



Sierra Borealis *alaska report*

SIERRA CLUB ALASKA CHAPTER
JUNE 2020



Ambler Road-a bad prospect for Alaska's Economy and Environment Billion-Dollar private road will cause generations of damage

On March 26, 2020, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) released the Final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the construction of an industrial access road from

is subsidized by AIDEA and currently turning a profit, still pose huge economic and health risks to humans and the environment because the mine will require constant remediation *IN PERPETUITY* after operations cease...and AIDEA's bonds are notoriously inadequate for such sustained responsibility—especially as, in many cases, the big mining corporations depart and the State is left to clean up the mess.

Brooks Range Council (Brooks Range.org)
aerial footage by Zatz Works



Ambler Road-artist's depiction

the Dalton Highway to the Ambler Mining District. Under the preferred alternative identified in this EIS, Ambler Road—as it has come to be known—would traverse 211 miles of pristine wilderness ecosystems at the southern edge of the Brooks Range and Gates of the Arctic National Park and Preserve.

Which brings up some more questions about this project—for whom is AIDEA building the road and how much will it cost? Trilogy Metals/formerly NovaCopper of NovaGold (a series of Canadian corporations) is teaming up with South 32 (an Australian corporation) to extract the mineral wealth out of Alaska's earth as part of their "Arctic" and "Bornite" projects and ship it overseas. (Watch this video to see why Trilogy Metals favors operating in Alaska, including huge State subsidies and low taxes— <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ncR1eWBtYEA>—and in which they reveal their intent to develop 30 other "polymetallic deposits" in the area.

The Road would be funded through the Alaska Industrial Development and Export Authority (AIDEA), which preemptively allocated \$35 million for the project in an "emergency" board meeting on March 27—the day after the EIS was released. AIDEA's track record of publicly funding private corporate interests is mixed at best: think Healy Coal Power Plant funding—\$100 million invested and about \$2 million per year while mothballed, and Alaska Seafood International's seafood plant—\$50 million invested and millions more trying to save it...both went belly-up, as Anchorage Daily News reported.

Ambler Road has much greater significance than just the initial Arctic and Bornite projects. Ambler Metals will partner with NANA

Corporation which owns the land where the Arctic and Bornite project ore deposits are located.

Original estimates by Trilogy/ Ambler Metals were in the range of \$280 - \$380 million to construct the Road; the Final EIS estimates no less than \$520 million; and many industry experts believe figures north of the \$1 billion mark are more realistic. That's just to build the road, so the ore can be driven to
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Ambler Road -- from page 1

Fairbanks, loaded on the Alaska Railroad, and transported to Port MacKenzie and out of state.

The entire operation is dependent on State and municipal infrastructure—all to serve up the lion's share of the wealth to a few Canadian and Australian corporate executives. To be fair, NANA Corporation—and other Native Corporations through the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act disbursement program—will benefit from some of those profits as well, but those monies rarely stay in the localities that provide the raw wealth nor do they result in sustainable economies.

Opposition to Ambler Road

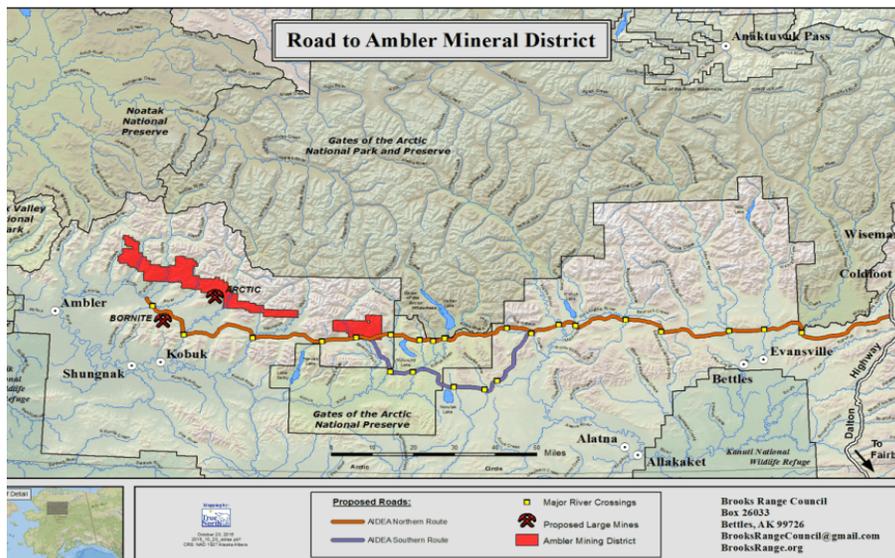
Not all Native communities and corporations are on board with the Ambler Mining projects the way NANA is. According to KUAC—the University of Alaska Fairbanks' radio and tv program, "In spite of economic promise, many villages in the area have passed formal resolutions against the road." And Native Corporation Doyon, Ltd.—although officially neutral about the project--"sent a strongly-worded letter yesterday [April 7, 2020] to the Alaska Industrial Development and Export Authority about the Ambler Road project. The letter chastises AIDEA for not completing right-of-way agreements with the Native corporation to cross its land near Evansville."

