



Sierra Borealis

alaska report

SIERRA CLUB ALASKA CHAPTER
JUNE 2016



Oppose any new offshore drilling for Alaska: *June 16 deadline*

Send your comment to BOEM NOW

I have recently been informed about the five-year plan for offshore drilling in Arctic and the Gulf of Alaska. As a teenager in Alaska I care immensely about my future in this state and the harsh effects from extracting and burning dirty fuels on our environment, climate, and health. Offshore drilling is quite dangerous in the sense that the odds of an oil spill are unquestionable. With the event of an oil spill, wildlife, air, and water will be in jeopardy. The benefits of offshore drilling do not even compare to the harm that it will cause on our environment.

In April, the Department of the Interior's Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM) held hearings for the

offshore oil and gas leasing Five Year Plan in Alaska. More than one hundred people attended hearings in Anchorage and Fairbanks. Written testimonies were collected, letters to the editor completed, and oral testimonies were shared. The rally in Anchorage was a great experience that brought people together who are all in support of the same cause.

The Obama administration has recently withdrawn its plan to allow offshore drilling on our Atlantic coast but has yet to decide whether oil and gas drilling are allowed in the Arctic or Gulf of Mexico. The decision the Administration makes this year will have far-reaching consequences for future years. To keep any new offshore drilling out of the five-year plan is critical to avoid the next oil disaster or oil spill in the Arctic, and to protect our

climate from 60 billion tons of carbon dioxide contained in offshore oil and gas reserves.

➔ WHAT YOU CAN DO:

Submit your comment to BOEM by June 16 at www.bit.ly/BOEMcomment to show the Obama administration that you support keeping dirty fuels in the ground, and oppose any new offshore oil and gas drilling in America's Arctic or in the Gulf of Alaska. ❖

-- by Roxanna Reynolds

(Roxanna Reynolds is a summer Organizing Intern in the Sierra Club's Anchorage office. She's a rising 11th grader at Anchorage's South High School. If you have questions about commenting, you can contact Roxanna at roxyjreynolds@icloud.com. And see page 6 for more about Roxanna.)



photo: Mark Meyer

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Anchorage rally lets citizens speak out against drilling

Sierra Club President Aaron Mair to visit Alaska July 29-30

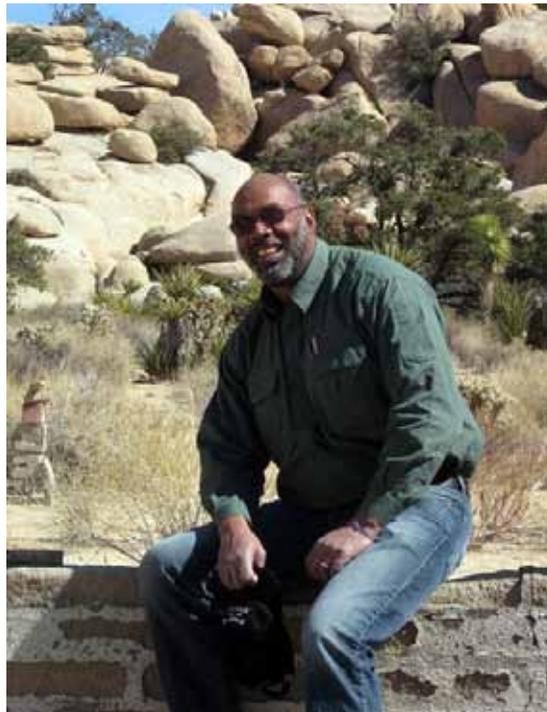
Sierra Club members in Alaska are invited to meet the Sierra Club's President Aaron Mair in the Anchorage area on Friday July 29, at a time and place to be announced later. You can find information about this and all Sierra Club Alaska Chapter activities on our Facebook page <https://www.facebook.com/SierraClubAlaska/?fref=ts>.

Mair is visiting Alaska to focus attention on the problems of global climate disruption, and the urgent need for Americans to stop using coal, oil and gas, including the fossil fuels exported from Alaska. Although State government has depended on oil production, Alaska will suffer more than many other states from sea level rise (we have by far the longest coastline of any state), and from ocean acidification, which threatens the entire fishing economy of coastal Alaska.

Mair will visit Seward, from which Alaska exports its coal, and will hike to Exit Glacier, along the same trail that President Obama hiked last summer, also to focus attention on global warming.

