



alaska report

VOLUME 32 | NUMBER 3 | OCTOBER 2006

Courts Rule in favor of Alaska's Environment

Kensington Mine on hold

Teshekpuk Lake drilling halted

On August 24 the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals issued an emergency injunction that requires Coeur de' Alene Mines Corporation of Idaho to stop all construction activities associated with their plan to dump toxic mine waste into Lower Slate Lake, a hitherto pristine alpine lake located north of Juneau, Alaska. Just weeks earlier, an Alaska District Court Judge had issued a

The US District Court for Alaska on September 25 issued a strongly worded decision that could save the internationally significant wildlife habitat around Teshekpuk Lake in the Northeast Planning Area of the National Petroleum Reserve, Alaska (NPR). The court found that the Interior Department shortchanged environmental protection for Teshekpuk Lake through an environmental analysis that violated federal environmental laws. The ruling strikes down the Interior Department's leasing plan for the area and prohibits the BLM from proceeding with a planned sale of oil and gas leases on more than 400,000 acres around the lake. The lease sale was to have taken place September 27.

September 27 Lease Sale Postponed Indefinitely

In the Sept. 25 decision in Juneau, U.S. District Judge James Singleton, Jr. found that the Department of Interior's Bureau of Land Management (BLM) failed to consider the cumulative environmental impact of widespread oil and gas drilling in the NPR, a key point in conservation groups' arguments against the plan to lease the area around Teshekpuk Lake. The decision enjoins BLM's leasing plan and remands the matter to the agency for further analysis.

Alaska Native communities which use Teshekpuk Lake for subsistence hunting and fishing strongly opposed the federal plan to allow oil and gas drilling around the lake. Scientists, sportsmen's groups, other conservationists, and hundreds of thousands of concerned citizens also voiced their concerns about the threat that drilling poses to nesting and molting grounds used by large populations of geese and other waterfowl and to caribou calving habitat. This summer, more than 100,000 concerned citizens submitted comments to the Interior Department demanding protection for vital habitat in the Teshekpuk Lake area, bringing the total number of pro-conservation comments to over 300,000 since 2005.

Besides being one of the most important and sensitive



decision, which the Club's Juneau Group decried as poorly reasoned and ill-considered, that would have allowed this dumping. Now two 9th Circuit Judges, one a Nixon appointee from Oregon and one a Carter appointee from California, unanimously agreed to halt Coeur's dumping scheme, thus precluding further environmental damage while the court considers the merits of the case. This new decision strongly indicates that the Judges believed the Sierra Club and its co-plaintiffs are likely to win this case after it is briefed and oral arguments are heard this November.



Slate Lake before and after

Background

A year ago, in September 2005, the Sierra Club filed suit

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photos: Mark Rorick

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arctic wetland complexes in the Northern Hemisphere, the Teshkepuk Lake Special Area is home to the 45,000-head Teshkepuk Lake caribou herd, 60,000 molting geese a year, and the entire breeding population of Steller's eiders. Hundreds of species of birds migrate from six continents to spend part of the year in Teshkepuk Lake.

The Teshkepuk Lake Special Area was established in 1977 by Interior Secretary Cecil Andrus. This designation meant that the wildlife, subsistence and cultural values of the lake's fragile wetlands must receive maximum protection under any future development scenario. Until recently, this designation was enough to protect this pristine place. But the Bush administration pursued its intention to turn the Teshkepuk Lake Special Area into a giant network of drilling platforms, gravel roads, airstrips and pipelines.

For now, Teshkepuk Lake will not be auctioned to the highest bidder. The BLM must now operate under the Clinton Administration's 1998 plan for the NPRA. Thus, Bush's plan, with weakened environmental stipulations across the entire Northeast planning area, is now illegal. Stay tuned for next steps on how to permanently protect this special place. This is a positive moment in Alaska conservation. The Court decision is based on public sentiment, local knowledge and sound science, not political pressure. We hope it sets a trend as agencies and lawmakers decide the fate of other critical Alaska lands, like the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge.

For more info, go to: <http://www.sierraclub.org/arctic/western/> ♦

-- Betsy Goll

Roadless Rule Reinstated!

One of President Bush's first acts upon taking office in 2001 was to put on hold the Clinton-era *Roadless Rule*, and a federal district court in California has just (late September 2006) ordered the administration to reinstate this popular law. It is the latest - albeit one of the biggest - development in the saga over how to manage nearly 60 million acres of America's remaining wild forests.

