



alaska report

VOLUME 35 | NUMBER 4 | NOVEMBER 2009

Polar Bear critical habitat to be named But--for bears to survive--carbon emissions must be sharply reduced

On October 22, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) announced a proposal to designate more than 128 million acres of Alaskan coastline and waters as critical habitat for the polar bear. In May 2008 the Department of the Interior listed the polar bear as a threatened species under the Endangered Species Act, but it failed to designate critical habitat then, as conservation groups insisted the law mandated.

This would be the largest ever single designation of protected habitat for any species, encompassing the full range of the two American polar bear populations—the Chukchi Sea and the Southern Beaufort Sea groups. Together they are estimated to have roughly 3,500 bears.

Unfortunately, the Administration may be sending out some mixed messages: The FWS announcement, required by the Endangered Species Act, follows on a decision earlier the same week by the Minerals Management Service (MMS) to approve offshore oil drilling in key polar bear habitat in Alaska's Beaufort Sea. MMS is also considering drilling plans for polar bear habitat in the Chukchi Sea; they have just given the Shell Oil Company permission to drill in the proposed habitat area.

These recent conflicting decisions come after several years of legal wrangling and Bush administration foot dragging. When former Interior Secretary Dirk Kempthorne finally announced in 2008 that the polar bear would be listed as threatened, he exempted greenhouse gas emissions and oil development — by far the two leading threats to the bear — from regulation under the Endangered Species Act. According to the ESA, critical habitat is those areas that must be managed to



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Polar bear mother and cubs: in the path of preservation

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permit an endangered or threatened species to recover to a level where it is safe, for the foreseeable future, from the danger of extinction. The new Obama Administration had a chance to lift this exemption in March 2009, but Interior Secretary Ken Salazar announced he would leave in place the "4(d) rule" that exempted greenhouse gas emissions and oil development from regulation under the Act, ignoring more than 100,000 citizen petitions to save the bear— as well as requests from more than 1,300 scientists, more than 50 prominent legal experts, dozens of lawmakers, and more than 130 conservation organizations.

The science looks gloomy for polar bears. By most estimates nearly a third of all polar bears — including all bears in Alaska — will be extinct by 2050 if current warming trends continue. The rest of the species will be most likely be gone by the end of the century. And, the mere designation of critical habitat will do little to actually help bears – unless the carbon-emissions whose increase is warming the polar seas are sharply reduced. And, the Interior Department's drilling plans at the same time could neutralize any beneficial effect the listing could have.

Sierra Club greeted the FWS announcement with the following statement by Executive Director Carl Pope:

"We applaud the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for designating critical habitat for the polar bear. There is no question that polar bears are in trouble. This is an important first step. Now, if we want America's polar bears to survive, we must also address global warming and eliminate the threat of offshore drilling.

There is no environmentally sound way to drill for oil in polar bear habitat. Where there is drilling, there are oil spills. There is no proven method for cleaning up oil in the Arctic's broken sea ice, and once a bear makes contact with even a small amount of oil, it loses its ability to insulate and can die of hypothermia and ingestion.

We don't need to sacrifice polar bears and other wildlife so oil companies can break their billion-dollar profit records. America already has the technology and the will to embrace a clean energy economy that will end our dependence on oil and leave pristine places like the Arctic, and its wildlife, intact."

⇒ What You Can Do:

The Interior Department has announced a 60-day comment period on its proposed critical habitat designation.

Please send comments **by Dec. 21** to:

Public Comments Processing, Attn: FWS-R7-ES-2009-2042, Division of Policy and Directives Management, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, 4401 N. Fairfax Dr., Ste. 222, Arlington, VA 22203.

Online:

Federal eRulemaking Portal:

<http://www.regulations.gov> (follow the instructions for submitting comments.)

-- Kit McGurn

On polar bear critical habitat, Brendan Cummings, senior counsel with the Center for Biological Diversity, who has led the Center's advocacy for polar bears, said, "The Interior Department is schizophrenic, declaring its intent to protect polar bear habitat in the Arctic, yet simultaneously sacrificing that habitat to feed our unsustainable addition to oil." ♦

Commercial fishing in Arctic waters halted

In August 2009, the Secretary of Commerce approved the Fishery Management Plan for the Fish Resources of the Arctic Management Area. Taking a bold, firm step, this plan initially prohibits commercial fishing in the Arctic waters of the region until more information is available to support sustainable fisheries management.

