



Sierra Borealis *alaska report*

SIERRA CLUB ALASKA CHAPTER
JUNE 2013



Action Alert for Tongass National Forest:

Sealaska Bill Endangers Fish, Wildlife, And Communities

S. 340, a bill the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee will soon mark up, would damage vital fish and wildlife habitats, jeopardize the livelihoods of several small communities and other forest users, delay for years the Forest Service's planned transition from old growth logging to second-growth forestry, and potentially set in motion attempts by other Native corporations to amend the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act of 1971 (ANCSA).

The Southeast Alaska Native Land Entitlement

Finalization and Jobs Protection Act is sponsored by Senator Lisa Murkowski (R-AK) and co-sponsor Mark Begich (D-AK) on behalf of the Sealaska Corporation of Southeast Alaska, one of 13 for-profit regional corporations established by ANCSA.



S. 340 would authorize Sealaska to select 70,000 acres of its 290,000-acre ANCSA land grant from national forest

land outside the areas specified for its selections by ANCSA. Sealaska owns 220,000 acres it previously selected, lands which adjoin the township owned by each Native village corporation.

Sealaska can take conveyance of its remaining 70,000 acres from the selection withdrawals at any time pursuant to a 2004 act by Sen. Murkowski that requires Alaska Native corporations and the State of Alaska to prioritize their

remaining land selections in order to expedite final conveyances. Sealaska complied with the requirement but got final conveyance of the 70,000 acres put on hold pending Congress's consideration of S. 340, the latest version of Sealaska bills introduced earlier. (See *Sierra Borealis* June 2011)

Sealaska wishes to select the 70,000 acres from other areas of the Tongass because it has logged most of the valuable old-growth timber on its land. In S. 340 it has identified high-volume old-growth timber plus mature second-growth timber primarily on Prince of Wales, Kosciusko, and Kuiu Islands.

Yet as the bill nears a Committee vote, members don't have appraisals of Sealaska's 70,000 acres on hold and the 70,000 acres the corporation seeks to acquire in other areas of the Tongass. By contrast, administrative exchanges involve appraisals, including the consent of Congress for exchanges involving designated wilderness.

Residents of nine small communities in the vicinity of Sealaska's proposed new selections oppose the bill, having witnessed what Sealaska's highly destructive clear-cut logging did to its own lands. These communities rely on intact watersheds to protect productive salmon streams that sustain their commercial and subsistence

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District Court dismisses State of Alaska case

fisheries. Sealaska's proposed new selections cover several of these important salmon streams. Other forest users--tour guides, lodge owners, air taxis, charter boat operators, wilderness visitors, etc., --also depend on healthy fish and wildlife.

According to the Forest Service, enactment of the bill would "substantially delay" the agency's planned transition from old-growth to second-growth forestry, because Sealaska's new selections would take timber needed by the agency for the change. The transition is a long-overdue reform strongly supported by the Sierra Club, other environmental organizations, and residents throughout Southeast Alaska. The Forest Service did not provide the Committee with an estimate of the length of the delay, but as planned the transition is to take place over the decade 2013-23.

Enactment of the bill and the extensive clear-cutting that would follow might also result in efforts to give Alexander Archipelago wolves and the northern goshawks of the southern Tongass protection under the Endangered Species Act. Both species depend on intact old growth forest habitat.

Finally, if S. 340 is enacted it might set a precedent. Other Native regional corporations owning lands with little or no resource extraction potential could ask for major adjustments in their land holdings through amendments to ANCSA. At the April hearing on S. 340 Sen. Murkowski got the Forest Service witness to say that the bill would not set a precedent, but the Bureau of Land Management witness, wary of upsetting long-settled land ownership patterns elsewhere in Alaska, would not concede that point.

On March 25, the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia ended a challenge by the state of Alaska against a nationwide Clinton-era rule protecting tens of millions of acres of roadless national forest lands from logging and road building.

The Alaska case was the final litigation challenging the rule nationwide. The court held that no further challenges are allowed, because the statute of limitations had run out.

Earthjustice attorney Tom Waldo said, "This is a complete victory for the Roadless Rule. It means that it's too late not only for the state of Alaska, but for anyone to file lawsuits against the rule, which has withstood every legal challenge. The Forest Service adopted it with overwhelming public support. It is important for clean water, fish, wildlife and recreation in the remaining intact areas of the national forests."

The court dismissed the state's lawsuit for being filed after the six-year statute of limitations. The Sierra Club had helped galvanize a citizens' campaign in the late 1990s to protect America's last wild national forest lands, and forest activists breathed a sigh of relief after more than a decade of legal challenges.