Everywhere Mair goes, he also works on issues close to his heart, environmental justice for all ethnic and socioeconomic groups, and a strengthening of partnerships between the Sierra Club and social justice organizations. In his own words, he is working to make the Sierra Club "a more welcoming environment to all people, regardless of their race or socio-economic status."

Aaron Mair of Schenectady, New York, is an epidemiological-spatial analyst with the New York State Department of Health. His experience includes more than three decades of environmental activism and over 25 years as a Sierra Club volunteer leader who has worked diligently for environmental justice. Mair's activism began with a decade-long battle that he led to shut down a polluting solid waste incinerator in an inner-city community in Albany, New York. His efforts ultimately led to a commitment by the state to shut down the facility and a \$1.6 million settlement award to that community. Mair was also a key figure in leading the fight and securing the Sierra Club's participation in the Clean Up the Hudson campaign, which resulted in a settlement between the EPA and General Electric to dredge toxic PCB sediments from the Upper Hudson River.



Aaron Mair enjoys a hike in Joshua Tree National Park with fellow Sierra Club Directors and other participants at a Board of Directors' meeting in 2013 in Palm Springs, California.

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The Sierra Club president is a volunteer member of the fifteen-person elected Board of Directors. The directors choose one of themselves to serve a one-year term as president, although presidents have been commonly re-elected to serve a second year. (Mair was reelected in May to a second year.) Extensive travel obligations to speak at many Chapter events as well as at governmental functions have generally made the presidents ready to step down after two years. A few presidents have come back later to serve a second two-year stint, such as Ed Wayburn—who as president in 1968 first persuaded the Club to make Alaska

lands a priority and brought the Club into the campaign for Alaska federal lands that resulted in the 1980 ANILCA. Michele Perrault and Robbie Cox also served twice. Perrault as president held the first Board of Directors meeting in Alaska – in 1986, and Cox came to Alaska in 1995, while he was president, to participate in a Sierra Club national backpack outing in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, co-led by Bill Gomez and Vicky Hoover—now editor of **Sierra Borealis**. Since Robbie Cox's mid-'90s visit, until this summer, no sitting Club president has visited Alaska.

Aaron Mair is the 57th president in the Sierra Club's 124-year history--beginning with John Muir. As leader of Sierra Club volunteers, the president works closely with the head of Club staff--the executive director--presently Mike Brune. Brune was in Alaska in summer of 2015 to visit the Arctic Refuge. (**Sierra Borealis** Sept 2015)

The Club's 62 chapters, such as the Alaska Chapter, are each directed by an elected executive committee of volunteers; they elect a chair—the "Chapter chair". But there is only one president in the Sierra Club—leader of the national Board of Directors.)

For articles by Aaron Mair, go to <http://www.sierraclub.org/other/authors/aaron-mair> ❖

-- Pamela Brodie, Alaska Chapter chair, contributed to this article.

Smart Choice 2016: Southcentral Alaska Commuter Rail

In January 2016, the Alaska Department of Transportation released a draft "State Rail Plan" for public review. The process had begun in early summer 2013, when the Department held public meetings in the Matanuska-Susitna Borough as part of developing its State Rail Plan. At these meetings, as in earlier years, strong interest was expressed in commuter rail. However, it took another 2 ½ years and pressure from citizens for the Department to update the plan and release its draft.

Public comments for the Draft Rail Plan closed on March 10. The Plan is a step in the right direction in that it praises rail as a means to reduce emissions and highway congestion. It scores commuter rail benefits as high. It details ridership forecasts and an operating plan, and explains that commuter rail could be operated either by a Regional Transportation Authority or, as in Connecticut and Utah, by the State itself.

However, based on its costs, the Draft Plan lists the feasibility score for commuter rail as zero.

This is a prime example of why we need multi-modal transportation planning. On its projects webpage, the Alaska Department of Transportation lists "highway congestion and accidents" as reasons for adding lanes to the Glenn Highway. No mention is made of commuter rail. Yet capital costs to begin commuter rail are small compared to what the Department is spending or planning to spend on Glenn Highway improvements. And south of Anchorage, the \$4.15 million spent each year on subsidizing the Whittier tunnel (which was supposed to pay its own way through tolls) exceeds the \$3.6 million annual subsidy required to operate commuter rail.

Is it cost effective or environmentally smart to keep pouring money into Alaska's highways while planners say that commuter rail is "too expensive?"

Can rail help Alaska reduce CO2 emissions?