Doyon Ltd. CEO Aaron Schutt goes on to say, "We find it equally troubling that AIDEA invoked the Coronavirus pandemic to justify funding this unauthorized road on an emergency basis. We hope AIDEA is not using this public health tragedy to pressure Doyon or other landowners into granting Rights of Way--particularly after AIDEA failed for years to engage with Doyon."

Given the significant public opposition to the project, and at a time when the State of Alaska is reeling from a barrage of economic knockout punches—the falling price of oil and associated revenues, the losses in tourism due to the coronavirus pandemic, Dunleavy's irresponsible fiscal policies, declining fisheries due largely to climate change, etc.—why would Alaskans support AIDEA—a State program—handing over tens of millions of dollars immediately, and much more longterm, to subsidize a flawed venture to benefit a few corporate executives??

Why would Alaska, or the United States of America for that matter, even allow this? When the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA) established Gates of the Arctic National Park and Preserve (GAAR) in 1980, it included a provision to allow: "access for surface transportation across the Western (Kobuk River) unit" of GAAR (ANILCA Section 201 (4)(b)). Note that this provision applies only to the Western unit of GAAR, not to any of the other federal or state lands that the 211-mile road will cross. In fact, the vast majority of the road will be located on State lands, with significant stretches on BLM and Native Corporation lands, and only one sizeable section crossing GAAR lands.

It's important for Alaskans to understand what's happening here: savvy multinational mining corporations are taking advantage of a small loophole in ANILCA, in conjunction with a



True North GIS for Brooks Range Council

development-friendly administration in Washington, DC, to have the State build them a private road so they can run away with all the profits—while the associated problems—all the financial and environmental risks—are borne on the backs of Alaskans and our environment. The corporations know the Trump administration would bully the BLM and other land management agencies, making the NEPA process little more than a rubber-stamping exercise.

AIDEA was started in 1967 "to encourage the economic growth of the state" (AIDEA website) with specific provisions for local economies and small businesses. The well-researched website, Ground Truth Trekking, exposes these large mining operations for what they are—an ephemeral boom-and-bust cycle of environmental devastation that allows the corporations to grow ever wealthier, while the local economies must struggle, alongside ravaged mine sites that require environmental remediation in perpetuity.

Here's a universal truth: if we destroy our environment, we won't have an economy. Period. It's time for Alaskans to say NO to the economic, environmental, and social injustices that these large mining operations deliver. It's bad for the environment, bad for us, bad for our economy. Sometimes you've just got to admit that you're in a bad relationship... and get out. So it is with Alaskans and large, multinational mining corporations. Only this time—in a way that only Alaskans can—we tell them to take a hike. ❖

-- by Adam Babcock

Alaska Chapter activist Cynthia Wentworth's Letter to Editor opposing the Ambler road appeared in the Anchorage Daily News on April 26:

"I applaud Rep. Andy Josephson's commentary, 'AIDEA was wrong to fast-track Ambler Road over public outcry.' (Monday, April 6). The Alaska Industrial Development and Export Authority is considering spending \$35 million of state money on...the Ambler mining road megaproject through interior Alaska... As Rep. Josephson pointed out, this proposal is trying to -- continued page, p 3, bottom

Exploring Alaska During the Pandemic: *Alaska for Alaskans*

This summer is poised to be quite different than any we've seen before, with the Covid-19 pandemic affecting everyone's life and activities. As you can see in this issue of *Sierra Borealis*, it too has a different slant—with several articles on getting outdoors and taking advantage of nature in this pandemic.

One big change is the likelihood of a summer with little to no tourist season. This will have unpredictably adverse effects throughout the state, with small communities who rely on the income of the tourist industry facing unknown economic consequences with little certainty on the horizon.

However, less tourism does provide a unique opportunity for Alaskans to explore Alaska in a way which hasn't been possible in recent years. Local spots that are usually overrun with out-of-state visitors will be hosting much smaller than usual crowds this summer and will be happy for any extra business. This is a chance to have a truly Alaskan experience without competing with throngs of tourists—while providing much needed economic support to small communities and business owners across the state.

The state also faces threats to the fishing and cannery industries this year. Isolated fishing communities like Cordova rely heavily on these industries and the spending power they create to prop up their economies. The cruise ship industry, which normally brings a significant amount of tourism-related traffic, is expected to have far fewer, if any, cruises to Alaskan ports this year. Communities like Juneau, Ketchikan, and Skagway won't be nearly as busy as in past years and will need the economic stimulation provided this summer by Alaskans staying closer to home—but with

wanderlust. With social distancing measures added in, Alaskans will have plenty of room to breathe and smell the roses as they explore long-neglected favorite spots.