The ruling indicated a larger trend: failure of the Bush administration's forest and environmental policies that were heavily skewed in favor of the timber industry.

However, despite Judge Laporte's ruling in favor of roadless-area protection, still at question is the long term status of the roadless areas in the Tongass National Forest in Alaska. In 2003, the Bush administration exempted the Tongass from the roadless rule by creating a separate amendment based on the validity of the Tongass Land Management Plan. That plan, commonly known as "TLMP," was declared illegal in a separate court case earlier this year. A Draft Environmental Impact Statement on the *new* TLMP is expected in the coming months; it will be a welcome opportunity for the public to weigh in on this plan and engage in a national campaign to reinstate the Tongass in the Roadless Rule.

The recent court decision on the Roadless Rule case did reinstate protections for the Chugach National Forest.

More info: <http://www.sierraclub.org/forests/roadless/> ♦

-- Betsy Goll

against the Army Corps of Engineers to oppose Coeur d'Alene's Kensington hard rock mining project, located a few miles beyond the northern end of the City of Juneau road system (50 miles north of downtown Juneau) in the Tongass National Forest.

Fifteen years and several proposed operating plans after the initial proposal, Coeur's current operating plan would pipe 4.5 million tons of mine waste into Lower Slate Lake in the Tongass National Forest. (See **alaska report**, Nov. 2005, March '04, Sept., Nov. '02, Aug. '99, March '94). Conservation groups have opposed this operating plan since its inception, because of the dangers of toxic waters stored in the lake and the irrevocable impacts on nearby Berners Bay and its watershed.

The Club and its conservation partners, Lynn Canal Conservation and the Southeast Alaska Conservation Council, challenged the decision by the Corps of Engineers to issue a permit to Coeur d'Alene that would allow the deposit of 4.5 million tons of chemically processed mine waste from the Kensington Gold Mine into a freshwater lake. The plaintiffs held that this decision violated the Clean Water Act.

Coeur has already built a docking facility in Berners Bay at Slate Creek Cove for off-loading supplies and workers and shipping out containers of gold concentrate. Another dock is scheduled to be constructed at the south end of Berners Bay at Cascade Point. Cascade Point contains spawning habitat for the depressed Lynn Canal stock of Pacific herring. The Slate Creek Cove facility is close to seal "haul outs" and eulachon spawning grounds.

Coeur's mine waste would consist of the ground-up mine ore that is left over after the gold concentrate has been removed chemically from it. The waste would then be mixed with mine water into a slurry so it could flow by gravity through a 3 mile pipeline into Lower Slate Lake. A dam was being constructed at the time the injunction was issued to increase the lake's size so it could receive the 210,000 gallons per day of waste the mine is projected to generate.

The Corp of Engineers says the slurry would be as alkaline as ammonia as it exits the pipeline (with a Ph as high as 10 to 11). Even after the slurry is diluted by lake water, treatment would be needed before any water is allowed to flow from the lake into Berners Bay, an extremely rich marine habitat. The dam itself would have to hold back at least 4.5 million tons of mine waste forever.

The case is an extremely important one for the Club and all groups and people interested in defending the Clean Water Act. If Coeur de' Alene's dumping plan is allowed to proceed it would be the first time since the passage of the CWA that a gold mine was allowed to dispose of chemically processed mine waste into a water body of the United States.

Allowing this scheme to go forward would set a precedent that would affect mining practices throughout the country. The stakes could hardly be higher for both the Club and the Coeur de' Alene Mines. ♦

-- Mark Rorick

(Mark Rorick is chair of the Juneau Group.)

BP Shuts Down Prudhoe Bay: Arctic concerns raised

"We'll look back on this event as the Pearl Harbor Day in energy," said Matthew Simmons, chairman of energy investment bank Simmons & Co. International in Houston. "The chance that the leaks and corrosion found at Prudhoe Bay by BP (British Petroleum), Europe's second-largest oil company, are an isolated occurrence is 'zero,'" said Simmons, who is writing a book on aging oil infrastructure.

"It is appalling that BP let this critical pipeline deteriorate to the point that a major production shutdown was necessary," said Rep. John D. Dingell (D-MI), Ranking Member of the House Committee on Energy and Commerce. "BP must take all steps necessary to repair or replace problem pipelines quickly, so the American consumer does not pay for BP's laxity. And the United States Congress has an obligation to hold hearings to determine what broke down here and what laws and regulations need to be improved to ensure problems like these are found and fixed earlier."