The plan, covering the Arctic waters of the United States in the Chukchi and Beaufort seas, establishes a framework for sustainably managing Arctic marine resources. Among other factors, the plan will consider that warming ocean temperatures, migrating fish stocks and shifting sea ice conditions may potentially favor the development of commercial fisheries. The plan was recommended by the North Pacific Fishery Management Council in February 2009.

The Arctic Fishery Management Plan (FMP) governs commercial fishing for most species of fish within the Arctic Management Area. The Arctic Management Area, is all marine waters in the U.S. Exclusive Economic Zone of the Chukchi and Beaufort Seas from 3 nautical miles offshore the coast of Alaska or its baseline to 200 nautical miles offshore, north of Bering Strait, and west to the 1990 United States/Russia maritime boundary line and east to the United States/Canada maritime boundary. The FMP governs commercial fishing for all stocks of fish, including all finfish, shellfish, or other marine living resources, except commercial fishing for Pacific salmon and Pacific halibut, which is managed under other authorities.

This Arctic FMP prohibits commercial harvests of all fish resources of the Arctic Management Area until sufficient information is available to support the sustainable management of a commercial fishery. ♦

-- from U.S. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA)

Western Wilderness Conference 2010

Join wilderness enthusiasts from all over the Western states April 8-11, 2010 on the campus of U.C. Berkeley in the San Francisco Bay Area. Some 800 participants will gather to focus on the role of wild lands in an era of global climate change and how to win new allies for preserving wild places. Plenary sessions, dynamic speakers and intensive workshops will help connect wild places with climate change and offer training on how to advocate effectively. Films, music, fun, networking-- join us! Go to www.westernwilderness.org for more information and for "early-bird" registration.

Climate change cannot be ignored

I just returned from a six-week journey that took me 30 miles south of the Arctic Ocean where I watched a herd of about a dozen musk oxen graze along the Sagavanirktok River. Two Pacific loons swam on a lake nearby. Earlier I observed a grizzly bear watching over her two cubs as they dug up roots and insects. To get their attention, she stood on her hind legs, pounded her chest and cried out to them until they ran to her and they disappeared from my sight. While I was kayaking on a pristine lake, a bald eagle swooped over my shoulder, snagged a fish and flew to its nest. All rivers and lakes were at flood stage due to rapid spring melt. From my kayak I saw a moose calf struggle to swim across a flooded area while its mother frantically waited. The baby safely made it to her side, and was rewarded with a warm suckle of milk.

Backpacking the Atigun River Gorge of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, I watched a herd of Dall sheep high on a mountain of the Brooks Range. They looked like tiny cotton balls and minutes later - poof - they were over the mountain and out of sight. Ptarmigans, still in winter white, dotted the tundra landscape. Long-tail jaegers screeched at me if I trekked too close to their nests. The Central Caribou herd migrates in this area, but I saw only a few in scattered locations. Little ground squirrels watched me.

Climate change has brought more heavy thunder storms from the Bering Sea, and I experienced more days of heavy rain, some sleet and the worst insect infestations I've experienced in Alaska in 20 years. Most streams, only knee high last year, were raging rivers and too dangerous to cross. With more mining and drilling proposed in Alaska's Arctic wilderness we are in danger of losing more wildlife, pristine wilderness, and a healthy environment for humans.

Thirteen scientists researching national climate change in the United States, two from the University of Alaska, Fairbanks, reported, "Alaska had longer summers, higher temperatures and drier conditions; insect outbreaks; increased wildfires; thawing permafrost; coastal storms; and displacement of marine species." Their research showed Alaska has warmed more than twice the rate of the rest of the United States, with an average 3.4 degrees annual average increase and winters that are 6.3 degrees warmer in a period of only 50 years. The 90-page report can be found at www.globalchange.gov/usimpacts.

Scientists from the University of Ontario studying the Yukon River discovered there have been dramatic fluctuations of extreme low and high flows. These extreme fluctuations occurred over 44 years, not centuries. Extreme low flows have resulted in severe droughts and forest fires. This year's extreme high flows caused massive flooding and ice chunks the size of buildings that destroyed three villages in Alaska along its banks. Agriculture and fishing have been

dramatically altered.