With many avoiding the close confines of an airplane, this doubles as an opportunity to experience a travel system entirely unique to the state of Alaska. While other states may have active ferry systems, the Alaska Marine Highway acts as the essential gateway to so many unique communities, and it needs the economic support of Alaskans more than ever following 2019's devastating budget cuts. With some *MVs* already in service and even more set to return in June, this poses a great opportunity to visit the communities of Kodiak, Yakutat, or Haines—even though ferry service frequency may be somewhat reduced. There is no simpler—and more enjoyable—way to support the transit system which these coastal communities rely on.

With the potential for unfilled camp grounds, hotels, and empty air bnbs, now is the chance to truly explore the outdoors of Alaska—whether you are a comfort-seeking city-dweller or a seasoned outdoors enthusiast.

For experienced backpackers and bikers this means less threat from out-of-state

competition on the more well-known trails. It also may mean some limited access, with many park facilities offering very limited hours. Some could be closed entirely. For creatures of comfort, this means not having to worry about booking a hotel or airbnb for a last-minute weekend getaway. It also means preparing for some small inconveniences in the form of restaurant, visitor center, and other business closures. If anything, the challenges we face this summer provide means and a motive to get creative with ways to enjoy the outdoors....Savor the adventure!

While planning and traveling remember that additional challenges will likely come up all summer as we navigate this strange time. Keeping in mind that you want to support local businesses, call ahead to your favorite restaurant or grocery store to make sure they're not closed or staffed for limited hours. Be prepared for minor inconveniences such as discontinuation of coffee pots and microwaves at some hotels and cabins. Museums and other historical sites across the state may experience closures, so be sure to plan back-up activities just in case. Most importantly, remember to be respectful of those around you and their social distancing measures. ❖

-- Heather Jesse

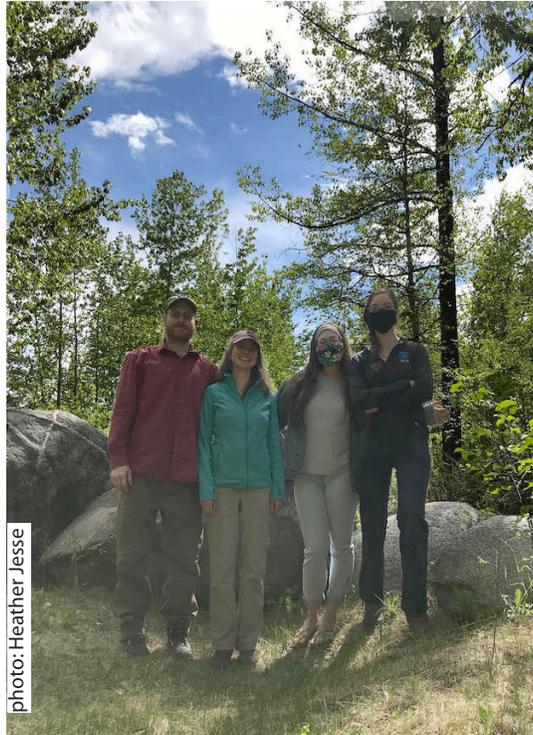


photo: Heather Jesse

Alaska Chapter volunteers Alyssa Schaefer, Adam Babcock, Christin Swesringen, and Heather Jesse visit the Wishbone Hill Site in late May

Wentworth LTE opposing Ambler Road--from p 2

to use limited state money to benefit one industry when we have so many other funding priorities—and at a time when Alaskans are particularly vulnerable. In addition to the \$35 million initial [state] money, what are the implications of spending another \$500 million to \$1 billion of public funds on another new road? Almost \$1 billion of federal and state money is already being spent on road construction in Alaska during fiscal 2019-2020. It is no wonder that 47% of Alaska's greenhouse gas emissions are from transportation. The Ambler Road megaproject would also severely disrupt subsistence hunting and fishing for rural residents of Northwest Alaska, at a time when for public health reasons we most need to be supporting these peoples' food security. It is time to take this project off the drawing board, now.

— Cynthia Wentworth ❖

Pebble Mine proposal--the threats keep on coming

Alaskans know that the salmon returning to Bristol Bay every year--36.9 million on average--are both a critical part of the ecosystem and a key source of food/subsistence fishing in the Bristol Bay area. Bristol Bay salmon are also economically important for Alaskan and beyond, valued at \$283 million in 2018, creating over 14,000 jobs, expected to support many people's livelihoods for a long time to come. Therefore, having up-to-date information about the Pebble mine project that threatens Bristol Bay salmon is vital for Alaskans. Since new information surrounding the Pebble project is of concern—and also confusing, I hope here to provide a summary of the current situation.

While the Pebble mine proposal has been around for about fifteen years, the Pebble partnership did not actually apply for a permit while President Obama was in office. The primary permit needed by the Pebble mine is a US Army Corps of Engineers' Clean Water Act "dredge and fill" permit. Before it can issue such a permit, the Army Corps must undertake an environmental review, with input from the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). The Clean Water Act is a primary Federal law aimed at restoring and maintaining the chemical, physical, and biological integrity of the nation's waters, including the Bristol Bay area.