Corrosion in the fragile, aged pipe was blamed for a spill of at least 267,000 gallons in March and a smaller spill in August. In August, BP discovered so many troubling locations that it decided to shut down the entire Prudhoe operation, causing a brief \$2 spike in the price of oil. It since decided to close only the eastern half, cutting Prudhoe production by roughly 200,000 barrels. While it plans to eventually replace the entire 16 miles of transit pipeline, BP hopes to restore the eastern production by end of October through temporary repairs and bypasses of bad spots.

"The chance that the leaks and corrosion found at Prudhoe Bay by BP are an isolated occurrence is zero".

Connection with the Arctic Refuge

BP's latest scandal is more evidence that the industry cannot and should not drill in sensitive places—off our coasts, the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge and Teshekpuk Lake. The oil companies' record on the North Slope has been abysmal with more than 400 spills annually. Their record proves that drilling is dirty, dangerous and destructive and should only take place in restricted areas.

In the meantime, another BP spill has occurred in California. According to Lois Epstein, Cook Inletkeeper's Senior Engineer & Oil & Gas Specialist, "wall thinning on this pipeline was enormous (over 80% in some places) and the industry has very little flexibility under those circumstances under industry codes, so BP had to shut down even if neither the state or federal governments required it to do so. And what does that say about ConocoPhillips lines on the North Slope, and Exxon's lines? And similar pipelines elsewhere near aging oil fields?"

In a Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee hearing the week of Sept. 11, Republican and Democratic senators pounded on BP officials. Committee chairman Sen. Pete Domenici, (R-NM), said that BP's conduct might have cost advocates their

slight edge. "ANWR [the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge] might go backwards with this kind of event," Domenici said.

Sen. Lisa Murkowski, R-AK, spoke of the betrayal she has felt after years of trying to sell refuge drilling as completely safe. "This is a painful hearing for me as an Alaskan, to be talking about corrosion that has allowed for a spill on the North Slope. I'm sure you have heard from other Alaskans who are disappointed, frustrated, angry, because for years we've been told by the industry, and we have stood alongside—we have said the operations on Alaska's North Slope are the gold standard. That's what we believed; that's what we want to continue to believe. But that faith has been shattered by what we're seeing up north now."

Pipeline Safety Legislation

The current pipeline safety law expires at the end of September, and Congress would need to reauthorize or extend it. In the House, Democratic members of the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee want to modify committee-passed pipeline safety legislation to address BP's handling of its Alaskan oil pipelines. But Chairman Don Young, R-AK, says "it's a good bill and we're going to stick with it." The House Energy and Commerce Committee is also working on a pipeline safety reauthorization bill, and ranking member John Dingell, D-MI, has criticized the Bush administration's proposed rule for not covering enough low-stress pipelines. No Senate action has occurred. ♦

--Maryellen Oman

Record of oil spills on the North Slope

- 1978: 700,000 gallons when vandals blew up a section of the 800-mile line shortly after the pipeline opened
- 1989: 39,000 gallons
- 1996: 410 total spills
- 1997: 758,000 gallons of diluted seawater; 475 total spills
- 1998: 412 total spills
- 1999: 375 total spills
- 2000: 400 total spills
- 2001: 280,000 gallons when a hunter fired his rifle into the pipeline (cleanup cost: \$7 million); 625 total spills
- 2002: well explosion; 675 total spills
- 2003: blowout; 600 total spills
- 2004: blowout; 550 total spills
- 2005: 111,300 gallons of "produced water" (separated from the mixture of crude oil and liquid natural gas) from buried pipeline
- 2006: 267,000 gallons from a corroded transit pipeline in a caribou crossing area

Arctic Refuge and Congress

With the legislative session winding down, the enormous plate of unfinished business, and the glaring publicity about pipeline woes, it is unlikely Congress will pass arctic drilling legislation before the November elections. After a month of summer campaigning, Congress returned on September 5th for a final burst of activity before returning again to the

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Alaska Task Force Chairman Ed Wayburn turns 100

A Voice for the Wilderness

September 17, 1906. Edgar Wayburn is born in Macon, Georgia.

September 17, 2006. Ed celebrates his centennial in the San Francisco Bay Area via a big party by the Wayburn family at their home in Bolinas, California, and, a couple of days earlier, by another grand party given him by the Sierra Club.

And in between? To echo the title of the editorial in the Sept. 17, 2006 San Francisco Chronicle, Ed Wayburn was *A Voice for the Wilderness*.