The effects of warmer temperatures and extreme flow fluctuations have drastically reduced salmon spawning because salmon can not tolerate these conditions. Salmon populations are so low on the Yukon River that Alaska and federal authorities have banned all commercial fishing and severely restricted subsistence fishing. Directly affected are people whose main diet for centuries has been king salmon. A leader, Nick Andrew Jr., from Yup'ik Eskimo village, 400 miles west of Anchorage, said, "Usually by this date, everyone's subsistence king salmon needs are met. But now only 20 percent of the village's king salmon needs have been met. It's a bad situation." A group of fishermen from the village defied the law and caught 100 king salmon in gill nets, cut the fish for drying and freezing and delivered them to widows, elders and disabled residents. Subsistence fishing is vital to the survival of these people.

Temperatures have fluctuated over centuries causing floods, droughts, ice ages and warming, but the drastic changes we are now experiencing have happened in 50 years or less. Iowans need to educate themselves about climate change, and the effects of carbon dioxide produced by fossil fuels as Congress debates cap-and-trade, renewable and other energy legislation. Learn who will benefit the most from their decisions - fossil fuel industries or citizens. Presently, powerful oil, gas and coal lobbies are swaying public opinion back to supporting their huge profits.

My journey ended as I drove through the magnificent grasslands of South Dakota. Camping at a primitive site in Badlands National Park, I saw a lone, shaggy, male buffalo - a symbol of what Americans got wrong in the past. We must do better. ♦

-- Phyllis Mains

PHYLLIS MAINS (pmains@juno.com) is a Sierra Club activist from Iowa who chairs the Alaska Coalition of Iowa. Phyllis commented, "Maybe my Op-Ed will inspire more of our members to write letters to newspapers -- I'd love to see that happen."



Musk ox seen along the Sagavanirktok River (just west of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge--reached from the haul road)

Photo: Phyllis Mains

Katmai National Park and Preserve bear/visitor management

Park Service offers weakened plan

Brooks River is the most important and famous brown bear concentration area in the national park system. During the July peak of the summer sockeye (red) salmon run, up to 70 bears at one time pursue their favorite food. Also drawn to the area during the summer are more than 10,000 visitors who arrive by plane and boat for a day of observing and photographing bears, to fly-fish for salmon and trophy rainbows, and to take a van tour to the Valley of Ten Thousand Smokes. For hikers and boaters Brooks River is a popular jumping off point for the Katmai Wilderness. Brooks Camp, a private lodge operated by the Katmailand Company under park concession, a public campground, visitor center, and other NPS support facilities are located on the north side of the river.

To reach the bear-viewing platforms on the south side of the river, visitors arriving on the north side walk across a floating bridge--except when bears are swimming near the bridge or are on the banks near the bridge. At these times, traffic jams occur as park rangers, armed with shotguns, sidearms, bear spray, and walkie-talkies hold back people until the bears have moved away.

Bear watchers, anglers, and those on the Valley tour must wait on both sides of the river, sometimes up to an hour or more, until the bears move on. Guests at Brooks Camp and the public campground, day-use visitors on tight travel schedules, and lodge-based anglers headed for other hot fishing holes in the park and elsewhere can see their plans disrupted. Airline flights can be missed back at the community of King Salmon on the edge of the park, where most trips to Brooks River originate.



New bridge plan compromises existing deeply flawed bear/visitor Plan

As described in two newsletters with maps, available at <http://www.nps.gov/katm/parkmgmt/upload/Newsletter2.pdf>, the NPS "is considering replacing the existing floating bridge and trails to improve visitor access" with an elevated bridge and connecting elevated boardwalks designed to eliminate the traffic jams, remove a barrier to the bears, provide a safe crossing for visitors, and

allow park staff to focus on other park needs. The existing bridge "requires annual installation and removal, frequent maintenance and repair (including bear-caused damage), riverbank erosion control, and annual bank stabilization repairs due to storm damage and high water events." Also being considered is relocation of the park barge landing and access road away from the mouth of the river.

Three "conceptual designs" for a new bridge and elevated boardwalks at the approaches are being considered: a "short-span pile-supported span, a mid-span wood truss bridge, and a free-span cable-stayed (suspension) bridge."