In 2014 the EPA, under the Obama administration, proactively issued a "proposed determination," to deny the Clean Water Act permit, essentially saying the mine posed too great a threat to the salmon-rich waters of Bristol Bay. The decision--even before a specific mine development proposal was submitted--was based on extensive studies of the ecology of the region and what was known about Pebble's intentions. The EPA conducted a multi-year rigorous, peer-reviewed scientific study of the watershed and its importance, and then concluded that even the smallest Pebble Mine would irreversibly damage the Bristol Bay ecosystem. Pebble proponents were well aware of this history.

However, in 2017, as Trump became president, Pebble applied for the Clean Water Act permit to the Army Corps. This led to a surprising development. In 2019, with Pebble's application under review by the Army Corps of Engineers, the EPA said it would withdraw its proposed determination against the mine.

If EPA had not withdrawn the "proposed determination against the mine project," the Pebble project could have never been approved--regardless of the outcome of the Army Corps' assessment of the specific project plan.

Is it legal for EPA to withdraw its own proposed determination of "irreversible damage"--which was based on its scientific assessment about the unique environment of the Bristol Bay environment? Validity and reliability of the assessment of the region by EPA have not changed; the only difference is the ruling administration--from Obama to Trump.

EPA's reversal compelled many concerned groups including Sierra Club to sue EPA for its decision to withdraw the proposed determination. Legal basis for the lawsuit is that EPA's decision runs counter to sound science and the duty of the agency to protect the environment.

Unfortunately, the U.S. District Court Judge ruled EPA could withdraw its proposed determination from 2014--on the consideration that government agencies have a certain latitude. The judge's ruling, however, does not question the validity of EPA's scientific study to assess the fragility and ecological importance of the Bristol Bay area.

Clash between EPA and Army Corps of Engineers

In the meantime, the Army Corps of Engineers continues to review the Pebble proposal, and has produced a draft

Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). According to E & E news on April 15, 2020 (<https://www.eenews.net/stories/1062882093>), EPA--in spite of having already withdrawn its proposed negative determination, now found holes in the draft EIS of Army Corps of Engineers. EPA questioned the validity and extensiveness of the data used in the Army Corps of Engineers' Pebble mine environmental review and also questioned the transparency of the process, according to meeting minutes.

EPA said the Corps of Engineers' draft underpredicted impacts to Bristol Bay. EPA also questioned the quality of data in the Preliminary Final EIS,

according to the March interagency meeting. EPA's concern is whether all the streams at the mine site were sampled for fish and wetland analyses. EPA also questioned the viability of the water treatment proposal and the Army Corps' choice to exclude the public from providing input on its compensatory mitigation plan.

Nevertheless, we expect the Army Corps will still try to issue the permit later this summer. Their decision is likely to be biased towards issuing the permit.

The Army Corps' researchers may truly believe, contrary to majority scientific consensus, that a Pebble mine is safe, or they may just believe Pebble mine development is more beneficial than the current value of natural resources including wild salmon and abundant wildlife.

Some reports indicate that Pebble consistently tells their
--continued next page, 5, bottom



A perfect Alaskan summer to fall choice --Berry picking

Berry picking is one of the most accessible ways for people in Alaska to participate in subsistence, the beautiful practice of foraging for one's food in nature. With the variety of berries and the abundance of berry picking hot-spots near the state's most populated areas, it's a favorite pastime for many of the state's residents and long a pillar of Alaska Native diets. This year, it also boasts the added benefit of built-in social distancing capability—as you benefit from getting outside. With the only upfront costs being transportation, berry-picking is a virtually free Alaskan experience.

On a sunny day in mid-to late-July, it's no shock to see entire families unloading at your favorite trailheads, from infants to grandparents, all but the tiniest brandishing home-made berry picking vessels. Plastic buckets whose original uses have long-since been forgotten, wicker baskets, Halloween candy buckets, tupperware containers, and repurposed milk jugs. Once they've collected their fair share, they'll all pile back contentedly into their cars with stained fingers and mouths and head home fuller than they arrived, and with more than enough berries to go around.

The most common edible species in Southcentral Alaska are lingonberries (lowbush cranberries), highbush cranberries, blueberries, and crowberries. The most common poisonous berry to watch out for is the baneberry. Baneberries are red with a crease in them like a peach, and with serrated leaves. They contain cardiogenic toxins which sedate the heart muscles and can even induce heart attacks. (Ewing, Susan, *The Great Alaska Factbook*, Alaska North-west Books, 1996.) Also, note that all white berries are poisonous. Cranberries and lingonberries are red also, but lack the prominent crease, and they

Pebble Mine update -- from page 4

investors that Pebble Mine, once approved, will grow beyond the basic proposal the Army Corps analyzed and will last for generations. Serious questions are raised about every step of the Army Corps of Engineers' EIS preparation process.

