is spectacular, though. And we want to make sure that our grandkids can see this [glacier]."

The following day, President Obama flew first to Dillingham, then on to Kotzebue. In Dillingham, he danced with a traditional Yup'ik dance group, ate salmon (and, briefly, held a live one), and said, while standing on Kakanak Beach, that Bristol Bay "represents not just a critical way of life that has to be preserved, but it also represents one of the most important natural resources that the United States has."

In Kotzebue, the president announced funding to assist villages adapting to the real-time impacts of climate change. This came as a welcome announcement, even if funds offered were modest compared to the actual mitigation costs.

Overall, President Obama's three day visit in Alaska was a significant event, both in that it was the first time any sitting U.S. president has visited the Arctic, but also due to the directness of the president's message on climate change. He also seemed to genuinely enjoy himself, remarking at one point in Dillingham that he wanted to bring Michelle and the girls back when he was no longer president.

Moving forward, the question remains about how the Obama Administration will reconcile the decision to



Bristol Bay salmon fishermen give President Obama a hands-on demonstration

photo: Official White House photographer Pete Souza
(from Behind the Lens online gallery)

allow Shell to drill in the Arctic Ocean with meaningful action to curb emissions and leave fossil fuels in the ground. The upcoming United Nations climate talks in Paris and the U.S. Chairmanship of the Arctic Council create more opportunities for the U.S. to lead the world in addressing climate change.

Now that the President has seen Alaska for himself, it seems he can better grasp firsthand what's at stake. ❖

-- Alli Harvey

National Park Service wants to allow plant gathering and removal by Indian tribes

The National Park Service (NPS) is proposing a regulation to allow members of federally recognized Indian tribes to gather and remove plants or plant parts for traditional purposes from units of the National Park System. Which units would be opened to this practice would be determined later under the proposed regulation, or rule, "...which would apply only to those Indian tribes traditionally associated with specific park units."

Four national parks in Alaska listed

Thirteen park system units in Alaska that constitute about half of the total acreage in the system are among the 408 being considered nationwide. Of the thirteen, four are listed as potentially open to the gathering and removal of plant resources: Katmai National Park and Preserve, the former Mt. McKinley National Park (now the wilderness heart of Denali National Park), Sitka National Historical Park, and Klondike Gold Rush National Historical Park.

Established prior to the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (Act) of 1980, the four were closed to subsistence before the Act passed. Congress maintained that status in the Act. New parks and preserves established by the 1980 Act encompassed areas in which subsistence was present at the time of the Act. In these units Congress authorized the continuation of subsistence.

Listing a unit in the proposed regulation doesn't guarantee that it will be opened to this subsistence practice. If the NPS finds that plant resources are available on Indian reservations, other Indian-owned land, or other public lands in the general vicinity, the unit could remain closed.

A questionable legal basis for the proposed rule

According to the NPS, a National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) statement on its proposed general rule is not required because Interior Department regulations allow a categorical exclusion from NEPA. If a tribe requests that a specific unit be opened, A NEPA analysis would apply.

The NPS did not assert a categorical exclusion for a similar rule. In 2014 it issued a rule allowing qualified local rural residents, both Alaska Natives and non-Natives, to gather and remove plant materials, shed or discarded horns antlers, and bones from Alaska units open to subsistence (*Sierra Borealis* June 2014). An extensive Environmental Assessment (EA) accompanying that rule noted potential adverse effects on cultural, recreation and scenic values, wilderness, and wildlife/wildlife habitat.

These potential adverse effects of plant gathering under the 2014 rule apply equally to the four Alaska parks and other park system units that could be opened under the proposed rule. This suggests that an Environmental Assessment under NEPA should be prepared for the

proposed rule as well .

NPS attempting to bypass Congress

In addition to avoiding NEPA compliance, the NPS also claims that the National Park System Organic Act of 1916 gives it regulatory authority to open park system units to the gathering and removal of plant resources. In the case of the four Alaska parks and other park system units now closed to plant gathering and removal, this claim of executive authority puts the NPS on a collision course with Congress.