We don't have space here to detail all the momentous accomplishments in the environmental career of the Sierra Club's Honorary President and Alaska Task Force Chairman. Let's just touch on three outstanding events that Ed himself highlights as especially meaningful for him:

** The Golden Gate National Recreation Area.

** Redwood National Park.

** Alaska and the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act.

The Golden Gate: Growing up in Georgia, young Edgar was acclimated to the outdoors around home and through numerous summer scout camp experiences. As a young doctor, just out of Harvard Medical School, in 1933 he chose the San Francisco area to settle in, partly because of all the surrounding open space. He joined the

Arctic Refuge and Congress

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campaign trail. The aftermath of BP's Prudhoe Bay disaster fueled statements from a number of pro-drilling lawmakers that the disaster in Prudhoe Bay may have ruined chances to push arctic refuge drilling legislation through this year. Further, a couple of key members of Congress who have voted for arctic drilling, such as Senator Akaka (D-HI), have indicated they may reconsider in future. Akaka, a long-time friend of Senator Ted Stevens and arctic oil drilling proponent, faces a stiff election against a candidate who publicly opposes drilling in the Arctic Refuge. All in all, how arctic votes will look post-election remains to be seen.

After the November election, Congress will reconvene for a "Lame Duck" session to wrap up unfinished items before the end of the year. Arctic activists are on "rider" alert, looking for any bad legislation that might get tacked on to big bills like an omnibus Interior bill or energy bill. All bills but the budget bill can be filibustered in the Senate, so we will continue to ensure we have enough votes to block bad legislation that may arise.

While it is expected the Congress will focus any energy debates on increased supply, there are several forward-thinking proposals before Congress right now that could help to end our oil dependence, save consumers money and fight global warming. We will continue to educate lawmakers on why drilling in the Arctic Refuge is not the answer to America's energy needs.

For more info: <http://www.sierraclub.org/arctic/justthefacts/> ♦

-- Betsy Goll

Sierra Club in 1939 to go on a burro trip in the Sierra Nevada. Returning to the Bay Area after four years of military duty during World War II, he was



Ed Wayburn on his 100th birthday with "Alaskan" admirers, Vicky Hoover, Jack Hession, Cabot Christianson and Cynthia Pickering Christianson (seated with Ed)

alarmed by big changes; the wide-open hills around the Bay consumed by new housing developments and roads. Ed began seeking opportunities for preserving some of the open land still dominant in the North Bay. Successful campaigns ensued to expand Mt. Tamalpais State Park, to establish the Point Reyes National Seashore, and finally, as the last link in this vital system of connected open space, the Golden Gate National Recreation Area, legislated in 1972. This grand urban-to-rural haven for public enjoyment remains a shining star of the National Park System.

The Redwoods: By the mid-1950s, Ed and his wife Peggy with their four children were spending the family summer vacations surveying undeveloped scenic areas in the U.S. West for possible inclusion in parks and other protected areas. They began to visit the great redwoods of northern California after massive damage from a 1955 storm brought attention to problems that arise when protection is limited to land low down in a watershed, and logging higher up could unleash devastating erosion and sediment on an area considered "protected". Ed and Peggy set about campaigning to acquire upper watershed properties and persuaded the Sierra Club's Board of Directors to make establishment of a Redwood National Park one of its priority campaigns. Many years of intensive effort culminated in the park's establishment in 1968 and its significant expansion a decade later. The park included large amounts of logged areas that gave the National Park Service a chance to demonstrate the effectiveness of restoration work.

Alaska: Ed is proud that he has been on 35 trips to Alaska. But his first one happened almost accidentally. In 1967 Ed suggested as a family vacation a venture into Eastern Canada. But Peggy had heard about Alaska from a friend and from hearing a talk by Starker Leopold and was curious about it, and to Alaska they headed. They both were so overwhelmed by the scale and magnificence of the Alaska landscapes and the opportunities for future preservation of this vast federal domain that on their return to San Francisco, Ed, then Sierra Club president, set aside an hour on the agenda of the next Board meeting to speak about Alaska. That hour made Alaska, for the first time, a Sierra Club priority.