A big question is EPA. EPA scientists at least appear to be working seriously to provide objective review (see: <https://www.ktoo.org/2019/07/02/epa-says-report-on-pebble-mine-lacks-detail-likely-underestimates-risks-to-water-quality/>). Yet, EPA's final decision could be heavily influenced by political considerations. Delay is hoped for. Under a different administration, EPA could choose to veto the permit based either on internal assessments by new EPA leadership, or based on external pressure from environmental groups. The most effective action we can take *now* to prevent Pebble project from materializing is to make sure the next president is scientifically minded and has appropriate concerns for the long term health of our environment. ❖

-- Yasuhiro Ozuru

have oval leaves. Blueberries are greyish-blue when ripe and come right off the bush when gently rolled in your fingers. If they have any redness or are hard to pick, they aren't ripe for picking yet.

When exploring new areas and searching for new berry bushes, it's best to get familiar with your area beforehand and scout potential berry sites early in the season. Be sure you know the shape and color of the leaves that you're searching for, along with the flower bud and, when the time is ready, the desired color of a nearly ripe berry. There are field guides to help identify Alaskan berry bushes at all stages for those who are more seriously interested in the subsistence activity. There are Facebook groups too. No matter your experience level, wild Alaskan berry bushes are there for all and promise fun for all ages.

Southcentral Alaska berry picking season can be different each year: hotter summers bring earlier harvests, and cooler summers provide slow-burning picking seasons. The Chugach area will differ from the Mat-Su and Kenai Peninsula by several weeks depending on the year. When deciding which patch to explore, keep in mind that the spots close to the city tend to be over-picked. Traditionally, Alaska Natives leave easy-to-access patches for the elders and go to farther spots. A good rule of thumb is to take only 1/4 of a patch, leaving a quarter for other foragers, a quarter for animals, and a quarter for the berry plants themselves. Wherever you go, have fun, bring bear spray, and look around you from time to time to soak in the beauty of Alaskan autumn at its peak. ❖

-- Heather Jesse and Christin Swearingen

Chart with locations & berries

Location	Berry species	Difficulty	
Anchorage			
Basher Drive Trail	Lingonberry, Crowberry	Easy	
Little O'Malley	Blueberry	Medium	
Arctic Valley	Blueberry, Crowberry, Cranberry	Medium	
Sheep Mountain	Blueberry, Lingonberry, Crowberry	Medium	
Girdwood			
Winner Creek Trail	Blueberry, Crowberry	Easy	
Crow Creek Rd	Blueberry, Cranberry	Easy	
Mount Alyeska	Blueberry	Easy	
Mat-Su			
Hatcher Pass	Blueberry	Medium	
W Rocky Lake Dr	Cranberry	Easy	
Old Bodenbug Butte Trail	Raspberry	Medium	
Matanuska River Park	Cranberry	Easy	

Stand in solidarity with the Gwich'in Nation

Tell Bank of America to rule out financing Arctic drilling

While Alaskans practice physical, social distancing and care for community health, the Trump administration's plan to lease the still-unprotected coastal plain of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge for drilling continues to threaten Indigenous communities, pristine wilderness, and struggling wildlife—not to mention the long-term stability of our climate.

In spite of the Administration's push, by now all but one of America's biggest banks have committed not to fund any new drilling projects in the Arctic Refuge. Bank of America is now the only major US bank that has not ruled out funding for Arctic drilling.

Five of the six largest banks in the U.S., along with more than a dozen major banks around the world, have committed to not finance oil and gas development in the Arctic, including in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. By end of May, only Bank of America has failed to update its environmental policy and speak out to protect the Arctic. The time to convince Bank of America to act is now.

In late April, Morgan Stanley became the fifth major American bank to rule out backing oil and gas exploration and development projects in the Arctic. Citi, Goldman Sachs, JPMorgan Chase and Wells Fargo have also made similar commitments. (See *sierra borealis* March 2020.)

Canadian Gwich'in leaders, in the Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation (VGFN) and the Gwich'in Tribal Council, based in the Northwest Territories, are calling on major Canadian banks to join in the boycott of Arctic financing.



In its eagerness to hand over the Arctic Coastal Plain to the fossil fuel industry, the Trump administration disregards Indigenous rights and public wishes. The coastal plain of the Arctic Refuge is integral to the livelihoods and way of life of the Gwich'in Nation, whose members have lived in that region for thousands of years and consider that land sacred.

For more than thirty years, (since the Reagan Administration first recommended opening the Arctic Coastal plain to drilling), the many communities across northeast Alaska and northwest Canada that comprise the Gwich'in Nation have been unanimously united in their firm



photo: Marion Klaus

opposition to fossil fuel development of the coastal plain. A large majority of the American people support the Gwich'in people's opposition to drilling in their homeland—the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge.

By some estimates, extracting and burning the potential oil reserves in the Arctic Refuge would be the emissions equivalent of adding 776 million new cars to the road. We face a global climate crisis, and it is clear that we need to stop developing new fossil fuel expansion areas in order to reach the emissions-reduction targets that science requires.

[Tell B of A to keep its assets out of the Arctic.](#)

There is no room in our global carbon budget for more oil and gas production in the Arctic, period. It's time for Bank of America to align its investments with a safe climate future, and that must start by saying NO to funding Arctic drilling.