The State of Alaska's case, although focused on state issues, sought to strike down the Roadless Rule nationwide. The federal government defended the rule

with the Sierra Club and other conservation groups allowed into the case as intervenors. On the side of Alaska, industry-aligned interests also intervened.

Last fall, the U.S. Supreme Court decided not to hear an appeal on a similar lawsuit brought by the State of Wyoming and a mining industry group from Colorado. The 2001 Roadless Rule prohibits new road construction and logging on large undeveloped areas of national forest land across the U.S. that includes parts of Alaska's Tongass and Chugach forests.

The Department of Justice and intervenors filed motions to dismiss the Alaska case, arguing the state missed the statute of limitations.

On May 17, Tom Waldo of Earthjustice in Juneau reported on the latest update on this case: "Yesterday, not surprisingly, the State of Alaska filed an appeal of the district court's decision dismissing Alaska's case for failing to file within the statute of limitations. Today, the Alaska Electric Light & Power group of intervenor-plaintiffs filed an appeal. It is likely there will also be appeals from other intervenor-plaintiffs: Alaska Forest Association, Southeast Conference and SE Alaska Power Agency."

Earthjustice will participate in the appeal, arguing that dismissal of the case was correct. ❖

to protect the Tongass:

⇒ What you can do

- Let Senators Murkowski and Begich know that you oppose this giveaway of valuable national forest land to Sealaska. The corporation would not lose an acre if S. 304 is rejected.
- Other Senators on the Energy and Natural Resources Committee need to hear from national forest supporters in their states. Contact family and friends in the senators' states and urge them to help. Go to <http://www.energy.senate.gov/public/index.cfm/members> for more information. ❖
- **Committee members:**
- **All phone #s start with (202)224-**
- **Dems (12)**
- **Reps. (10)**
- Ron Wyden, OR chair- 5244 - Lisa Murkowski, AK rnk. memb. - 6665
- Maria Cantwell, WA -3441 Lamar Alexander, TN - 4944
- Chris Coons - DE - 5042 John Barasso, WY - 6441
- Al Franken, MN - 5641 Jeff Flake, AZ - 4521
- Martin Heinrich, NM - 5521 Dean Heller, NV - 6244
- Tim Johnson, SD - 5842 John Hoeven, ND - 2551
- Mary Landrieu, LA -5824 Mike Lee, UT - 5444
- Joe Manchin III, WV - 3954 Rob Portman, OH - 3353
- Brian Schatz, HI - 3934 Jim Risch, ID - 2752
- Debbie Stabenow, MI - 4822 Tim Scott, SC - 6121
- Mark Udall, CO - 5941 Bernie Sanders, VT (Ind.)5141

-- Jack Hession

-- Irene Alexakos

Glacier Bay National Park integrity threatened

Senate committee marks up, approves gull egg collection bill, S. 156

Glacier Bay National Park is one of the nation's premier wildlife sanctuaries. A true national park, it is closed to the consumption of wildlife, including subsistence practices. It is a World Heritage Site and an international biological reserve; its land area is almost entirely wilderness; it provides critically important summer feeding grounds for endangered humpback whales; and it is one of only four park wildlife sanctuaries in Alaska. Kenai Fjords, Katmai, and Denali (former Mt. McKinley core) are the other three sanctuaries.

Now this superb wildlife sanctuary is threatened. S. 156 by Sen. Lisa Murkowski (R-AK) and co-sponsor Mark Begich (D-AK) would authorize the Secretary of the Interior to allow members of the Hoonah Indian Association (HIA) to collect glaucous-winged gull eggs twice each year at up to five gull colonies in the park. Hoonah is a community southeast of the park on Chichagof Island. As of the 2010 census, it had 760 residents, 399 (52.5 %) Huna Tlingits. "Twice each year" refers to a second round of egg gathering after the gulls nest again following the initial raid. (See *Sierra Borealis*, June 2011, June and Dec 2010.)

At a May markup, the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee approved S. 156 and other public land bills and reported them to the full Senate. A vote on the bills has not been scheduled.

National Park Service Supports S. 156

The National Park Service testified in support of Sen. Murkowski's bill in the 2011-12 Congress and again in the current session. This is the first time in the 98-year history of the National Park System that the agency has advocated opening a national park to the extraction of a wildlife species. The Sierra Club testified against the bill in 2011 and continues to oppose it in the current Congress.