Alaska's Arctic and subarctic regions are warming at twice the global pace. Yet when it comes to transportation policies that would reduce CO2 emissions, Alaska lags.

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

Anchorage's airport rail station together with planned commuter rail was chosen as one of the "best projects". The Glenn-Parks Highway interchange (subsequently built) was chosen as one of the worst. At a July 31, 2002 press conference held at the nearly completed airport rail station, the Sierra Club's choice was announced as "visionary" by past and present CEOs and board members of the Alaska Railroad.

In May 2003, Anchorage's Municipal Assembly passed a resolution supporting commuter rail between the Matsu Borough and three of Anchorage's largest employment centers: downtown, the airport, and the Dimond Shopping Mall.

Commuter rail would be relatively easy to implement because the Alaska Railroad track already connects these locations. The track goes to the airport and passes Dimond Center on its way south. To the north, it parallels the Glenn Highway between Anchorage and the Matsu Borough. Both freight and passenger trains (currently geared to tourists) run daily along this track.

The Matsu Valley City of Wasilla has made plans to

move the historic Wasilla station in order to better accommodate trains and car traffic, provide bus and cab drop off, and more parking for commuters. A potential station near the Glenn/Parks interchange is being considered, as well as possible stations at Eklutna, Birchwood, Eagle River, and Elmendorf Air Force Base. Since the Sierra Club's "best projects" choice in 2002, \$78 million has been spent straightening the track, making potential commuter rail time competitive with driving.

So why was the sprawl-inducing Glenn Highway interchange built, (along with more additions to the Glenn Highway) and why is

-- continued on p. 4



photo: Cynthia Wentworth

Anchorage airport rail station. An underutilized asset, the Alaska Railroad

Commuter Rail -- from page 3

the "Smart Choice" commuter rail still only "visionary" 14 years later?

Background on highways versus commuter rail in Alaska

Given that the Matsu Valley is Alaska's fastest growing area, and that 2015 was the world's warmest year on record, this is a question that begs to be asked.

The first part of the answer is that the U.S. is a highway centric country. Although anywhere in the world, both highways and commuter rail require capital expenditures and operating subsidies, in the U.S. it is much easier to get money

for highways than it is for rail. Still, as demonstrated elsewhere in the U.S., getting money for rail is possible.

Secondly, our State legislature has failed to act on bills that would set up a Regional Transportation Authority, which would be one way to implement commuter rail. Instead, it has chosen to spend money on continued Knik Arm bridge planning, which would create more auto dependent urban sprawl and disrupt thousands of acres of de-facto wilderness. Indeed, by 2015 \$85 million had already been spent on the proposed Knik Arm bridge.

Thirdly, our Alaska Department of Transportation is still basically a highway and aviation department. While it continues to include almost \$1 billion for the Knik Arm Bridge in its Statewide Transportation Improvement Program, it has never given anything but lip service to the concept of multi-modal corridor planning.

This highway centrality is ironic, given that the Alaska Railroad is owned by the State of Alaska, and falls under the purview of the Alaska Department of Transportation. In 1985, when the Railroad passed from federal to state ownership, it was set up as a self-sustaining, quasi-public corporation, becoming the Alaska Railroad Corporation (ARRC). Indeed, the Commissioner of Transportation sits on its Board of Directors.

In 2008 the U.S. Congress passed the Passenger Investment and Improvement Act (PRIIA) with the expressed intent of improving passenger rail service in the U.S. To be eligible for the capital grant funding authorized in the Act, states are required by Section 303 of the PRIIA to develop Federal Railroad Administration-accepted state rail plans.



photo: Cynthia Wentworth

Cynthia Wentworth (Sierra Club), confers with Governor Bill Sheffield and John Binkley (Alaska Railroad Corporation Board Members) as they study the Sierra Club's National Transportation

Anchorage area transit progress

The Municipality of Anchorage just finished a public review period for its Draft Land Use Plan Map. While the Map emphasizes Transit Oriented Development (Anchorage is a very car dependent city), the Map does NOT designate the Alaska Railroad corridor for transit-oriented development on the grounds that Anchorage does not yet have the density to support commuter rail! This is ironic, given:

- 1) the Municipal Assembly's 2003 resolution supporting commuter rail,
- 2) the \$106 million spent on the airport rail station and on track straightening, with commuter rail as a principal justification, and
- 3) the growth in the area's population since 2003: many more Matsu residents are now commuting to jobs in Anchorage. Even if, as some believe, Anchorage presently does not have the density to support commuter rail, rail advocates want these corridors to be reserved now in order to influence how future land use occurs.

