



Sierra Borealis

alaska report

SIERRA CLUB ALASKA CHAPTER
DECEMBER 2010



Alaska Chapter Election: it's on now!

Look for ballots in the mail

In early December all Alaska Chapter members should receive a Sierra Club election ballot in the mail, to vote for members of the executive committee of the Alaska Chapter, and perhaps also of your regional group. **Please vote.** If your household has a joint membership, both members may vote on the same ballot. Sierra Club bylaws require the mailing of paper ballots to all Sierra Club members. For all other communications, the Alaska Chapter is working towards electronic communications, as much as possible.

If we do not yet have your e-mail address, please e-mail it to chapter chair Pam Brodie at pbrodie@gci.net.

(Don't worry, we use it rarely and promise we won't clog up your computer with messages.)

Three long time activists, Irene Alexakos, Russ Maddox, and Mike O'Meara, are running for re-election to three slots on the chapter executive committee (excom); their candidate statements appear on the next page.

Candidates for the Group elections and their statements will appear on the Alaska Chapter website for the Juneau and Denali Groups by the time the ballots are mailed; the ballots will refer members to the website. The website address is

<http://alaska.sierraclub.org/> ♦

-- Pamela Brodie, Alaska Chapter chair

Celebrating a 50th Arctic anniversary

Can a national monument be achieved?

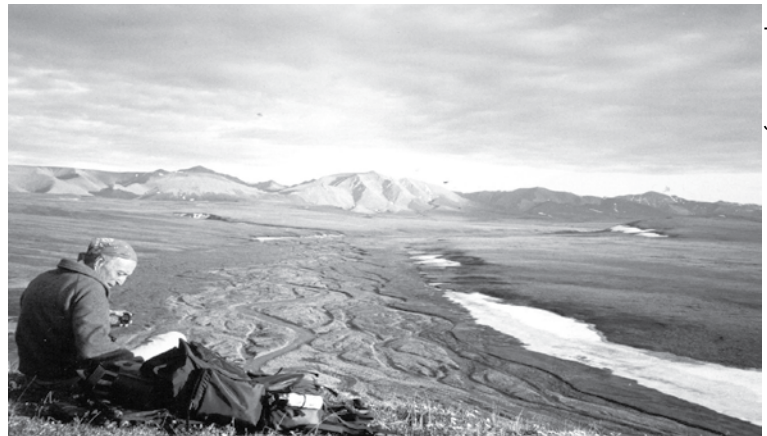


photo: Vicky Hoover

The Arctic Coastal Plain--from the shining mountains to the sea

This December marks 50 years since President Dwight D. Eisenhower established the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge on a beautiful and vast stretch of land on Alaska's northern coast.

Since then, local communities, environmentalists, and political champions of all backgrounds have upheld President Eisenhower's defense of the area's unique wildlife, wilderness and recreational values" by uniting to stave off repeated attempts to open the Refuge to oil and gas development.

As we mark the 50th anniversary of setting aside the area for preservation, we must do everything we can to be sure that the Refuge—one of America's last truly wild places—stays wild for generations to come. President Obama can protect the heart of the Refuge for his grandchildren and ours by designating the Coastal Plain of the Arctic Refuge as a National Monument.

The coastal plain is the 1.5 million acre north coast area of the 16 million acre Refuge, which section 1002 of the 1980 Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act left out

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Chapter Excom candidates and statements

Irene Alexakos (Haines)



I am a 30-year member of Sierra Club. Currently on the Alaska Chapter Excom with the position of Secretary, I have also held the Chapter Chair position and served as a part time Chapter employee (2005-2006). I have worked for the US Environmental Protection Agency, the Alaska Clean Water Alliance and Earthjustice in Juneau. I live off the grid outside of Haines.