NPS leadership at the region and Washington levels has failed to uphold federal law and long-standing NPS policy governing the National Park System. Although former Interior Secretary Ken Salazar let the NPS endorse the Alaska senators' attack on the park, his successor Sally Jewell, a strong supporter of national parks, could decide to withdraw the Department's support for the bill.

S. 156's effect on the park

In a park study based on field observation and a mathematical model, the NPS found that gull egg gathering in the park would likely result in a 22 percent park-wide loss of gull fledglings. This reduction is acceptable, argues the agency, because the egg collecting would be consistent with sustained yield management. However, the NPS is charged by Congress with providing total protection to wildlife, not with experimental sustained yield schemes.

The agency is also ignoring a precedent that may

be set if S. 156 is enacted. If glaucous-winged gull eggs are removed from the park with the agency's and Congress's approval, on what basis could the Huna Tlingits' request to hunt harbor seals and mountain goats under sustained yield plans be denied? Alaska Natives living near Katmai, Denali, and Kenai Fjords I Parks might ask for subsistence privileges, and tribes in other states might also make similar requests.

The national interest alternative to S. 156

S. 156 presents Congress with a false choice: either open the park to egg collecting or deny the HIA the opportunity to pursue a traditional and valuable cultural activity. But it's a false choice, as revealed by the NPS's own research in Huna Tlingit history, culture, and subsistence activities.

In 2001, as part of this research, park personnel escorted a party of HIA members to collect gull eggs at a traditional Huna Tlingit egg gathering site in the Inian Islands just outside the park boundary. In 2002 the members again collected eggs at this same gull colony using a vessel chartered for them by the park. The site is one of six traditional Huna Tlingit gull egg collecting sites within the tribe's traditional territory outside the park. Park staff knew of the other five sites but neglected to visit them.

photo: Jack Hession

Table Rock in Cross Sound is one of the five other non-park sites. The photo was taken about two weeks after the nesting season ended; large numbers of glaucous-winged gulls are present during the nesting season.



The availability of the six non-park sites for HIA gull egg collecting is the alternative to S. 156 that the Sierra Club recommended to the Committee and now recommends to the full Senate.

Committee markup

S. 156 requires the Secretary, if he or she allows egg collecting in the park, to prepare an annual egg "harvest" plan "jointly" with the HIA. Joint NPS-private entity management of a park resource is unprecedented and contrary to NPS policy and federal law governing the National Park System.

At its May markup the Committee considered an amendment recommended by the NPS that would make the HIA's role in the harvest plan "purely advisory." The Committee did not accept the amendment. If the bill as reported by the Committee is enacted, a precedent

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Are Frankenfish coming to Alaska?

Genetically engineered fish threaten Alaska's wild salmon

On the morning of May 17, the first prized Copper River salmon of the year arrived at Seattle-Tacoma International Airport. Fresh from Alaska, the ceremonial "first fish" was handed over to top chefs for the fourth annual Alaska Airlines Copper Chef Cook-Off. This year the airline expects to ship over 2 million pounds of Alaska salmon to some 95 cities.

In the coming months premium quality wild-caught salmon will be harvested from the Gulf of Alaska, Cook Inlet, Bristol Bay, and other parts of the state's vast coastal waters and major rivers. Alaskans and people throughout the country and abroad will be nourished for another year by one of the most flavorful, healthful, and natural foods obtainable.

But some people think they can do better.

Biotechnology companies AquaBounty Industries and Intrexon have teamed up to bring you "AquaAdvantage," an Atlantic salmon beefed up with a king salmon gene -- AKA Frankenfish (a term popularized by media reports.) They claim it grows twice as fast and grows to be larger than average Atlantic salmon on half the food -- perfect for feeding the world's exploding population through accelerated fish farming.

Government regulators take the bait

In April 2012 the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) completed its draft environmental assessment of the proposal to market AquaAdvantage or "Frankenfish" and issued a preliminary Finding of "No Significant Impact." The assessment was publicly released last December. According to the FDA the genetically altered fish won't cause environmental or health problems. The agency contends that a full-blown environmental impact statement is unnecessary and wants to approve AquaBounty's request to move ahead. So, AquaAdvantage/Frankenfish could be at your local grocery or favorite seafood restaurant by next year.

Other people want to throw the hook.