Jack Hession, the Sierra Club's first Alaska field staffer,

Ed Wayburn, a Voice for the Wilderness

reminisced about the impact of Ed's efforts: "During the Club's 1971-80 national campaign for passage of the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act, Ed ensured that the bill remained the Club's highest legislative priority, and that the effort was fully funded. He also skillfully lobbied key members of Congress on visits to Capitol Hill, such as the late Henry M. "Scoop" Jackson, with whom Ed also cooperated on the Redwoods, North Cascades, and other national park bills. It was Ed who convinced Sen. Jackson to add the National Interest Lands amendment to Jackson's bill settling Alaska Native land claims in 1971. This amendment, which was sponsored in the House by the late representatives Morris K. Udall and John Saylor, was a necessary condition for the ultimate victory in 1980, when ANILCA was signed into law."

It took 13 years from that first Wayburn trip until ANILCA was passed, and even then the job was not done. The Act has had to be diligently defended from attacks by the Reagan and both Bush administrations, and from an intensely anti-conservation and pro-resource-extraction Alaska Congressional delegation.

Ed continues as leader of this defense as Chairman of the Alaska Task Force, which he started in the 1970s.

The Wayburns' numerous Alaska trips had the goal of learning about areas

that needed protection. But equally valuable to Ed and Peggy was the experience of enjoying Alaska, taking in the wonder of its magnificent, unsurpassed landscapes and ecosystems. Of the many special places he and Peggy visited, marveled at, and worked to protect, Ed recalls a few special favorites: Admiralty Island, Denali, Wrangell-St. Elias National Park, and Lake Clark.

He notes, too, that among the public officials they toured with in Alaska were Secretary of the Interior Rogers Morton, National Park Service Director George Hartzog, and Nevada Senator Alan Bible, chair of the Senate Subcommittee on Public Lands, (who provided crucial support for Ed's suggestion to add the National Interest Lands amendment to the Native Claims bill.)

At Ed's 100th birthday party, Alaskan Cynthia Pickering Christianson vividly described a recollection of Ed in Alaska:

"In the late 1980s, I was fortunate to run the Fortymile River with Ed and Peggy Wayburn. Ed, Peggy, Jack Hession, my husband Cabot, and I had put in on the Fortymile in 2 rafts near the town of Chicken. The Fortymile is in Alaska near the Canadian border and was named a Wild and Scenic River in 1980. Though remote, it has been the site of mining activity for decades, and, as a Justice Department lawyer representing President Carter and defending his Alaska

land withdrawals in the 1970s, I was well aware of the intense feelings and anger felt by miners in Alaska toward conservation designations of land and rivers, which they perceived as a threat to their way of life.



Ed and Peggy in Denali, 1991

On our second day on the river, we had stopped for lunch on a brushy river bar, when a man pulled up in a skiff, eating cornbread out of a cast iron skillet as he landed his boat. The man had long unkempt hair, a dirt-encrusted long "duster"-type coat. He purposefully strode toward us and said, "I hear the Sierra Club is on the river". Ed never flinched and stepped forward, introduced himself, and explained his connection with the Club. I, on the other hand, afraid, bolted for the bushes, where I could hear, but not be seen.

Ed and the miner proceeded to engage in a lengthy conversation in which they discussed the reasons for the protection of the river and other lands and the harmful effect the miner felt it could have on his way of life. Ed stood his ground, but was respectful and thoughtful in his responses to our guest. Finally, Ed and the miner, who indeed had gold in his boat, shook hands. The miner got in his boat and disappeared down the river. Ed demonstrated, for me, one of the most memorable examples of personal integrity and courage I've seen." ♦

-- Vicky Hoover

Alaska leader Mark Hickok dies

Longtime Anchorage resident and environmental activist Mark Hickok died on June 19, 2006, at Alaska Regional Hospital. With her first husband, Gerald Ganopole, she was a cofounder of the Sierra Club's Alaska Chapter. Jack Hession, former Sierra Club Alaska Representative, noted: "Mark was a key leader in the establishment of the state park system and moving force behind the only wilderness park in Alaska, Kachemak Bay State Wilderness Park. That effort on behalf of state parks, especially wilderness, reflected her life-long commitment to wilderness in Alaska."

At its recent September meeting, the Sierra Club's Board of Directors passed a Memorial resolution in her honor:

"The Sierra Club Board of Directors notes with sadness the recent death of Mark Hickok, of Anchorage, Alaska.

Born in Los Angeles, California, in 1922, as Margaret Amy Beaumont, she changed her legal name to "Mark" when she worked for the male-dominated United Press International.