The agency claims that a new bridge and boardwalks "would advance the phased relocation of facilities and park operations from the north side of Brooks River to the south side of the river as called for in the 1996 Brooks River Area Development Concept Plan (DCP) and Environmental Impact Statement (EIS)." The plan was intended to give the riparian zone on the north side entirely over to the bears, while reserving the south side for a new seasonal village complex consisting of a new floatplane and boat dock, lodge, visitor center, campground, shuttle bus road system, park staff housing, maintenance, and related support facilities.

Since 1996 the planned move to the south side has been stalled by lack of funding and opposition to the move by the lodge concessioner and other fishing lodges in the region that fly their anglers to the river. Aside from some new housing for park staff built on the south side, the rest of the existing north side complex remains in place.

In its two newsletters and at the public "scoping" meetings, the NPS made no mention of the cost of a new bridge and boardwalks. An Alaska Chapter enquiry revealed that the new bridge project would add approximately \$5 million to the DCP's estimated \$30 million cost.

The agency's claim that the new bridge and boardwalks would "advance" the phased shift to the south side is misleading. For that purpose, the existing bridge and the park's large modern supply barge, a craft that resembles a small landing ship tank, would suffice.

On the contrary, the project would be a major retreat because it would undermine the plan's intent to remove all facilities from the north side. A permanent bridge/boardwalk beginning a few steps from the lodge, combined with the adjacent floatplane and boat landing beach--used by bears headed for the river--indicates that the agency has abandoned its original plan to yield at least the north side of the river to the bears.

Katmailand prefers to keep its lodge in the present location, and over the decades its interests were diligently protected by former Alaska Senator Ted Stevens. A friend of the founder of Brooks Camp, Stevens amended federal law to virtually guarantee the company's concession, if not location, in perpetuity. Katmailand and its allies can be expected to

Katmai plan -- continued

campaign for the status quo, now strengthened by the bridge/boardwalk idea.

Re-evaluation of the Development Concept Plan needed

Complicating the issue is the deeply flawed DCP. It is a half-measure that fails to fully comply with the Alaska National Interest Land Conservation Act's directive to "protect habitats for, and populations of, fish and wildlife, including, but not limited to, high concentrations of brown/grizzly bears and their denning areas...". NPS-funded studies of bear-human interactions show the need to reform Brooks River area management if the bears' habitat requirements are to be fully met.

The DCP fails because it would plunk down a costly taxpayer-funded new summer resort and NPS facility in bear critical habitat on the south side of the river. Bears travel through and rest in the proposed complex area that lies between Brooks River and other foraging areas, notably salmon-rich Margot Creek farther south. Their trails lace the forest between the two streams, yet the agency remains blasé about the possibility of bear-human close encounters ("incidents" in agency jargon) and the disruption of bear behavior and travel patterns by the new structures, shuttle

bus system, and human activity.

In drafting its DCP the agency rejected an alternative recommended by the Sierra Club, state and national conservation groups, and other citizens, which called for relocating the lodge and most NPS facilities to the western end of the park in or near the Alaska Native community of King Salmon, and instituting a day use program at Brooks River similar to ones in place at Denali and Glacier Bay, where communities just outside these parks provide overnight lodging, transportation, and other facilities for visitors.

Compared to the DCP, especially as now made even worse by the proposed bridge/boardwalk project, the conservationists' alternative offers the Park Service a way to fully comply with Congress's directive. The alternative would also embrace former Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt's "gateway community" policy for providing economic opportunities to local businesses and residents, a policy the NPS ignored in 1996.

A Draft Environmental Impact Statement on the proposed bridge and boardwalk project is due out for public review and comment late next year. Because the DCP has not been implemented, the Park Service now has an opportunity to reevaluate its DCP and reconsider the conservationists' alternative. The Alaska Chapter has urged it to do so, but it remains to be seen whether the agency, still captive of policies and attitudes of previous hostile administrations, will rise to the challenge. ♦

-- Jack Hession

Alaska wildlife and global warming • • • • •

Climate change takes toll on caribou worldwide

More than 50 identifiable caribou herds migrate over huge wilderness tracts in a wide band of habitat circling the top of the world. They head north in the spring to ancient calving grounds, then back south through summer and fall to winter ranges closer to northern forests.

Many herds have lost more than half their number from the maximums of recent decades, according to a global survey by researchers at the University of Alberta, published in June in the peer-reviewed journal *Global Change Biology*. Caribou herds have gone through boom-and-bust cycles historically, but were never known to decline so uniformly worldwide.