Because of growing public concern--even angst, the comment period on the draft environmental assessment was extended through April 26, 2013. More than 1.8 million people testified, most vehemently opposing FDA approval of the AquaBounty salmon. The large turnout was due in part to a coalition of public interest, consumer, environmental, and animal protection groups along with recreational fisheries associations, food businesses, and retailers organized by the Center for Food Safety. Most objections focus on what are seen as inadequately addressed environmental and public health risks.

National Sierra Club policy on genetically engineered (GE) foods (<http://www.sierraclub.org/policy/conservation/biotech.aspx>) is long and complex but generally runs counter to the draft FDA assessment's findings. Most other national and Alaska conservation organizations have heartburn over it too. Commercial fishermen and Native people in Alaska tend to dislike salmon farming in general and most seem to oppose AquaAdvantage/Frankenfish.

Alaska's political establishment, often at odds with many of the above interests, is among the most vociferous opponents of the GE fish.

Senators Lisa Murkowski and Mark Begich and Congressman Don Young have led the charge against AquaBounty, joined by a growing number of senators and representatives from other states. The 2013 Alaska Legislature passed Joint House Resolution 5 opposing the FDA findings, and Alaska Governor Sean Parnell, also a vocal opponent of GE salmon, is expected to sign it.

Trader Joe's, Whole Foods, Bi-Lite Market, Aldi and other national retailers vow not to carry the AquaBounty fish, should it ever be marketed.

How come?

AquaAdvantage/Frankenfish would be the first GE animal food approved for human consumption in the U.S. An FDA go-ahead would set the standard for future assessments of other GE (genetically engineered) critters.

Many deem the FDA analysis insufficient. "Like FDA's food safety analysis, the environmental analysis leaves many questions unanswered, and includes numerous highly questionable and unsubstantiated assumptions," said Michael Hansen, PhD, senior scientist at Consumers Union.

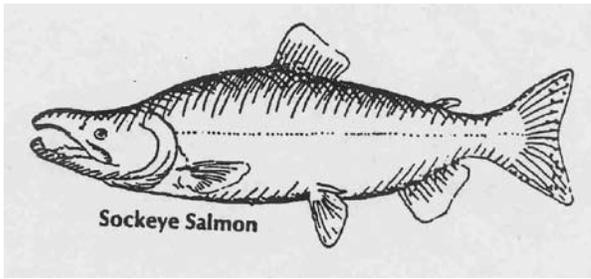
For example, the public interest group Food and Water Watch suggests that the AquaBounty salmon may not actually grow faster than some conventional farmed salmon. According to a spokesman, "The FDA only examined GE salmon's growth rates to the size of a quarter-pound hamburger -- about one-fortieth the normal harvest weight. This comparison was only made between GE salmon and a partially domesticated fish, not the fast-growing, highly domesticated salmon that dominate commercial production. Even the company [AquaBounty] now admits it has never done a head-to-head comparison with fast-growing Norwegian salmon, which appear to grow faster than GE salmon." Hansen warned further that, "The decision on this fish is precedent setting; a full EIS [environmental impact statement], including a failure-mode analysis that looks at possibility of fish escapes, must be performed."

While the issue hasn't yet been decided, there will probably be no requirement to label the AquaBounty fish as genetically engineered if/when it hits the market. AquaBounty representatives have fought hard to avoid such a requirement, stating that their fish is materially the same as any other salmon. So far the FDA supports their contention. Consumers, however, want to know what they are buying.

You should have seen the one that got away

Farmed Atlantic salmon escape into the ocean every year and are routinely caught by fishing vessels from Washington State to Alaska. This is a constant concern for the Alaska Department of Fish and Game and fisheries managers elsewhere. Pathogens and parasites carried by farmed fish can infect and sicken wild salmon. If escaped farmed salmon

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breed with wild fish, hybridizing will compromise the gene pool of naturally occurring

populations.

AquaBounty claims their fish would be raised only in onshore pens to prevent escape and that all commercial batches would be monitored to assure 100 percent sterility. Unfortunately, experience indicates that complete success is unlikely. Invasive species regularly find their ways into U.S. marine and fresh water habitats. There is no guaranteed method to produce 100% sterility. Risk cannot be eliminated.

Alaska's wild salmon runs do not deserve such risks. Alaskan rivers support the only remaining healthy salmon runs in the U.S. The fishing industry is Alaska's largest private-sector employer, accounting for over 78,500 jobs. The value of the commercial salmon harvest averaged \$512 million annually between 2007-2011. Sport, personal use, and subsistence fishing for salmon provide additional jobs, income, food, and cultural value beyond measure. Major efforts to revive depleted salmon runs in other parts of the country would also be at risk if fertile AquaBounty fish found their way into coastal waters.