Russ Maddox (Seward):



I have thoroughly enjoyed serving on the Executive Committee since 2006 and look forward to serving another term. In 2004 I co-founded Resurrection Bay Conservation Alliance to promote conservation and environmental justice in our community. RBCA has become an integral member of the community and has enjoyed many successes. I still serve on the Board of Directors. In 2005 my relationship and activism with the Sierra Club blossomed with the threat of a coal fired power plant being proposed in Seward—which we successfully fended off. I also serve on the Issues Policy Council for the Alaska Conservation Alliance, representing RBCA on a statewide forum. I am currently employed by Alaska Center for the Environment, monitoring and evaluating coal waste streams statewide. I will always seek the common ground and try to broaden our base, as it is my firm belief that folks of all political persuasions share the same core values of clean air, water, and lands. Thank you for your support.

Mike O'Meara (Homer):



I have always been a tree hugger -- pillaging the natural world is like setting fire to your own house. I've been a Sierra Club member since 1968 and, upon moving to Anchorage from Los Angeles the following year, became active in the new Alaska Chapter. I served on the executive committee through the mid 1970s. Great good fortune allowed me to buy 120 acres of undeveloped land near Homer where I've lived since 1976. Moving to the Kachemak Bay area caused me to focus most of my energies on environmental struggles there. I've participated in the Kachemak Bay Defense Fund effort to keep oil development out of the Bay, and I'm a founding member of the Kachemak Bay Conservation Society, Alaska Marine Conservation Council, and Cook Inlet Keeper. After retiring from Homer's Pratt Museum 2½ years ago, I've found time to play a more active role in the Sierra Club again. With the world's unsustainable population grasping for dwindling energy and mineral resources, all of Alaska's remaining unspoiled lands and biological richness are in jeopardy. Unless we make the transition from fossil fuels to renewable energy soon, the whole human race is threatened. What better time to be an environmental activist? ♦

Arctic 50th: a monument?

of wilderness protection. The oil industry wanted it studied for potential oil development, and it is often referred to as the "1002 area".

While the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge may seem millions of miles away from most Americans, the reality is that the Arctic is all around us. More than 180 species of birds visit the refuge every year. And birds that hatch on the Coastal Plain of the Refuge journey to all 50 states and across six continents, before heading back to the Arctic, where the cycle of life begins again.

The Arctic Refuge serves as the origin of life for more than just birds. Considered by scientists to be the biological heart of the refuge, the coastal plain provides a home for numerous mammals, including the Porcupine caribou herd, polar bears, grizzly bears, musk oxen, Dall sheep, wolves and wolverines. These and many other animals rely on its tundra to bear their young – in fact, the refuge is the most important land denning site for our country's threatened population of polar bears.

Beyond its wildlife, the Arctic Refuge is also a sacred place. Long before it was set aside as a protected area, these values were recognized by the people of the Gwich'in Nation. For thousands of years, the Gwich'in people have regarded the coastal plain as "The Sacred Place Where Life Begins", because it has been the most frequent birthing ground for the migratory Porcupine caribou herd. This herd is the foundation for the social,

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Glacier Bay National Park Integrity under Attack— by a National Park Service decision



In October National Park Service Alaska Regional Director Sue Masica approved the proposal by Glacier Bay National Park managers to open the park to gull egg gathering by Huna Tlingit Natives, most of whom live in the community of Hoonah on Chichagof Island across Icy Strait from the park. The affected glaucous-winged gull colonies are within the Glacier Bay Wilderness. (*sierra borealis*, June 2010).

Her decision comes under a 1998 law quietly slipped through Congress that calls for a study to determine if collecting “gull” eggs—in this case the eggs of glaucous-winged gulls—could be done without harming the gull population. If the answer is yes, the Secretary of the Interior is then to “propose legislation.”

The ensuing study by the NPS, based on a theoretical mathematical model and existing knowledge, concluded that while the total number of eggs hatched would decline by about 22 percent, this “harvest” would still be sustainable; the glaucous-winged gull population in the park would not be harmed. This conclusion is obviously at odds with the overarching “non-impairment” standard of national parks under which all forms of wildlife are secure from being consumed by humans.