Biologists, searching for clues to the decline of the caribou, believe the insidious impact of climate change, its tipping of natural balances and disruption of feeding habits, is decimating a species that has long numbered in the millions and helped support human life in Earth's most inhuman climate. Climatologists foresee northern temperatures rising several degrees more this century unless global greenhouse gas emissions are sharply reduced soon. Global warming has boosted temperatures in the Arctic twice as much as elsewhere,

In early October, Associated Press reporter Charles Hanley visited Porcupine River tundra in northwest Canada's Yukon Territory and sent a report that, "Here... where man has hunted caribou since the Stone Age, the vast antlered herds are fast growing thin. And it's not just here. Across the tundra 1,500 kilometers (1,000 miles) to the east, Canada's Beverly herd, numbering more than 200,000 a decade ago, can barely be found today."

The Porcupine herd moves over a 100,000-square-mile range,

calving in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, near Alaska's north coast, where proposals for oil drilling have long stirred intense opposition from environmentalists.

The "People of the Caribou," the native Gwich'in of the Yukon and Alaska, first noted changes in the late 1990s, as their Porcupine herd dwindled. From 178,000 animals in 1989, the herd—named for the river flowing across its range—is now estimated to number 100,000. "They used to come through by the hundreds," said James Firth, of the Gwich'in Renewable Resources Board, who guided journalist Hanley and a colleague across the tundra.

Climate pressure on caribou puts pressure on Canada's "first nations," who for at least 8,000 years have relied on caribou meat for the winter larder, have settled along migration routes, have built their material culture around the animal — using skin, bones and sinews for clothing, shelter, tools, thread, even their drums.

Firth feared his people may face "hard decisions," perhaps to limit their hunt to ease the pressure.

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Caribou and global warming

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In neighboring Northwest Territories, the territorial government on Sept. 24 reported results of its aerial survey of the Bathurst herd: Its population has dropped to about 32,000, from 128,000 in 2006. "The numbers are not getting better. There's no good news, no indication of recovery," said J. Michael Miltenberger, the environment and natural resources minister.

And, he noted, "Halfway around the world in Siberia, the biggest aggregation of these migratory animals, of the herds whose sweep across the Arctic's white canvas is one of nature's matchless wonders, has shrunk by hundreds of thousands in a few short years."

Siberia's Taimyr huge herd has declined from 1 million in 2000 to an estimated 750,000, as reported by the U.S. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) in its 2008 "Arctic Report Card". Although the Taimyr is the world's largest herd, Canada and Alaska have more caribou, and the Alberta study reported that 22 of 34 North American herds are shrinking. Insufficient data were available on seven others.

In northern Scandinavia, where the Sami people make a hard living herding reindeer (domesticated reindeer) as livestock, freezing rains there have forced Sami to buy fodder to substitute for ice-locked forage.

The global survey drew on scores of other studies, government databases, wildlife management boards and other sources, the biologists found that 34 of 43 herds being monitored worldwide are in decline. They noted an average falloff in numbers was 57 percent from earlier maximums.

Canadian researchers say caribou are suffering in several specific ways:

- Unusual freezing rains in autumn are locking lichen, the caribou's winter forage, under impenetrable ice sheets.
- Mosquitoes, flies and insect parasites have always tormented and weakened caribou, but warmer temperatures have aggravated this summertime problem, driving the animals on crazed, debilitating runs to escape, and keeping them from foraging and fattening up for winter.
- The springtime Arctic "green-up" is occurring two weeks or more earlier. The great caribou migrations evolved over ages to catch the shrubs on the calving grounds at their freshest and most nutritious. But pregnant, migrating cows may now be arriving too late.
- Caribou get physically bogged down in thawing permafrost.
- Longer wildfire seasons literally are burning up their food.

"The future of the Gwich'in and the future of the caribou are the same," the Gwich'in often say. Will an intricate, interdependent natural web of life in the Arctic tundra unravel, year by year and degree by degree?