Any company that is connected to the destruction of the Arctic Refuge faces enormous reputational risk and public backlash. The bank could be accused of trampling on human rights, destroying a globally valuable intact wild places, and accelerating the climate crisis.

With oil prices dropping drastically—and with renewable energy rapidly becoming widely available and economically competitive, now should be an easy time for Bank of America to step forward and join fellow banks in agreeing to preserve Arctic human rights and natural splendor and ecological integrity.

Please contact Bank of America via this link to the Sierra Club's Add-Up Campaign alert:

<https://addup.sierraclub.org/campaigns/tell-these-big-us-banks-that-arctic-drilling-is-bad-business/petition?>

If this link not directly work on your computer, simply paste it into your browser.

Thank you for taking action for America's Arctic Refuge. ❖

(From Sierra Club Add-up campaign and other "Our Wild America" news reports.).

Outings --
Get Outside

Nature as a pandemic escape

The COVID 19 Pandemic has caused mass physical isolation, causing many to stay home as a responsible measure of social, or physical distancing. This worldwide phenomenon is somewhat more challenging for rural areas. As Alaskans, we're already more physically spread out and reliant on interstate travel. While we face unique challenges due to our geography, our geography is also our biggest asset. We have vast trail systems, parks, lakes, rivers, mountains and the ocean to be distant in. This is a luxury when so many in urban areas are forced to stay indoors.

Many organizations now formally recognize the physical and mental health benefits of being outside during this time, such as Harvard University, the Cleveland Clinic, and the American Academy of Pediatricians. To be certain, not all Alaskans are able to climb Alaska's mountains, float its rivers, or camp under the late setting sun. But even in our cities and small communities there are green neighborhood spaces close by. For those who are high-risk, this can be an exceptionally hard time to stay inside. If you cannot physically get outside there are still benefits from getting fresh air at an open window or even listening to nature sounds.

It's a great time to get involved and speak out from home to protect those places you love--so they are still there to enjoy when this is over. If you are able to get outside, bring a cloth face covering, stay six feet from those that are not in your household, and try not to contact high touch surfaces. On days when the trails are so packed that maintaining a six-foot distance isn't possible, we have to get creative. This may mean checking out a new trail when your usual trailhead is full, or it may mean trying out a new outdoor activity altogether.

As an example, in a recent attempt to stay connected and get outside on a packed trail day, I decided to invite a couple of friends to a less-visited local park where we could distance ourselves on hammocks and enjoy relaxing in the fresh air and sun. Whatever it is that gets you closer to nature, whether that's listening to the birds through an open window, climbing a new peak, or just "hanging" --sitting on a bench in the sun--now is the perfect time to cherish Nature and enjoy responsibly. ❖ -- by Hope Meyn



photo: Christi Meyn

Hammock relaxing at the Centennial Rose Garden

National Trails Day—June 6

June is a special month to celebrate getting outside in Alaska

This year, we celebrated National Trails Day on June 6, 2020. Regularly observed on the first Saturday in June, National Trails Day was started in 1993 by the American Hiking Society (AHS) to commemorate America's extensive system of hiking trails around the country and the various ways we use them for recreation.

While National Trails Day is the perfect symbolic day to spend time recreating on our favorite trails, the day has also become a practical opportunity to preserve the trails that we love. In 2018, AHS challenged the public to improve 2,802 miles of trails—the distance it takes to hike the United States from coast to coast. That year, more than 100,000 volunteers surpassed that goal by over 1,000 miles.

Take the Public Lands Protector Pledge!

This year, in lieu of large public gatherings amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, AHS asks people to take the Public Lands Protector Pledge and commit to taking at least one personal action meant to protect trails and also to fight for equitable access to quality green space.

As part of its Pledge request, AHS has offered several ways in which the public can make a difference, including:

- Get educated on public lands and land access issues and vote;
- Contact your local congressional representatives regarding bipartisan legislation that protects trails and supports equal access;
- Participate in trail clean-up on your own;
- Commit to a trail work project (once any applicable shelter-in-place orders have been lifted); and
- Donate to nonprofit organizations that protect and maintain trails.

For more information, and to take the Pledge, visit <https://americanhiking.org/national-trails-day/>.

Even though this year's celebration is markedly different from those in the past, Alaska's trails are open—and beckoning.

If quarantine has taught us anything, it's that nothing is more valuable and restorative than savoring our trails and open spaces.

We invite you to celebrate National Trails Day by getting out on your favorite Alaska trail (at a safe physical distance from other hikers) and taking the national AHS Pledge. I'll be heading to my favorite trail, up to Wolverine Peak.

Happy Trails! ❖

--Traci Bunkers

Invasive Plants in Alaska

Are weeds, non-native plants, and invasive plants the same?

Not quite! The term “weed” is used for any plant, native or non-native, whose presence is undesirable to people at a particular time and place.