She was one of the founders of the Club's Kern-Kaweah Chapter in 1958 when she was married as Mark Ganopole. Not long afterward, she moved to Alaska, where she helped start the Alaska Chapter. She was a Club Director from 1977 to 1980 and served on the Board of the National Parks and Conservation Association. She was influential in conservation in Alaska, and was a leader in the establishment of Chugach and Kachemak state parks, as well as in the selection of the lands that were set aside in the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act." ♦

photo: Jim Roush



Ed and Peggy Wayburn and family and Jack Hession on the Sheenjek River, 1990

Wild Lands for Wild Salmon Week

Spotlight on Alaska's Building Environmental Community Program (BEC):

Alaska's wild salmon are key to the state economy, supporting commercial and sport fishing, tourism, hospitality, subsistence, and the Alaskan way of life. Wild salmon depend on healthy forests, and clean water, oceans and rivers.

This year, Sierra Club Alaska field staff and 23 volunteers organized the 5th annual *Wild Lands for Wild Salmon* celebration, to reach out to the public and educate Alaskans about the link between wild lands and wild salmon, during the week of August 6-12.

In 2006, 90 businesses from across the state signed on to our Wild Lands for Wild Salmon proclamation, which identified the critical link between wild salmon and wild lands, highlighting the watersheds of the Tongass and Chugach National Forests. These businesses represent commercial and recreational fishing, restaurants, gift shops, retail outfitters, hotels, bookstores, grocery stores, sporting goods stores, coffee shops, and tourism and recreation. For the week of August 6-12, all business supporters displayed Sierra Club promotional materials such as a community event poster, window sticker identifying their business as a Wild Lands for Wild Salmon supporter, and tri-fold tabletop fact sheet about the need to protect wild lands for the benefit of wild salmon, and what folks can do to keep our forests healthy and wild.

This year the week of celebrations went statewide, with six community gatherings, three volunteer nights and major media events in Anchorage, Juneau, Sitka and Ketchikan. The approximately 150 participants included business leaders, non Sierra Club members recruited from door-to-door visit, Sierra Club members who had never participated in an event before, and long time members who were once active in the Club and came to get re-engaged.

In Anchorage we hosted a major media event, two phone banks, door-to-door canvassing, tabling, and two outings to learn about local salmon restoration. Besides educating the community, these events aimed to build new relationships with local conservation organizations and the Municipality of Anchorage, pull in new volunteers, and identify new potential future volunteers.

A big press conference that included the Mayor of Anchorage, local businesses and Sierra Club representatives was held at a downtown restaurant overlooking a wild salmon stream. The Mayor of Anchorage declared August 6-12, 2006, to be "*Wild Lands for Wild Salmon week*" and applauded the partnership work of the Sierra Club. Business supporters spoke of economic and quality of life benefits to having wild salmon runs in city and state.

Southeast events featured community potlucks. Sean Cosgrove, National Lands Team and Clyde Hanson, National Forest Protection and Restoration Committee Chair, joined field staff and Chapter leaders at these local gatherings. The Juneau event sought to strengthen the local BEC volunteer base. In Sitka and Ketchikan BEC kickoff events aimed at connecting to our members and identifying new conservation volunteers.

The 5th annual Wild Lands for Wild Salmon Week was very successful. The Alaska staff and volunteers will continue to pro-

mote the Building Environmental Communities program and hope to build it into a long term campaign to engage allies to protect critical lands vital to healthy Alaska fisheries. ♦

-- Betsy Goll

Alaska Offshore Drilling Planned

Public Comment Period ends Nov. 22

The U.S. Minerals Management Service is reviewing its new draft plan for federal OCS (Outer Continental Shelf) off-shore oil and gas drilling in Alaska and other waters nationwide. Alaska's Bristol Bay, which has been protected under presidential moratoria since the Exxon Valdez oil spill, would be opened to offshore oil and gas drilling under this new plan. Further areas at risk include the entire arctic coastline, from off the shore of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge to the very reaches of the western arctic. Comments can be submitted until November 22 on the draft plan and EIS.

On September 28 there was an important public meeting in Anchorage on the plan for federal off-shore lease sales in Alaska. Other Alaska public meetings will be held in Good New Bay - Oct. 9, Naknek - Oct. 10, Dillingham - Oct. 11, Nuiqsut - Nov. 8, Kaktovik - Nov. 10, Wainwright - Nov. 13, and Point Lay - Nov. 14.