Unfortunately, President Clinton did not veto the bill as contrary both to national park standards and to Congress’s explicit directive in the 1980 Alaska National Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA) that Glacier Bay NP should remain closed to subsistence practices.

Even if Secretary of Interior Ken Salazar concurs with Masica’s decision, it does not necessarily mean that the Obama Administration will ask Congress to open this World Heritage park to subsistence egg collecting; Congress told the Secretary to “propose legislation” but cannot order the President to approve such an idea. If Secretary Salazar and the White House reject Regional Director Masica’s unprecedented proposal -- as Glacier Bay’s time-honored role as a wildlife sanctuary demands -- there would be no Administration request for a bill to open the park.

The Glacier Bay decision is unprecedented, as there has been no other case in the U.S. where the National Park Service has unilaterally recommended opening a national park to wildlife consumption.

A park-opening bill can be expected in the next Congress by one or more members of the three-member Alaska delegation. Thus it is vitally important that the Obama Administration reject Regional Director Masica’s recommendation and work to defeat any such bill.

The Sierra Club’s Alaska Chapter has a long history of defending Glacier Bay National Park from inappropriate activities, such as commercial fishing and other wildlife consumption. The Chapter submitted detailed comments opposing the NPS’s draft glaucous-gull egg collection Environmental Impact Statement.

A win-win alternative exists

Fortunately, the either/or decision of opening/not opening the park is not the only choice for Administration decision-makers and Congress. A half-dozen traditional glaucous-wing gull egg collecting sites are available within Huna Tlingit traditional territory just outside the boundary of Glacier Bay National Park. In fact, following passage of the 1998 law, park managers provided vessel and other logistical support for a party of Huna Tlingits from Hoonah in a successful test run to determine if one major non-park site was a feasible alternative to opening the park. The villagers themselves confirmed that feasibility the following year, when the NPS chartered a vessel for that successful effort.

But despite admitting that NPS facilitation of Huna Tlingit egg collecting at non-park sites is “reasonable and feasible,” the NPS, relying on a legal technicality, refused to consider this alternative in its Legislative EIS. Even without NPS assistance, egg collecting at these non-park sites can be accomplished by the Natives using their own vessels.

In addition to subsistence egg collecting, the Huna Tlingit have demanded that Glacier Bay be opened to subsistence hunting for seals and mountain goats.

A Glacier Bay park-opening bill in Congress would be watched by the entire Native American community, and, if enacted into law, could set off similar demands for subsistence privileges in other park sanctuaries not only in Katmai, Denali, and Kenai Fjords in Alaska, but in other states.

As goes Glacier Bay, so go national parks as wildlife sanctuaries? Because opening Glacier Bay to subsistence use must not be allowed to happen, the public interest lies in nipping Director Masica’s park-opening bid in the bud.

⇒ What you can do

Please urge Secretary Salazar and Assistant Secretary for Fish, Wildlife and Parks Tom Strickland to reject Regional Director Masica’s disappointing recommendation. At stake is not only the integrity of Glacier Bay, one of the world’s finest wilderness parks, but all our other national park sanctuaries:-- such as Yellowstone, Olympic -- and your own favorite park.

Write to both Secretary Salazar and Assistant Secretary Strickland at the following address:

Department of the Interior
1849 C. Street, NW
Washington, DC 20240

A personal letter is the best, (Yes! old-time U.S. Postal Service) but email or phone contact is possible at:

Phone: (202) 208-3100

E-Mail: feedback@ios.doi.gov ♦

-- Jack Hession

Alaska Climate Corner – News notes from Alaska

Sierra Club's new "Resilient Habitats" Campaign

Sierra Club activism in Alaska has traditionally been focused on preservation of Alaska's magnificent wild, public lands. Today, the new Resilient Habitats campaign aims to assure protection of these lands in the face of rapid climate change. In particular, the campaign (which connects public lands advocacy with global warming concerns) wants to make those lands more resilient by increasing the protected corridors that provide connections between protected areas so that wildlife will be freer to move as the climate around them alters. In addition, the campaign seeks to remove certain non-climate stressors that harm wildlife habitat and would tend to reduce its resilience – stressors like clearcut logging, road construction, or off-road vehicle abuse. The campaign thinks of "resilience" as the ability of an ecosystem to bounce back to health if damaged. And no state more than Alaska has great need of resilient habitats. Alaska's Arctic is one of ten model ecoregions chosen as an initial focus as the Resilient Habitats campaign gets going.

(The following information comes from Alaska Conservation Solutions, e-newsletters. [http://www.alaskaconservationsolutions.org/.](http://www.alaskaconservationsolutions.org/))

As Arctic sea ice melts: Northwest Passage Open for the Fourth Consecutive Year

Summer of 2010 marked the fourth consecutive year--and fourth time in recorded history--that the fabled passage has opened for navigation, according to the National Snow and Ice Data Center. This year also marks the third consecutive year--and the third time in recorded history--that both the Northwest Passage and Northeast Passage have melted free. As the Arctic ice cap shrinks, ship traffic will increase at the top of the world and will bring with it air pollution that has the potential to accelerate even further climate change in the world's northern reaches.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's annual Arctic Report Card confirmed, in October, that Arctic sea ice reached the third lowest recorded minimum since 1979, and Arctic snow cover duration was at a record minimum. The report is based on the findings of 69 international researchers and 176 scientific references.

Climate Change May Cause Arctic Conflict

Diminishing ice in the North Pole is causing global interest in the region to grow. As a result, major Arctic powers like the United States and Russia are increasingly asserting their presence in the region. Military officials fear that climate change may lead to conflict as a race for resources unfolds. A University of Alaska Fairbanks [report](#) offers international

policy-makers guidance for navigating the political and practical ramifications of shipping in the Arctic.

Ice-Free Arctic Ocean May Not Help in Soaking Up Carbon

Scientists have been looking at ways the Earth might benefit from natural processes to balance the rising heat, and one process had intrigued them, a premise that melting ice at the poles might allow more open water that could absorb carbon dioxide, one of the major compounds implicated in global warming. Now, though, new research suggests that that idea may be one more dead end ([Science Daily, 8/3/10](#)).



Warmer Arctic likely to be permanent

The signs of climate change were all over the Arctic this year -- warmer air, less sea ice, melting glaciers -- which probably means this weather-making region will not return to its former, colder state. In an international assessment of the Arctic, scientists said, "Return to previous Arctic conditions is unlikely".

Climate Change Prolongs Growing Season

One hundred years ago, Alaska's growing season lasted three months. Today, the growing season is becoming longer as the snow melts earlier and springs get warmer. The changes have stretched the growing season from 85 days in the early 20th century to 123 days, as reported by Anchorage Daily News in August.

Polar Bears Face Melting Chemical Cocktail

Polar bears, the icon of the Arctic, are under threat from the twin challenges of climate change and chemicals that are not breaking down in the region's cold waters. Scientists believe the pollutants, locked in the polar ice for decades, could be released into the ocean as the ice increasingly melts.

At a mid-October hearing in federal court U.S. District Judge Emmet Sullivan ordered the Obama administration to clarify whether polar bears are endangered under U.S. law. The legal status of polar bears remains in question after the Obama administration supported the former President George W. Bush administration's rule that polar bears are merely *threatened*. If polar bears are found to be *endangered*, there may be legal means to regulate greenhouse gas emissions under the Endangered Species Act.