-- From news report, *The Associated Press*

Pacific brant winter in Alaska — fewer migrate to Mexico

Until recently, nearly the entire (90 percent) world population of Pacific brant, a small, dark sea goose, wintered in Mexico. But as many as 30 percent are now staying in Alaska for the winter instead, according to a study by the U.S. Geological Survey. Pacific brant breed primarily in Arctic Alaska and winter along the Pacific coast of North America from Alaska to Mexico. The species is "of federal management

concern" because its numbers have been declining steadily across its entire range since the early 1960s. "This increase in wintering numbers of



Photo: U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Brant family

brant in Alaska coincides with a general warming of temperatures in the North Pacific and Bering Sea," said David Ward, the lead author of a new study led by the U.S. Geological Survey and a USGS researcher at the Alaska Science Center. Effects of a warming climate since 1976 were well-documented for abundance and distribution of some marine species, including walleye pollock, Pacific cod, northern fur seals, and thick-billed murre, a kind of seabird. However, the effects on species such as brant, which are restricted to estuarine ecosystems – where rivers meet oceans – had not been investigated until now. "Our study suggests that the growth in the brant population wintering on the Alaska Peninsula is linked to this same climate change," Ward said.

The shift, Ward indicated, appears related to changes in the availability and abundance of eelgrass, the primary food of brant in their nonbreeding season. A reduction of coastal sea ice makes more nutrient-rich eelgrass in Alaska accessible to brant – encouraging their overwintering. But, Ward cautions, the winter picture may not be all that balmy for brant in Alaska.

The milder Alaskan winter of 1991-92 was punctuated by an extended period of cold weather and extensive shoreline ice, a scenario that could become more common if scientific predictions that couple climate warming with increased climatic variability prove true. These sudden and severe cold bouts during overall warmer winters could put more of the entire brant population at risk with so many of the birds now wintering in Alaska.

In addition, a changing wind regime also -- see next page

Alaska Chapter and Group Elections Ahead

Would you like to help decide Sierra Club policy? This exciting opportunity is about to be available for Alaska Chapter Sierra Club members.

Elections will soon be held for positions on the Executive Committees of the Alaska Chapter and the regional groups within the Alaska Chapter. If you are an Alaska Sierra Club member and would like to run, or would like to nominate another Alaska member who is willing to run, please contact a member of the chapter Nominating Committee: (NomCom):

Alaska Chapter NomCom:

Russ Maddox, chair

russmaddox@yahoo.com 224-7607

Paul Forman Trailpup@arctic.net,

Patrick Fort cpfort@uaa.alaska.edu.

Chapter Nom Com members will forward nominees for Group Executive Committees to appropriate Group nominating committees. Executive Committee terms are two years, and the terms are staggered so that half the committee members are elected each year. (In addition to its six elected members, the Alaska Chapter ExCom includes a liaison from each of the three regional groups and its delegate to the Sierra Club Council, *ex officio*, if that person is not already on the ExCom.

The three regional groups are the Juneau Group representing Southeast, the Knik Group representing Anchorage and Southcentral, and the Denali Group representing Fairbanks and Interior Alaska.

The deadline to submit names to the Nominating Committee is Tuesday, December 8. The Nominating

Committees will report the names of nominees on Tuesday, December 15. Members who wish to run but are not nominated by a nominating committee may run if they submit to the committee a petition to run signed by fifteen (15) members of the appropriate chapter or group. The deadline to submit candidate petitions and ballot issue petitions is Tuesday, January 12.

The Sierra Club's strength is much more than its clout and renown in the national arena. Its real power is made up of its corps of dedicated volunteers in every state, passionate about local environmental issues. Alaska is no exception. Please volunteer for a strong and effective Alaska Chapter to boost the Sierra Club's ability to preserve and improve our environment.

The chapter Executive Committee will appoint an Election Committee at its regular conference call on Tuesday, January 19; no candidates for an ExCom may serve on the Election Committee. Ballots will be printed and mailed Friday, January 22. Marked ballots must be received at the Sierra Club office in Anchorage by Friday, February 26, and will be counted by the election committee from 5 p.m.

(This notice and schedule are in compliance with Sierra Club bylaws.) ♦

-- by Pamela Brodie, Alaska Chapter chair

Editor to retire

Vicky Hoover, Sierra Club conservation organizer, Western Region/Alaska, has also produced and edited the **alaska report** since 1986 when she began her job as special assistant to Dr. Edgar Wayburn, Chairman of the Alaska Task Force. After nearly 24 years, Vicky is retiring from her Sierra Club staff job at the end of November.