Non-native plants are those that do not live or grow naturally in the region or area in which they have been established. They are introduced, either accidentally or intentionally, by humans. Non-native plants are also sometimes referred to exotic, alien, or non-indigenous. Non-native plants can have varying levels of invasiveness depending on their ability to produce large numbers of viable offspring and their potential to establish and spread in natural areas.

Alaska’s Non-Native Plants

There are approximately 400 non-native plant species known to occur in Alaska, each with its own level of invasiveness and potential to cause harm in natural areas. The Alaska Center for Conservation Science (ACCS) at the University of Alaska Anchorage maintains a database and mapping application called the Alaska Exotic Plants Information Clearinghouse (AKEPIC) in cooperation with several federal agencies and other entities. ACCS tracks the detection and spread of invasive plants in the state and compiles biographies of non-native plant species. ACCS also ranks each plant according to its invasiveness and potential impacts on natural areas in Alaska. The goal of ACCS’s work is to identify infestations of invasive plants more quickly (early detection) to allow for a more rapid response. Check out their website for

more information about AKEPIC, a detailed identification field guide to help you identify non-native plants in your area, and local resources for communities across Alaska! <https://accs.uaa.alaska.edu/invasive-species/non-native-plants/>

Taraxacum officinale (Common dandelion)

The common dandelion (*Taraxacum officinale*) is one of the most recognizable and prolific invasive plants in Alaska, frequently taking up residence in disturbed habitats like along road corridors, in residential neighborhoods, and fields. The dandelion is an excellent seed distributor, and its seeds can remain viable in the soil for up to 9 years! The plant is not completely detrimental,

however, as all parts of it are edible and nutritious: the flowers can be used to make dandelion wine or in cookies, the leaves can be eaten raw or cooked, and the root can be ground up to make a coffee substitute. Below is a recipe for Dandelion Wine that was created and tested by Alyssa Schaefer, Outings Coordinator, in 2018. The recipe made about three bottles of wine with a unique, citrusy flavor.

-- Alyssa Schaefer



Dandelion Wine

Ingredients

- 1 (.18 ounce) package wine yeast
- 2 quarts (8 cups) yellow dandelion blossoms, well rinsed (Note: Make sure that the place where you forage for dandelion blossoms is free of herbicides)
- 2-4 cups white sugar
- 3 lemons, sliced
- 3 oranges, sliced
- 4 quarts (16 cups) boiling water

Directions

1. Place dandelion blossoms in the boiling water, and allow to sit for 2 days. Keep pot covered.
2. After 2 days strain off the flowers, add the remaining ingredients to the water except the yeast.
3. Bring the mixture back to a boil for 10-30 minutes. Then put the liquid into your glass container. After it has cooled to roughly 30 C or 90 F add the wine yeast. Cover the container opening with cheesecloth and allow the liquid to ferment for three weeks at room temperature in a dark space, stirring once a day, or until the fermentation stops (when it no longer forms bubbles).
4. Strain through a fine sieve. Rinse the container and pour the liquid back in. Let stand for two to three days to allow the dregs to settle at the bottom. Gently decant into sterilized bottles and close. Store in a cool and dark space for at least two to three months before tasting. ❖

Trump Administration attacks: Expected to slash protection for national preserve wildlife

Bears, wolves, coyotes, caribou and other wildlife in Board of Game's cross hairs

In late May the National Park Service (NPS) announced that it has "aligned" its sport hunting and trapping regulations (rules) in Alaska's ten national preserves with the Alaska Board of Game's sport hunting and trapping methods. Details of the alignment are not yet available; publication of the final rule/environmental assessment in the federal register has been delayed.

Background

During the Obama Administration the NPS issued rules prohibiting incompatible hunting and trapping methods the Alaska Board of Game (BOG) had allowed in the preserves:

- Baiting brown and black bears at bait stations;
- Hunting and trapping wolves and coyotes, including pups May 1 through August 9;
- Spotighting black bears at den sites and in dens, including cubs and sows with cubs;
- Using dogs for hunting black bears; and
- Shooting swimming caribou and other "big game."*

The State quickly sued the NPS for these prohibitions, and former Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke began the alignment process now being accomplished by Interior Secretary David Bernhardt.

The NPS said its rule was necessary given the BOG's refusal to comply with preserve wildlife standards as set forth in federal law and policies:

An example of such manipulation is black and brown bear baiting at bait stations, which is a preferred tool of the BOG. The NPS summarized the reasons it banned such baiting.

"The NPS proposed prohibiting the harvest of brown bears over bait to avoid public safety issues, to avoid food-conditioning bears and other species, and to maintain natural bear behavior as required by NPS law and policy. Baiting tends to occur in accessible areas used by multiple user groups, which contributes to public safety concerns associated with baiting."

The legal and policy foundations of the NPS rule are found in the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA), the NPS Organic Act, NPS regulations and policies, and other applicable federal law.