New Wind for Schools Turbine Goes Up in Juneau

The U.S. Coast Guard installed a wind turbine at its station in Juneau to teach students in Juneau-area schools about science and energy. The turbine will produce approximately 10 percent of the station's electrical load and will be used as part of the new Wind for Schools in Alaska program. The State Facilitator for *Wind for Schools* is the

Renewable Energy Alaska Project (REAP), which led the effort, along with the Alaska Center for Energy and Power, to have Alaska added in 2010 to the list of 11 states accepted to this national program. More than 20 schools across Alaska have since signed up to participate in the program, which encourages students to learn about science and energy through the installation of wind turbines at schools.

Denali Park to Get Micro Hydro Power

Alaska's U.S. senators, Mark Begich-D and Lisa Murkowski-R, have co-sponsored a bill that would result in a small micro hydro power generator in Denali National Park and Preserve. "A micro-hydro project will reduce the Kantishna Roadhouse's diesel consumption," Senator Begich stated. "This means better air quality for the park, fewer truck trips on the single park road, a better experience for all park visitors, and a better bottom line for the Kantishna Roadhouse." ♦



Pits del Norte graphic design by Mike O'Meara

Update **Opposition to proposed Pebble Mine**

A major threat to environmental quality of Alaska, -- called by some "Alaska's greatest environmental threat" -- may finally receive a national spotlight.

The latest in the long battle over the proposed Pebble mine in southwest Alaska involves approaching the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). Six local tribes, commercial fishing groups, and the Bristol Bay Native Corporation (a powerful force in the region with 8,600 shareholders) have asked EPA to invoke a rarely-used lands protection power that could put an end to the Pebble project. If the EPA agrees to use its authority, there will be a national comment period and a real opportunity to engage concerned citizens across the country who care about preservation of Alaska's peerless wild lands.

In response, Alaska Congressman Don Young has filed a bill that could strip EPA of its authority to block Pebble. Young's action flies in the face of a state where residents love to spend time in its natural environment camping, fishing and hiking.

In addition, the law-firm Trustees for Alaska filed suit against the Alaska Department of Natural Resources arguing that the permitting program for the Pebble proposal violates the state constitution.

And the Bristol Bay Elder's Commission Visioning Project (funded by the Alaska Conservation Foundation) is well under way towards producing a powerful affirmation of strong resident opposition to such projects.

New interest in the proposed Pebble mine may be expected in December when a series of independent science panels is launched to help Alaska citizens evaluate baseline environmental and socioeconomic studies associated with

the Pebble proposal. The Colorado-based Keystone Center will start the science series on December 3, 2010 with a day-long panel focused on Responsible Large-scale Mining -- Global Perspectives. The panel will bring together international experts in the fields of engineering, geology and geochemistry, ecology, and anthropology, who represent the mining industry, academic institutions, and non-governmental conservation organizations. Panel members will share perspectives on responsible large-scale mining throughout the world.

The Keystone science panels, to take place on the University of Alaska Anchorage campus, will be open to the public. The panels will be broadcast statewide on public television stations and GCI cable. with a live web-stream on the Center's website, (www.keystone.org).

The Keystone Center is a non-profit organization founded more than 35 years ago to help government agencies resolve conflicts associated with new environmental laws and regulations. Keystone helps develop proactive, collaborative approaches to public decision making and has a record of maintaining its independence from clients, whether they are government agencies, nongovernmental organizations, or private industries.

Subsequent science panels will help citizens evaluate the extensive environmental and socioeconomic studies that Pebble and previous companies have been conducting for more than five years. Funding intended for National Academy of Sciences review of the Pebble Project is stalled in the state's legislative council.