Anchorage's Climate Action Plan calls for Anchorage to become the most energy efficient city in America. The current Metropolitan Transportation Plan predicts Glenn Highway traffic to double from the current 50,000 vehicles per day to 100,000 vehicles by 2035. When a new transportation plan is developed, it would be wise to make better use of an underutilized asset: the Alaska Railroad.

Now more than ever, commuter rail needs to be a "smart choice", as it was in 2002. ❖

-- by Cynthia Wentworth

(Cynthia Wentworth, from Indian, Alaska, serves as Alaska Chapter liaison to the Club's national Transportation Committee)

Alaska Chapter urges Federal Subsistence Board to reconsider its approval of brown bear baiting

Decision for Wrangell-St. Elias Park and Tetlin and Yukon Flats Refuges

At its April 2016 meeting the Federal Subsistence Board authorized subsistence hunters in Wrangell-Saint Elias National Park & Preserve (WSE) and the contiguous Tetlin National Wildlife Refuge to hunt brown bears “over bait” in the 2016-18 regulatory period that begins June 1. The Board also rejected a proposal to rescind its earlier approval of brown bear baiting in Yukon Flats National Wildlife during the 2014-16 period.

Its 2014 decision set a precedent that led the WSE NPP Subsistence Resource Commission, a local subsistence advisory group to the National Park Service (NPS), to propose opening the park and the adjoining refuge to brown bear baiting. Unless reversed, the Board’s April decision sets another precedent that could lead to the approval of brown bear baiting in other parks and refuges.

Background

Established by the Secretaries of Interior and Agriculture, the eight-member Federal Subsistence Board sets subsistence seasons, bags limits, and hunting and trapping methods on federal land in Alaska, including nine national park system units open to subsistence hunting and trapping by federally qualified subsistence users, both Alaska Natives and non-Natives.¹ Regional directors of the four federal land management agencies—National Park Service, Fish & Wildlife Service, Forest Service, and Bureau of Land Management—serve on the Board along with the regional director of the Bureau of Indian Affairs and three representatives of subsistence users, including the chairman.

If the Board adopts a regulation contrary to federal wildlife law, regulation or agency policy, such as brown bear baiting in national parks and wildlife refuges, the Secretary of Interior can veto the Board’s action or delegate the task to the



¹ Glacier Bay National Park, Katmai NP, and the former Mt. McKinley NP—now part of Denali NP—were long closed to hunting and trapping when ANILCA of 1980 was enacted. Congress re-affirmed them as wildlife sanctuaries. Kenai Fjords NP, a 1980 unit, is the fourth Alaska park closed to all forms of the consumption of wildlife.

NPS and FWS regional directors.

In approving the WSE baiting proposal, the Board ignored an existing NPS system-wide regulation that prohibits the feeding of wildlife. The Fish and Wildlife Service also has authority to ban brown bear baiting in national wildlife refuges—as shown by its proposed regulations prohibiting the practice by sport hunters. (*Sierra Borealis* March 2016)

In April the Board declined to discuss and vote on the WSE, Tetlin, and Yukon Flats proposals in its public session. At the staff level—the FWS’s Office of Subsistence Management and an inter-agency panel—the WSE and Tetlin proposals were approved over the objection of the OSM, and the proposal to rescind the Yukon Flats regulation was defeated. Evidently satisfied with the staff decisions, the Board placed the proposals

on its “consensus” i.e. consent agenda for quick approval, thus avoiding a discussion and vote in public session.

By contrast, in 2014 the Board did discuss and vote 5-3 to permit brown bear baiting in the Yukon Flats Refuge. Regional directors of the FWS, NPS, and FS voted against the proposal, while the BLM regional director, in a surprise move, voted with the BIA regional director and the three subsistence members,

including the chairman, to approve the proposal. (*Sierra Borealis*, March 2016).

Noting that earlier vote from two years ago, the Alaska Chapter wrote to the Board in April, during the comment period on proposals before the Board, with a request that the April 2016 baiting proposals be moved up from the consent agenda to the regular agenda for discussion and a vote. The Board did not reply to the Chapter’s request.