-- Betsy Goll

⇒ WHAT YOU CAN DO:

Please write to the Minerals Management Service by the **November 22 deadline**: Urge MMS to:

1. Remove Bristol Bay from the five-year plan.
2. Prohibit any more lease sales or further exploration or development until industry demonstrates definitely that it can clean up spilled oil in icy conditions.
3. Not schedule any more lease sales or allow further exploration until you study adequately the effects that oil and gas activities, including powerful seismic air gun surveys, have on whales, fish, and other marine wildlife in America's Arctic waters.

Write to: Minerals Management Service
5-year Program Manager
381 Elden Street, MS 4010, Herndon, VA 20170

Comments are not accepted by e-mail. To submit comments electronically, go to the internet comment site at: <http://www.mms.gov/5%2Dyear/2007-2012main.htm#Commenting>. ♦



Update – Alaska’s Intensive Predator Control for Wolves and Bears

The Alaska Board of Game met in Anchorage in May, 2006, and finalized implementation plans for extreme predator control across approximately 50,000 square miles, an area the size of Wyoming. The board voted to make its “emergency predator control” permanent, and to implement extreme wolf control (without scientific justification) in a vast new area covering several game management units areas used by the Fortymile caribou herd.

There was high praise for private pilots who were eager to provide their own planes – and local gunners -- for aerial killing of wolves. These were lauded by the Board as public-minded, local “heros”. Ted Spraker noted that “these pilots have spent a great deal of their time and money to remove wolves and have saved the state a lot of money. We should be proud to be part of this team.”

Extreme control for multiple Game Management Units

Rationale given by the Board of Game for intensive predator management over such a large area of Alaska is that subsistence users from the villages are not able to find game in their immediate area. Although there was no such subsistence necessity for “urban” hunters, it was clear that the Alaska Department of Fish & Game was catering to the urban population. The department spokesperson claimed that hunters from Anchorage and the MatSu valley are being “forced” to move farther away for hunting due to the decreasing (depleted) local moose populations. However ADF&G did not support shortening the moose hunting season-- instead the spokesman stated that there was no requirement to shorten the hunting season in an intensive management area. Regulations were then amended to allow land-and-shoot as well as the use of snow machines for running down (or “positioning”) wolves for killing.

Extreme predator control of wolves with use of snow-machines was also approved for portions of the Kuskokwim River drainage (Unit 19D and the Upper Yukon/Tenana Unit 12, 20E). Snowmachines are now also allowed to “position” the hunter to kill brown bears in the Upper Yukon/Tenana and also for both brown and black bears within Unit 19D (in Kuskokwim River drainage).

Airborne black bear baiting and season extension

A new regulation voted in by the board now allows taking of black bears at bait stations in predator control areas on the same day that the hunter has flown in, with the only requirement being that the bear or bears be killed at least 300 feet from the airplane. Discussion prior to the vote noted that a few members of the public want to “check their bait stations from the air”. Board member Cliff Judkins noted that “this is another tool in the tool box. If there are no bears, then the hunter will not have to camp out all night.”

The Board of Game discussed extension of the bear baiting season in some areas to last from mid-August to October 15, resuming again April 15 to June 30 (covering the entire period in fall when bears would be preparing for hibernation, or else emerging from their dens in early spring, often with hungry cubs in tow.)

Board member Ben Grussendorf noted that extension of the baiting season over this long period would assure that bears will become habituated to the bait station throughout the year. Notwithstanding however, this unprecedented lengthy bear baiting season was voted in for all of Unit 16. No one asked to see the breakdown of bear deaths at the baiting station by age group, by sex, whether there would be an excessive take of sows with cubs which also became habituated, or effects on other non-target species. No one asked about the long-term effects of such an extraordinary long bear baiting season. (see **alaska report**, March 2006.)

Attempts to push predator control into Parks & Refuges

There are about 52 million acres within the Yukon Charley, Wrangell St. Elias, Denali and Lake Clark National Parks and more than 70 million acres in the National Wildlife Refuges in Alaska which are currently off limits for the state’s extreme predator control program.

The board discussed proactive measures such as a memorandum to these federal agencies to push them into allowing predator control. Until now however, the National Park Service has stated that “wildlife inside of National Preserves is not to be managed for ‘maximum sustained yield’, as this is contrary to the federal management standard of “conservation of healthy populations (ANILCA section 802 and 50 CFR 100.4”); NPS: March, 2006). The Fish & Wildlife Service has a similar stand opposing the state’s position.