The proposed Pebble Mine, close to Lake Clark and Katmai National Parks and in the heart of a world-class salmon fishing region around Southwest Alaska's Bristol Bay, would be the world's largest open-pit gold and copper mine, if permitted. The Alaska Chapter has resolutely opposed this environmentally damaging idea from the beginning. Please contact Chapter activist Mike O'Meara for more details and background. <mikeo@HORIZONSATELLITE.COM>. ♦

An Alaska newcomer's perspective

(part 2)

(see September 2010 Sierra Borealis for part 1 of Nils Boisen's story about settling in Anchorage from Norway)

Almost immediately after we arrive in Anchorage in August our landlord tells us that we have to get a car. We explain that until I have a job we believe it's possible to get by on bicycling and public transportation for our needs. Naïve Norwegians? The past six years we've lived in a town where every imaginable necessity was a five minute bike ride away. Groceries, banking, doctors, daycare, school, my university. Anything else could easily be gotten to by train or bus. Norway is great like that. So we never needed a car. After one week of sticking to our ideals here in Anchorage, we had to admit that people's warnings were no joke. I had already been hit by one car, my wife nearly twice, and even my kids on one occasion were nearly plowed over in a crosswalk (and that time we were walking!). People actually looked at us biking as a family to the store as if it was some kind of cute novelty. The bike trails are great, but not for practical errands. And the bus system here is a joke. The drivers are helpful, but the time tables make no sense, and are unreliable. After having to spend some time at the transit station one afternoon, I felt the need to take a shower when I got home... Enough said. So we capitulated our "no car" ideals. One day my eight year old son observed



a half mile long line of traffic after being picked up from school and said. "Nearly every one of these cars has only one person in it. If just half of them took the bus there would be no traffic line". Even he sees the need here for better public transportation.

Like Alaska, Norway has a slightly

higher cost of living. Food in Alaska seems pricy, but compared to Norway, the variety of what one can buy here just boggles the mind. The average Norwegian grocery store could fit in the produce section of your average Safeway. We quickly learned, however, that the quality of so called "fresh produce" here is worth being skeptical towards. I think we get better produce in Norway because more of it is grown nearby, has travelled shorter distances, or at least takes shorter time to get to Norway. Not that I'm for converting more of Alaska to farmland, but it just seems a shame that the local produce actually has to cost more than the equivalent shipped up here from Oregon. I understand that most electricity in Alaska is, as far as I can tell, fossil fuel

based. This is of course not good, but I can't say Norway is much better. Norway likes to sell itself as a country running on renewable electricity. Hydroelectric power is big in Norway and is the main source of electricity consumed within the country. So big in fact that they have more than they need and make a lot of money selling electricity to other countries. But actually Norway is an oil nation, and oil aside, supplies most of Europe with natural gas for heating and cooking, and even electricity in Great Britain.

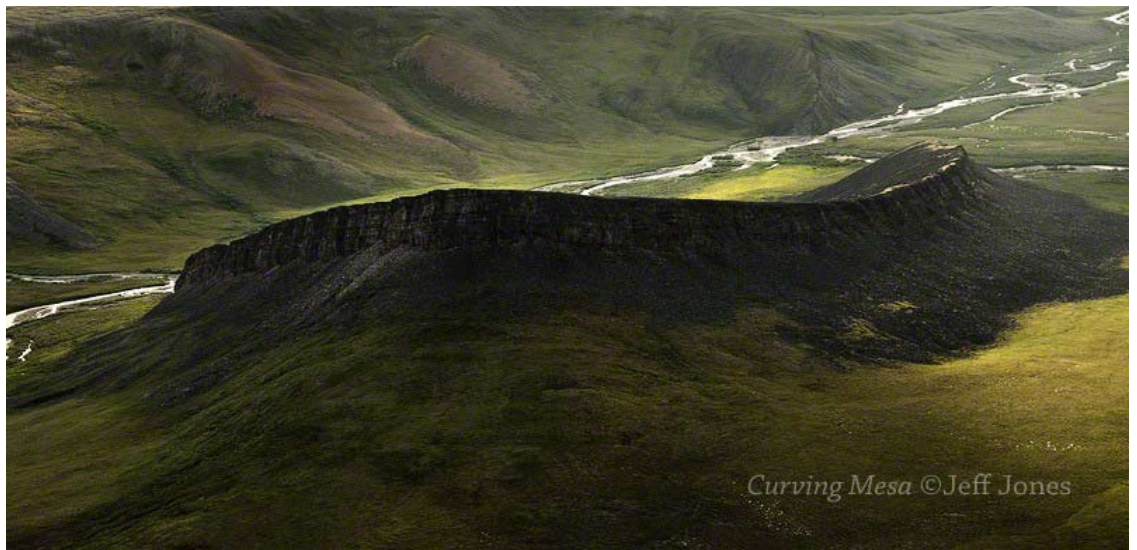
Norway's coast is about as windy as it gets, but it's actually Sweden and Denmark that are leading the way in wind power, which is a controversial topic in Norway. Many in Norway view the windmills as noisy eyesores that sabotage the esthetic coastline. Even some conservationists are against it because windmills significantly reduce the number of the strictly protected white tailed eagles. Though I personally believe wind power should be explored, I sympathize with the two main arguments against it, which could also be relevant for Alaska. Norway is, however, slowly investigating the exciting possibility of enormous floating windmills far out at sea.