In response, the Alaska Chapter will ask the Board to reconsider its decision and bring the issue up for discussion and a vote at its next public session in July. Board rules permit requests for reconsideration. ❖

-- by Jack Hession

Fairbanks Residents notify EPA of Intent to Sue over delay in addressing dirty air

The Fairbanks North Star Borough has some of the worst and most dangerous air quality in the nation. In April, the Sierra Club joined Citizens for Clean Air and Alaska Community Action on Toxics to demand that responsible officials address the problems that Fairbanks residents face just by breathing.

Sierra Club and the other organizations sent a letter to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) calling on the agency to meet its obligation under law to approve or disapprove a plan submitted last year by the State of Alaska to address air pollution in Fairbanks. The letter, submitted by the Alaska office of environmental law firm Earthjustice, notified EPA of the community groups' intent to sue if EPA does not act in 60 days.

The groups already sued EPA on this issue in April 2014 in order to move forward the State of Alaska's planning process for cleaning the air in Fairbanks. This 2014 suit helped prompt the State to submit to EPA an overdue plan to require the agency to address air pollution in the end of January 2015. But EPA has now missed the next deadline required by law—to approve or disapprove the State's plan. That deadline passed on February 18 of this year. The groups are now seeking to compel the agency to perform its duty under the Clean Air Act to make a decision on the plan—an important next step in addressing air pollution in the Fairbanks North Star Borough.

Citizens for Clean Air is a vigorous local Fairbanks area concerned citizens' group, and Alaska Community Action on Toxics (ACAT) is a statewide organization with which the Alaska Chapter has worked often.

The American Lung Association ranked Fairbanks as the ninth dirtiest of 227 metropolitan areas for the deadliest form of fine particle pollution (PM-2.5), a type of air pollution that can penetrate deeply into a person's lungs and enter the bloodstream. Sources of PM-2.5 in Fairbanks include outdoor burning; wood- and coal-burning heating devices; automobiles and other vehicles; and industrial facilities like coal-fired power plants. The air pollution problems have worsened since 2009, when state and municipal officials were first advised that soot and smoke levels in Fairbanks were unhealthy and dangerous.

More than one thousand health studies have shown that PM-2.5 air pollution causes a wide range of serious health problems, including asthma attacks, chronic respiratory disease, reduction in lung function, hospitalizations and emergency room visits for cardiopulmonary diseases, cancer, and even premature death. One study, conducted by the Alaska Department

of Health and Social Services, found that poor air quality led to increased admissions at Fairbanks Memorial Hospital for cerebrovascular disease and respiratory tract infections. PM-2.5 air pollution is of particular danger to children, reducing lung development, causing asthma, and impairing the immune system. The elderly and those with chronic disease also face heightened risk.

Joan Franz, Fairbanks resident, pediatric occupational therapist and member of Citizens for Clean Air, said, "All of the Fairbanks and North Pole nonattainment areas need EPA's immediate action. Each day of delay can result in loss of health, human potential, and, for some, their lives. EPA must act now!" ❖

-- Pamela Brodie, based on a press release from Earthjustice



They need clean air too.
Still Harbor--Behnken

Youth in Action

Summer Intern's work in Anchorage office

We asked Roxanna Reynolds (See her article on page 1) what it's like to be an intern in the Sierra Club office, and here's what she sent us:

Working as an Organizing Intern at the Sierra Club Alaska Chapter, I write and submit Letters to the Editor for the Alaska Dispatch News, outreach to members of the club about comments they submitted, type and submit members' comments to local newspapers around Alaska, table at local fairs and events, call and remind volunteers about upcoming volunteer opportunities, organize and plan local outings, work on op-eds, and then some simple around the office tasks.



Roxanna Reynolds

Concerns over Senator Lisa Murkowski's latest public lands bill

ANILCA-protected units threatened

In late May Senator Lisa Murkowski (R-AK), introduced S. 3004, the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Improvement Act. Chairman of the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee, she seeks a third full term this November (In 2002 she was appointed to the Senate by her father, Governor Frank Murkowski, who had left the Senate to become governor.)

Her new bill, which would convey public lands to various Native corporations, follows her recent success in authorizing the Sealaska Native regional corporation to select 70,000 acres of valuable old and second-growth timber in a flagrantly unequal-value land exchange with the Forest Service, opposed by Sierra Club. (*Sierra Borealis*, June 2015, Sept '13)

(The following descriptions are drawn from the Energy Committee's section-by-section analysis.)