What about feeding humanity? According to the World Watch Institute, farming herbivorous or omnivorous species like catfish, carp and milkfish can be many times more efficient than raising chicken, pork, or beef. However, carnivorous species like salmon are raised on feed made from other, typically smaller, open-ocean fish. It takes about 10 pounds of them to make 2.2 pounds of that feed. Salmon consume several times more of the stuff (by weight) than they provide in edible seafood when harvested. Not so efficient after all. And, unless alternatives are found, this kind of fish farming threatens to deplete essential components of the marine food web.

Wild salmon are typically more nutritious and palatable. All salmon are low in saturated fat and high in protein, amino acids, and omega fatty acids, but wild fish are 20 percent higher in protein than farmed fish. According to the FDA, farmed fish are almost five times fattier. That gives their flesh a jelly like consistency, with twice as much omega-6 fats as their wild counterparts. A healthful human diet requires a balance of omega-3 and omega-6 fatty acids, but the typical American already consumes 14 - 25 times more omega-6 fatty acids.

Unlike much wild seafood, Alaska salmon are low in mercury, PCBs, and other contaminants. Conversely, according to research published by the Environmental Working Group, farmed salmon sampled from U.S. grocery stores were high enough in PCBs to pose an increased risk for cancer (16 times higher than wild salmon). As in other factory livestock operations, antibiotics and additional drugs are used in fish farming. Due to a lack of carotenoids in their diets, farm-raised salmon have translucent flesh which must be artificially dyed to the

characteristic red/orange salmon color.

Frankenfish has not been approved -- yet.

With the public comment period over, the FDA is considering what almost 2 million citizens, organizations, and businesses had to say. One hopes the agency takes those comments seriously, reverses its "Finding of No Significant Impact" and goes forward with a full environmental impact statement process. Their process and timing were uncertain when this article was prepared. An April 23 Chicago *Tribune* story quoted AquaBounty Technologies' Chief Executive as saying it could take as long as 120 days following the April 26 public comment deadline. If so, a final environmental assessment could appear any time through late August 2013.

⇒ **What you can do:** Sign on to organizational petitions and appeals. Here are links to organizations that have been active in the GE salmon issue:

<http://www.centerforfoodsafety.org/issues/309/ge-fish/join-the-campaign-to-stop-ge-fish>

<http://www.foe.org/gefreeseafood>

<http://www.foodandwaterwatch.org/food/genetically-engineered-foods/stop-frankenfish/>

http://action.responsibletechnology.org/p/dia/action/public/index.sjs?action_KEY=13374

Contact:

President Obama <http://www.whitehouse.gov/contact>

There are two petitions for required labeling of genetically engineered foods at <https://petitions.whitehouse.gov/petitions>.

US Senators and Representatives (your own and others named in this article) [Go to <http://www.govtrack.us/congress/members> if you don't know who they are.]

FDA Commissioner Margaret A. Hamburg; (executive assistant angela.hoague@fda.hhs.gov)

What to say:

1. Express concern that the FDA Draft AquaAdvantage Environmental Assessment is inadequate.
2. Object to the FDA preliminary "Finding of No Significant Impact."
3. Demand a full environmental impact statement process for the AquaAdvantage/Frankenfish genetically engineered.
4. Demand required labeling of ALL genetically engineered foods.

Selected References:

<http://www.fda.gov/AnimalVeterinary/DevelopmentApprovalProcess/GeneticEngineering/GeneticallyEngineeredAnimals/ucm280853.htm>

<http://www.aquabounty.com/products/products-295.aspx>

<http://www.dna.com/content.aspx?ContentID=1551>

<http://homertribune.com/2013/03/modified-salmon-will-threaten-wild-stocks/>

http://articles.chicagotribune.com/2013-04-23/business/sns-rt-us-biotech-salmonbre93m1gr-20130423_1_chief-executive-ronald-stotish-aquadvantage-salmon-aquabounty

<http://news.msn.com/science-technology/gmo-salmon-debate-frankenfish-or-wunderfish>