Thus this is her last issue of the Report -- and given the current financial situation of the Sierra Club, this may be the last issue of the Report. Over the years Vicky has helped Chapter members shape their articles, and she has also contributed some of her own based on her knowledge of Alaska conservation issues. Vicky has led Sierra Club outings to the state, and has organized several trips to remote wilderness areas with Chapter members. In retirement, she has promised to continue her Alaska explorations, and her help to the Chapter on Alaskan conservation issues.

On retiring, Vicky will devote full time for several months to organizing the Western Wilderness Conference 2010 scheduled for April 8-11, 2010, in Berkeley, California. (See box, page 2)

Many thanks, Vicky, for your assistance to the Chapter and your commitment to wild places in Alaska and the West.

-- Pamela Brodie and Jack Hession, for the Alaska Chapter

Pacific Brant winter in Alaska

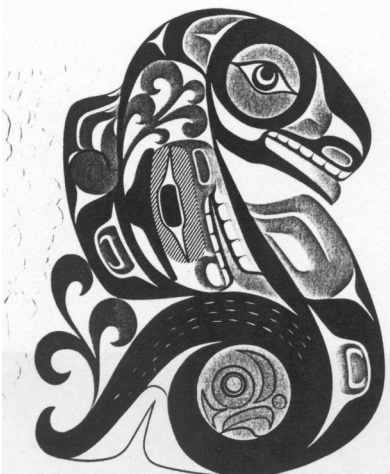
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affects brant wintering in Alaska. Now, there are fewer days each fall when brant have a favorable tail-wind for a 3,000 mile-long migration to Mexico. The increase in the number

of brant wintering in Alaska was found to be linked to fewer days with favorable southward wind flow.

"Because Alaska has the greatest concentration of Pacific brant outside of Mexico," said Ward. "threats to the Alaska wintering population can affect the entire Pacific Flyway population." ♦

-- From U.S. Geological Survey News Release



Class ring makers join boycott against Pebble Mine

The growing list of jewelers vowing to boycott gold from the proposed Pebble Mine in Alaska now includes major manufacturers of class rings. Herff Jones and Commemorative Brands Inc., which both make class rings, have joined the jewelers opposed to the proposed mine in southwest Alaska. Two other companies, Birks and Mayors and Hacker Jewelers, also added their names.

The jewelers took this major step at the invitation of local Alaskans, who want to protect Bristol Bay's salmon fishery – the world's largest remaining wild sockeye salmon fishery and the source of 50 percent of the world's commercial supply of sockeye salmon.

Canadian-based Northern Dynasty Minerals Ltd. and London-based Anglo American are developing the huge copper, gold and molybdenum deposit that is between Lake Clark and Katmai National Parks and near some of the world's most productive wild salmon streams.

Tiffany & Co., with more than \$1.5 billion in sales, is leading the campaign against Pebble. It took out an ad in *National Jeweler* to encourage other jewelers to join. "175 years of experience sourcing gemstones and precious metals tells us that there are certain places where mining cannot be done without forever destroying landscapes, wildlife and communities," the ad read. "Bristol Bay is one such place."

Jewelry retailers are an important voice against the controversial mine since over 80 percent of U.S gold demand

is for jewelry. The 18 jewelry companies that have signed the pledge against Pebble represent sales of more than \$3.7 billion a year. (See **alaska report**, Mar 08.)

"I want to thank all the jewelers who have vowed never to buy gold from the Pebble Mine," said Everett Thompson, a Bristol Bay commercial fisherman. "I know first-hand what a shame it would be to put this irreplaceable fishery at risk."

In other news, a recent survey reported that a majority of Bristol Bay residents oppose the proposed Pebble mine. Commissioned by Nunamta Aulukestai (Caretakers of Our Land), the poll was conducted by Craciun Research in May and June, 2009. The Anchorage-based research company sampled 411 adult residents from a cross-section of the Bristol Bay area. The poll showed that 79 percent of them oppose Pebble mine. To the question: "Do you favor or oppose the Pebble mine near Iliamna?" 79 percent were opposed, and 8 percent were in favor. The poll also asked about industries that could become important in Bristol Bay such as tourism, fish processing plants and alternative energy sources, mining and the oil and gas industry, and asked questions about economy and subsistence lifestyle.

Northern Dynasty and Anglo American recently announced a \$10 million increase in this year's budget to prepare the Pebble mine for state and federal permitting starting next year. ♦

alaska report

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

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ACTION NEEDED!

POLAR BEARS P. 1-2

ALSO FEATURED:

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