Among the provisions of S. 3004 are several that would allow certain village and regional corporations to select lands protected by ANILCA as well as other valuable federal lands:

- In the National Petroleum Reserve-Alaska, the Ukpeagvik Inupiat [village] Corporation would be given at no cost "sand and gravel deposits under the estate of 12 townships" (276,480 acres) of the Barrow Gas Field. In 1984 Congress transferred the gas field to the corporation at no cost, but retained other subsurface resources in public ownership. Sand and gravel is essential for oil and gas drilling in the Reserve.

(In return for receiving the sand and gravel, the village corporation would be required to "continue mitigating negative impacts on nesting sites for the Steller's eider" and would not be allowed to use explosives during the active nesting season.)

- Sealaska would be given 8,872.5 acres of surface and subsurface federal land and 5,145 acres of surface federal land on Prince of Wales Island in exchange for 23,000 acres of its subsurface estate at Cube Cove on Admiralty Island National Monument/Kootznoowoo Wilderness. The Cube Cove land would become part of the Monument; Sealaska would select valuable old growth forest on Prince of Wales Island.

(Note: Sealaska's Cube Cove acreage is beneath the Shee Atika [Sitka village] corporation's surface land around three large lakes in the Monument. Shee Atika severely logged its lands and has since been negotiating a sale of its holdings to the Forest Service for addition to the Monument. The Forest Service has appraised the land, and Congress has appropriated funds for the acquisition. S. 3004 would expedite the sale.)

- Cook Inlet Region Inc. would be authorized to select the remaining 43,000 acres of its ANCSA grant from federal land outside the "boundaries of any national monument [Admiralty and Misty Fjords National Monuments] or of National Park Service lands."

(Note: Available lands thus include National Petroleum Reserve-



Alaska, national wildlife refuges except in the Arctic NWR, wild & scenic rivers, the Chugach and Tongass National Forests, and designated wilderness in the refuges and Tongass NF. In addition to Tongass wilderness areas, other protected areas and public use areas would also be vulnerable.)

- The bill would establish five new urban Native corporations at Haines, Petersburg, Ketchikan, Wrangell, and Tenakee. Each corporation would select 23,040 acres. ANILCA conservation system units would not be available, but thousands of acres of congressionally-established non-commercial logging areas (Land Use Designation II areas) plus important public-use areas would be available for selection.
- (The Clinton Administration and Congress had found after a thorough study that the five communities did not qualify for urban corporation status. Nevertheless, proponents have repeatedly urged subsequent Congresses to establish the corporations.)*
- Alaska Native veterans of the Vietnam War would be granted 160-acre Native allotments. However, Congress has already provided allotments to Alaska Native veterans who because of their military service in 1969-71 may missed the opportunity to apply for land they occupied or claimed as enactment of ANCSA neared.
 - An Alaska Land Use Council would be re-established. Conservationists are wary of this idea as the previous council and the earlier Federal-State Land Use Planning Commission were controlled by private resource extraction interests and the State of Alaska.

The Sierra Club will urge members of Congress to defend the National Interest Lands.

-- Jack Hession

Sierra Club Local Outings 2016

Explore.
Enjoy.
Protect.



Alaska Chapter June Outings

Interested in attending an outing or have any questions?

Contact:
laura.comer@sierraclub.org

Poster: Saharra McKeen

South Bivouac June 9, Saturday at 5:30 pm:

Level: Easy

Directions: Meet us at 5:15 at the parking lot on Campbell Airstrip Road/ Basher Dr. about 2 miles south from Tudor intersection.

Campbell Creek Salmon Run June 16, Saturday at 5:30 pm

Level: Easy 2 mile walk.

Directions: Meet at the Campbell Airstrip Trail-head parking lot at 5:15 on Campbell Airstrip Rd about 1 mile south of the Tudor intersection.

Rabbit Lake June 19, Tuesday at 10:00 am

Level: Moderate, 8.5 mile hike.

Directions: Meet at the Huffman and Old Seward Kaladi Brothers at 9:45 as parking at the trailhead is limited.

South Fork Rim Trail June 23, Saturday at 5:30 pm

Level: Easy, 2 mile hike.

Directions: Drive up Hillside, left on Upper O'Malley Rd, left onto Prospect Height Drive for about 1.4 miles, make a left, meeting at 5:15 at the Prospect Heights Trailhead on your right. You need to pay a parking fee unless you have a state park parking sticker.

Sierra Borealis / alaska report

is the newsletter of the Alaska Chapter of the Sierra Club

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