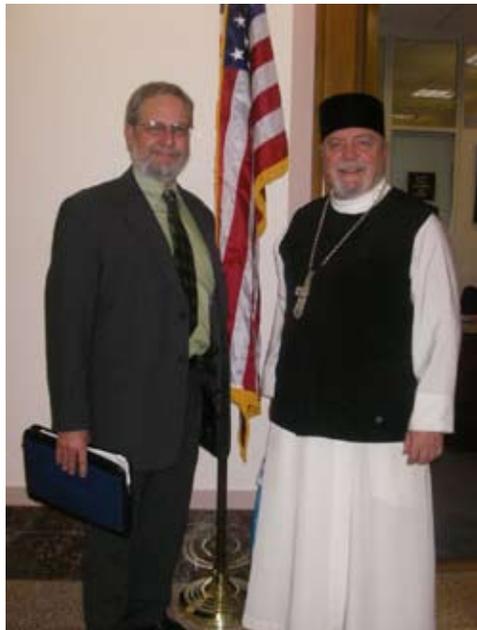
<http://news.stanford.edu/pr/00/fishfarms628.html> ❖

-- Mike O'Meara, Homer

Seward activist visits Washington as Clean Air Ambassador

Calls on Congress to enact stronger protections from carbon, air and coal ash pollution

Community organizer and Sierra Club Alaska Chapter volunteer Russ Maddox joined ambassadors from every state who formed a national delegation in Washington, D.C. in mid-May, calling on Congress to enact clean air policy to protect our communities from soot, carbon and coal ash pollution. Dubbed "**50 States United for Healthy Air**" <<http://50statesunited.org/>>, more than 100 Clean Air Ambassadors from all 50 states, representing the American Nurses Association, Earthjustice, Hip Hop Caucus, Labor Council for Latin American Advancement, National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), National Council of Churches, National Latino Coalition on



Russ Maddox and his lobbying partner Alaska Russian orthodox priest Father Michael Oleksa visit Congressman Don Young's office in DC

Climate Change, and Physicians for Social Responsibility, emphasized their concerns about the health implications of pollution, especially in urban settings, to their elected officials, the EPA and the White House.

"Ever since my own home and property were illegally contaminated in 2001, I have been advocating for other innocent victims of chemical trespass across Alaska," said Maddox. "My hometown of Seward, Alaska

currently has the only operating coal export facility on the west coast of the U.S. and we are routinely and unnecessarily exposed to coal dust. I am working closely with coastal communities in the Northwest that face proposed coal export facilities,

to help them avoid a similar fate. Air quality is also a huge concern in the interior Alaska communities of Fairbanks and North Pole that often experience some of the most polluted air in North America."

Maddox and the other ambassadors delivered a powerful message to their legislators and the Obama administration--that lives depend on strong protections against air pollution. Ambassadors contributed personal stories illustrating the direct impact air pollution has on the health of Americans young and old.

In meetings with Sen. Mark Begich, Sen. Lisa Murkowski's Energy and Resources Committee staffers, and Congressman Don Young, Maddox called for:

- help for communities that are struggling with the negative environmental and health impacts of climate change, including finalization of Clean Air Act standards that reduce carbon pollution from new coal-fired power plants, and actions to reduce pollution from existing plants;
- more frequent review of National Ambient Air Quality Standards that reduce smog and soot (the most widespread deadly pollutant);
- lowering of the ozone pollution limits;
- the swift implementation of the Cleaner Gasoline and Tailpipe Standards that would prevent up to 2,400 premature deaths and 22,000 asthma attacks each year;
- and the federal regulation of coal ash to prevent cancer-causing toxins such as arsenic and mercury from seeping into air and water.

This is the second time ambassadors from all 50 states traveled to Washington to discuss air pollution. The delegation of ambassadors is notable in that it is made up of teachers, parents, health professionals and others who have been personally impacted by air pollution.

Maddox currently serves on the Sierra Club's Council of Club Leaders' Executive Committee, Resurrection Bay Conservation Alliance's Board of Directors, and on Alaska Youth for Environmental Action's Advisory Board. ❖

- from a press release issued by Earthjustice

Glacier Bay National Park integrity threatened -- from page 3

could be set for allowing joint NPS-Alaska Native management of wildlife in other national parks in Alaska.

⇒ What you can do to defend Glacier Bay:

- Let Senator Murkowski and Senator Begich know that you strongly oppose S. 156.
- Ask family and friends in Alaska and in other states to speak out for the park. With the bill now before the full Senate, all senators need to hear from supporters of national parks.
- Ask Secretary of the Interior Sally Jewell to review the NPS's disturbing departure from federal law and NPS policy.
- Support the alternative of Huna Tlingit gull egg gathering at the tribe's traditional collecting sites outside the park, an alternative that does not require congressional authorization.