In August of this year, the twice-appointed chairman of the Alaska Board of Game, Mike Fleagle, was named to serve as chairman of the Federal Subsistence Board, replacing a Native leader who had served as chairman of the federal board for 11 years. Mike Fleagle, a strong advocate of intensive predator control, had helped to re-launch the state’s aerial wolf control program in 2002. Wildlife advocacy and conservation groups are quite concerned about what effect his appointment may have on the federal management standard of “conservation of healthy populations” on federal lands, including both predators and prey.

⇒ WHAT YOU CAN DO:

Visit the website for the Alaska Wildlife Alliance (www.akwildlife.org) and learn about the current litigation we are undertaking with Defenders of Wildlife against the Board of Game’s current intensive predator control. Also, please send letters to the editor to:

**Anchorage Daily News

P. O. Box 149001, Anchorage, AK 99514

Fax: 907-258-2157 www.adn.com

**Fairbanks Daily News-Miner

200 North Cushman St., P. O. Box 70710

Fairbanks, AK 99707

Fax: 907-452-7917 www.newsminer.com ♦

-- Valanne Glooschenko

Knik Group volunteer & Alaska Wildlife Alliance Board member

Alaska's Renewable Energy Future: *Promising projects on board*

Several proactive projects on the table give hope for Alaska's renewable energy future. For two years the Renewable Energy Alaska Project (REAP) has been organizing Alaska electric utilities and utility interests, conservation and consumer groups, businesses, and Alaska Native interests into an organization that advocates for renewable energy projects in Alaska. REAP (see **alaska report**, Dec. 2004) has gotten the attention of the Alaska Legislature, and the Democratic candidates for governor and lieutenant governor are touting renewable energy projects that could save consumers money, create jobs, curb global warming and protect public lands.

Currently 27 hydroelectric projects are producing 24 percent of Alaska's electricity. The largest hydro project is 126 megawatts at Bradley Lake; the smallest is 1 megawatt in the village of Akutan. Dutch Harbor's seafood processor Unisea uses one million gallons of a fish oil/diesel mixture to produce electrical power. Eielson Air Force Base supplies 1.5 percent of its heat and power by burning paper waste. In the small Alaska community of Lime Village, 106 photovoltaic panels supply electricity to a diesel-solar-battery system. Kotzebue's wind farm generates enough electricity to save approximately 100,000 gallons of diesel fuel each year. The federal Bureau of Indian Affairs has awarded a grant toward bringing more wind turbines to the east Aleutian communities of False Pass, King Cove, Kikolski, and Sand Point and to the Pribilof Islands village of St. George.

In Anchorage, Alaska's largest city, Mayor Mark Begich

has signed the Mayors' Global Climate Agreement, (see **alaska report**, June 2006) and many projects are currently in place or planned—such as capturing methane released from the landfill to power 2,500 homes; biodiesel projects utilizing used vegetable oil from restaurants and fish oil from fish waste around the state; and a proposed 50-megawatt wind farm on Anchorage's Fire Island.

This positive renewable energy picture is threatened by current corporate subsidies for oil and gas, weak state investments, and the rush for coal and other fossil fuels. Galena is negotiating with a Japanese firm to build a nuclear power demonstration plant. The National Petroleum Reserve-Alaska (NPR-A) has potentially the largest coal field in North America. The proposed Chuitna coal project just 50 miles across Cook Inlet from Anchorage potentially could be the largest coal project in Alaska. While the operator has not said who will purchase the coal, Chuitna coal would be likely to power the proposed Pebble Mine; lead to dirty power plants, including mercury emissions that will accumulate in Alaskan salmon; and aggravate Alaska's already severe climate change problems.

--Maryellen Oman



alaska report

alaska report is the newsletter of the Sierra Club Alaska Task Force, encouraging advocacy on Alaska federal lands issues, particularly as they pertain to the passage and implementation of the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act of 1980.

Sierra Club

85 Second Street
San Francisco, CA 94105-3456
(415) 977-5500

Edgar Wayburn, M.D., Chairman, Alaska Task Force
Vicky Hoover, Editor

Sierra Club Alaska Field Office

333 West 4th Ave., Suite 307
Anchorage, AK 99501-2341
(907) 276-4048

Betsy Goll, Alaska Regional Representative
Katherine Fuselier, Conservation Organizer
Maryellen Oman, Program Assistant

Southeast Alaska

(907) 209-2999
Irene Alexakos, Membership Outreach

Sierra Club Washington Office

408 C Street, N.E.
Washington, DC 20002
(202) 547-1141

Myke Bybee, Lands Team representative



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