In effect, the agency is asserting that its proposed rule pre-empts federal law, including the closure of Katmai and old Mt. McKinley parks to subsistence, as well as other units now closed to subsistence.

The public comment period for the proposed rule has been extended to September 28. It's possible that the final rule will resolve the conflict over executive versus congressional authority in favor of the latter.

If that were to happen, and if the NPS wished to pursue its proposed policy, it would be obliged to ask Congress to amend the law governing Katmai and old Mt. McKinley national parks, and perhaps other units in the System. Based on the Chapter's experience with recent NPS Alaska regulations and other actions, a resolution of this conflict in the final rule seems unlikely.

➡ What you can do

Help defend the integrity of the four Alaska parks by asking House and Senate subcommittee chairmen and ranking minority members to exercise their oversight on the proposed rule. Faxing a short letter is quick and effective.

Senator Bill Cassidy, Chairman
Senator Martin Heinrich, Ranking Member
Subcommittee on National Parks
Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee
304 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510 20510
Phone: (202) 224-4971

Representative Tom McClintock, Chairman
Representative Niki Tsongas, Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Federal Lands
House Natural Resources Committee
1324 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515
Phone: (202) 225-2761
Fax: (202) 225-5929

Representative Louie Gohmert, Chairman
Representative Debbie Dingell, Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations
House Natural Resources Committee
1324 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515
Phone: (202) 225-2761
Fax: (202) 225-5929 ❖

-- Jack Hession

Sierra Borealis / alaska report

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Featured in this issue:

Chapter Outings	p. 1
Chapter elections	p. 2
Denali name restored	p. 2
Jerry Ganopole memorial	p. 3
Ninth circuit on Tongass	p. 3
Izembek Refuge	p. 4
Obama in Alaska	pp. 5-6
Shell gets nod to drill	p. 6
Parks to open to gathering	p. 7
SPROG-Alaska youth training	p. 8

Alaska Youth Summer Grassroots Training

Each summer the Alaska Chapter of the Sierra Club has sent a few Alaskan youth away to attend the Sierra Student Coalition's summer national grassroots training, known as SPROG (for Summer Program). Late in 2014, a few past participants from University of Alaska and Alaska Pacific University came up with the idea to host our own version of the training here in Alaska! By hosting our own Sierra Student Coalition training we could ground the training materials in Alaskan perspectives and values and make sure that the participants--from places like Anchorage and Fairbanks as well as rural communities like Nuiqsut and Barrow--leave the training ready and able to effect changes to benefit the environment in their communities.

All in all - five trainers worked to plan and run this summer's Anchorage program August 14-18 at Alaska Pacific University. Two trainers from Puerto Rico, Alexis Rivera-Colon and Adriana Gonzalez, came and highlighted the unique organizing experience that often Alaskans share with Puerto Rico due to a similar relationship to the Contiguous 48 and our islanded electric grids. SSC alumna Erica Stout, now with the American Association of University Women, came from DC and brought her experience organizing on other progressive issues. And two of our own Alaska-raised SPROG-alumni, Tristan Glowa and Christina Edwin, rounded out our training team and ensured that the materials fit the needs of our participants.

This training allowed activists to reach out to many new

partners we haven't had the opportunity to connect with before. After contacting more than 40 organizations, we had twelve meetings

with potential partners that led to nine

of those groups lending their support to the training event with outreach help and youth nominations or with travel and lodging assistance to participants. These partnerships helped bring a diverse group of participants together -- from far north Nuiqsut to the interior of Alaska and down to the Kenai Peninsula -- some from communities of fewer than 200 residents. Eleven of the 29 applicants attended the training, and six of them were from Native communities.

Everyone left with new skills, new connections, and entirely new perspectives. A few of the students have already begun conversations and planning to restart the statewide coalition calls and to coordinate a campaign to address a new coal plant fee the University of Alaska schools are implementing. We are excited to continue to support these youth in their community organizing. ❖

-- Laura Comer



Lovebird © Israel Shotridge