Contact:

- * Sen. Lisa Murkowski - murkowski@senate.gov
Phone 202-224-6665, Fax 202-224-5301
Reach her Alaska offices at 271 3735 Anchorage or 586-7277 Juneau, or 456-0233 Fairbanks.
- * Sen. Mark Begich begich@senate.gov
Phone 202-224-3004, Fax 202-224-2354
His Alaska offices are at 271-5915 Anchorage, 586-7700 Juneau, and 456-0261 Fairbanks.
- * Sally Jewell, Secretary, Department of the Interior
849 C St. NW, Washington, DC 20240 - feedback@ios.doi.gov
(202-208-6416 or 202-208-7351). ❖

-- Jack Hession

Scientists Urge EPA to Protect Bristol Bay Watershed

More than 300 leading scientists sent a letter to the White House on April 26 expressing “deep concerns” about the prospect of large-scale mining in the Bristol Bay watershed of Southwest Alaska, home to the world’s largest wild salmon runs. The action comes as the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) released for public comment a revised draft assessment on watershed impacts of what could be North America’s largest mine.

The open-pit gold and copper operation, known as Pebble Mine, would be likely to cover an area larger than Manhattan, according to EPA. The proposal is put forward by the world’s second-largest mining corporation, London-based Anglo American, and Canada’s Northern Dynasty Minerals. The project has drawn sharp criticism from the Bristol Bay Native Corp., nine regional tribes, the commercial fishing industry, sportsmen, and environmentalists who fear the massive mine could cause irreversible damage to the watershed. The state of Alaska and the mining industry have objected to EPA’s action to assess the mine’s potential impact.

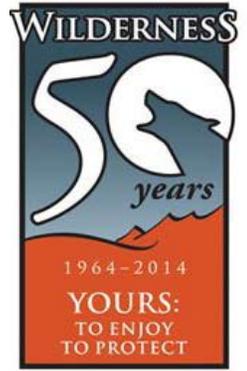
In 2009, Bristol Bay Native Corp. and nine tribes called on EPA to use its authority under the Clean Water Act to declare the watershed off-limits for mine waste disposal. EPA responded with a draft Bristol Bay watershed assessment in May 2012, concluding that “mining at this scale would cause the loss of spawning and rearing habitat for multiple species of anadromous and resident fish.” EPA’s recent revised draft is designed to address peer-review comments on the agency’s May 2012 draft.

“This is the wise course of action for EPA to take,” said Dr. Thomas Lovejoy, who holds the biodiversity chair at the H. John Heinz III Center for Science, Economics and the Environment and is professor of environmental science and policy at George Mason University. “Any development to this highly sensitive area should be comprehensively evaluated.” In addition to Dr. Lovejoy, Dr. Daniel

Anchorage Wild50 is launched

The 50th Anniversary of the Wilderness Act is bringing groups together across the country to celebrate wild America, and there is nowhere wilder than Alaska in this country. That is why the group Anchorage Wild50 has come together with agencies, conservation groups, and volunteers planning the 2014 Anchorage celebrations for the Wilderness Act.

Two organizing meetings have already taken place in Anchorage, with participation from wilderness-managing agencies like the National Park Service and Forest Service and organizations like The Wilderness Society and Alaska Center for the Environment, and volunteers from throughout the community--and of course, the Sierra Club. Our local 50th anniversary group is still growing and seeking more participants. Interested volunteers should get in touch with lindsey.hajduk@sierraclub.org to become part of Anchorage Wild50 and meet with us on the third Wednesday of the month at noon. Help plan the greatest wilderness celebration in our country's wildest state! ❖