*Shooting big game that is swimming is prohibited by the State, with an exception that allows shooting a swimming caribou from a boat under power or otherwise, and shooting a caribou that has made it to the shore while the hunter is still in the boat under power. State law also bans using dogs to hunt big game, except that dogs can be used to hunt black bears. The revoked NPS rule did not allow these. ❖

--Jack Hession

Proposes to open Kenai National Wildlife Refuge to brown bear baiting

A new proposed rule, according to the Trump Administration's Fish & Wildlife Service, would amend existing Obama Administration rules in order to "align" them with the Alaska Board of Game rules.

If adopted as proposed, the rule would authorize state-regulated [BOG] "harvest" [shooting] of brown bears at registered bait stations, as well as the BOG's trapping regulations. There are other provisions involving public access, but the baiting and trapping changes are the most important. (Fish and Wildlife Service Notice: FWS press release: https://www.fws.gov/news/ShowNews.cfm?ref=proposed-public-use-regulations-improve-hunting-fishing-and-recreation-&_ID=36564)

What You Can Do:

Let the Fish and Wildlife Service know that you strongly oppose opening the Kenai Refuge to brown bear baiting and the State's trapping regulations. You can also take this opportunity to oppose black bear baiting that is permitted at bait stations in a portion of the refuge.

Comments can be submitted by mail or hand-delivered; email is not accepted. Contact:

Andrea Medeiros
Alaska Regional Office.
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
1011 E. Tudor Road, Anchorage, AK 99503
907-786-3695 ❖

(-- From an alert by the Center for Biological Diversity sent to Alaska Chapter by Susan Hansen)



Izembek Lawsuit Victory--judge denies road assault on Wilderness

A federal judge has again said "NO" to the State of Alaska's and the Trump administration's plan to bulldoze a road through the Izembek National Wildlife Refuge Wilderness in Alaska. In a June 1 decision, Senior Judge John Sedwick ruled against Interior Secretary David Bernhardt's closed-door agreement for a land exchange of federal public lands in the Izembek National Wildlife Refuge. The State of Alaska and commercial interest have long sought to exchange state lands with the federal government, in order to take out of designated wilderness the strip of land where they want to build some ten miles of road through Wilderness.

The new decision not only protects Izembek's multitude of bird and land-based wildlife but also the integrity of the National Wilderness Preservation System from a harmful precedent.

Trustees for Alaska (trustees.org) filed the lawsuit in January 2020. After a court ruling in March 2019 voided Interior's previous very similar land swap agreement, Interior appealed the court's decision in the first lawsuit, which Trustees for Alaska had filed in August, 2019. But while that appeal was pending, Interior then entered into another unlawful land deal behind closed doors. Now the court ruled that the Interior Department can't avoid the legal requirements related to road construction on protected lands by saying the land swap doesn't authorize a road.

The court further ruled that the Interior secretary failed miserably at justifying the land swap, and that the Secretary could not ignore the agency's prior analysis that a road would cause significant harm to the ecological integrity of Izembek Refuge.

From Trustees for Alaska's press release on the ruling: "Like the first lawsuit, the second one argued that Interior cannot use the land exchange provision of the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act to gut a National Wildlife Refuge and congressionally designated wilderness. Groups also argued that Interior circumvented public process, environmental review, and congressional approval. Commercial and private interests have advocated for a road for decades.

"The Court held that Interior violated ANILCA in two ways. First, the exchange does not meet ANILCA's conservation purposes or the specific purposes of Izembek Refuge to protect wilderness and wildlife values. The court also agreed that the Exchange Agreement is an approval of a transportation system that falls within the ambit of ANILCA Title XI. As a result, Interior could not enter this exchange without approval from Congress and the President. Finally, the Court found—as in the previous lawsuit—that the Secretary failed to provide adequate reasoning to support the change in policy in favor of a land exchange and a road through Izembek."

"A road through the Izembek National Wildlife Refuge would be a costly and ineffective use of taxpayer dollars, and would severely damage this important wilderness," said Dan Ritzman, Director of the Sierra Club's Lands Water Wildlife Campaign. "This deal has been repeatedly studied and consistently rejected for good reason, and we're glad to see the court reject it once again."

Trustees for Alaska filed the most recent lawsuit on behalf of Sierra Club and eight other organizations, including Alaska Wilderness League, Center for Biological Diversity, Defenders of Wildlife, National Audubon Society, National Wildlife Refuge Association, and Wilderness Watch.



The only Alaska Ramsar site

The Izembek National Wildlife Refuge, at just over 300,000 acres the smallest of Alaska's 16 national wildlife refuges, sits near the western end of the Alaska Peninsula near the Aleutians and is 95 percent Wilderness. The Refuge is critically important wildlife habitat, a major crossroad for international bird migration, and a Wetland of International Importance, or so-called "Ramsar Site" according to an international convention that recognizes certain wetlands for their global value. (Izembek is the only Alaska Ramsar site of the 36 in the U.S.; there are some 2000 worldwide.) The Izembek Lagoon is of critical importance to millions of migrating birds because its unique nourishing eelgrass beds.

Sierra Club's Alaska Chapter has followed this ongoing issue for well over 20 years, with frequent newsletter articles. ❖



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