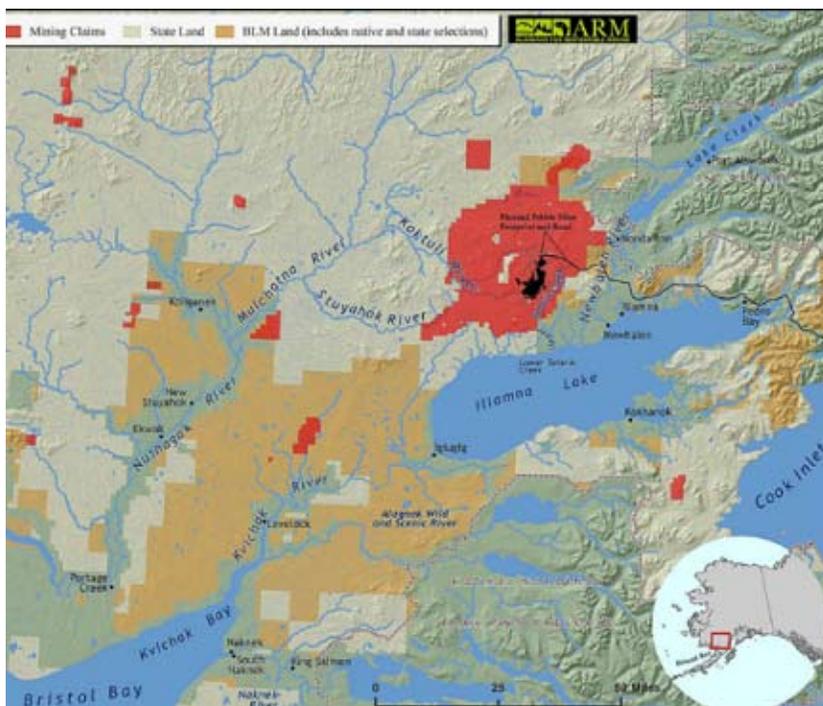
-- Lindsey Hajduk

Pauly of the University of British Columbia, National Medal of Science recipient Dr. Peter Raven, former U.S. Forest Service Chief Dr. Michael Dombeck, and 301 other scientists signed the April 26 letter, stating their consensus view that EPA is taking appropriate steps to safeguard Bristol Bay. Bristol Bay and its watershed are an unparalleled natural treasure. It is EPA’s obligation to ensure that the region’s bounty, including world-class salmon runs, is protected.

Industry and EPA data indicate that the proposed Pebble Mine would cover 32 square miles and include an open pit seven times deeper than the Washington Monument. It would include structures as high as the Hoover Dam to contain an estimated 7 billion to 10 billion tons of contaminated tailings permanently. It would require 86 miles of roads, slurry pipelines, and heavy-duty truck traffic, as well as power plants and a new deepwater port in one of the world’s most ecologically sensitive areas. (See *Sierra Borealis*, June 2012, March and Dec 2011, March and Dec. 2010.)

EPA’s latest Toxic Release Inventory shows that the metal mining industry was responsible for 41 percent of toxic releases for all U.S. industries reporting in 2010. The metal mining industry has ranked No. 1 in release of toxic material since it was required to report them in 1997. ❖

-- Irene Alexakos



Laura Comer joins staff in Sierra Club's Anchorage office

After a long winter here in Alaska and an empty spot in the Anchorage office, I'm thrilled to introduce myself as the new "Beyond Coal" Organizer. My name is Laura Comer, and I am joining the team from New Mexico. Back in New Mexico, I taught 6th grade on the Navajo reservation in Shiprock. From my classroom I could see three coal plants. Nearly a third of my students had learning disabilities; so it was not hard to look out the windows, see the chimneys and make a connection. Outside of the classroom, I talked with the community about the impact coal has on the health of their children and economy. This past year in Albuquerque, I took those conversations and worked to close half of a 1,800-megawatt plant as the lead organizer for 350.org/New Mexico. Here in Alaska less than 10 percent of our energy comes from coal, giving this state a huge opportunity to be the first one to go coal-free.

My start with the environmental movement began back in college where I studied Political Science at Hofstra University on Long Island. I attended the Greenpeace Organizing Semester and learned the keys to organizing back on my campus. That fall I ran a campaign with the Sierra Student Coalition to engage young people to vote with clean energy in mind. I followed the campaign to Power Shift 2009, a youth climate conference, where I organized the largest lobby day in history. Back at school, I wrapped up my degree with a thesis on the influence of new media on

youth organizing in a case study on the UNFCCC conference in Copenhagen in 2010.

At Copenhagen, the youth delegation met with the U.S. envoy for climate change, Todd Stern, who told us that we simply hadn't organized enough people. I left discouraged by the lack of political will to address climate change on a global level and fired up to get back on the ground and organize.

Sierra Club's Beyond Coal campaign's main objective is to replace dirty coal with clean energy by retiring existing coal plants and keeping coal in the ground. The greatest threat posed by coal in Alaska lies in the fact that Alaska possesses roughly half the nation's coal reserves with nearly 80 percent sitting prominently along shipping routes for growing energy markets in Asia.

Here in Alaska I cannot wait to get started reaching out to everyone about the impact coal has locally, what I have seen firsthand with my students, and protect the beautiful lands and wildlife by stopping proposed mining projects. Come next opportunity for international climate policy, Alaskans will lead the grassroots movement to protect our lands and people from dirty energy and climate change. ❖

-- Laura Comer



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

Thanks, Pam