Prior to our trip, I obviously had to start looking for relevant work in Alaska. With my background in ecology and natural resource management, my researching of this topic revealed a fascinating picture. Instead of well managed conservation, I found countless articles telling of environmental corruption, mismanagement and controversy, and even politics meant to impede our ability to pass down Alaska's pristine beauty. At the same time there are like over fifty environmental organizations in Alaska seeking to counteract this mentality. It's frightening to consider where the world would be without its passionate NGOs. How would Norway and Alaska look? How will they look? World oil and gas reserves are dwindling. Conserving oil is key. Minerals that support our thirst for ever more effective modern technology, even so-called green technology, must come from somewhere. The world's appetite for protein from the ocean will only continue to increase. Both Alaska and Norway are lands rich in all this and more.

Yet Alaska still has its wilderness soul, and the coming decades will be critical for how we conserve what remains not only of its pristine intact beauty, but also the vital ecological services like clean water, huntable game, and fishable fish. It all hangs together. More than ever Alaska will need those passionate few who understand that this beautiful country and all that it provides does not belong to just one generation to exploit it for all its worth. I admit I'm cautious about working here considering all I've heard. However, it's the place to be for those who want to make a critical contribution to preserving a unique portion of a unique planet. I'm looking forward to it. ♦

-- Nils Boisen, Ecologist
<nihabo@gmail.com>, (907)717-4250

New book honors 50th anniversary of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge



Curving Mesa © 2010 Jeff Jones

Arctic Sanctuary, Images of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, a new book by Jeff Jones and Laurie Hoyle, was released by the University of Alaska Press on September 15. The hard bound, 184-page panoramic proportioned book (14x 9 inches) contains over 150 of Jeff's landscape images, essays by Laurie, and an introduction by Michael Engelhard.

Art Wolfe says about *Arctic Sanctuary*: "In Jeff Jones's masterly landscapes of the Arctic I find a majestic peace and a powerful call to action to protect this sanctuary of wildlife and wildness. This book beautifully showcases a pristine land caught in the crosshairs of the greatest of human calamities, including global climate change and the grim search for

energy resources."

The book and companion exhibit celebrate the upcoming 50th anniversary of the Arctic Refuge. The 'Arctic Sanctuary' opened August 1 at the Consortium Library at the University of Alaska, Anchorage. After closing Nov 14, the exhibit moves to Well Street Art Company in Fairbanks for December, then to the National Conservation Training Center in Shepherdstown, WVA for January 2011, followed by the Bruce Museum in Greenwich, CT for March-May. Other venues come later in 2011-12. Contact Jeff at (jeff@lumnos.com) to discuss inviting 'Arctic Sanctuary' to your local art gallery or natural history museum. ♦

Arctic 50th: a monument?

-- from page 2

economic and spiritual fabric of the lives of Gwich'in people.

Yet despite the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge's sacred and critical biological importance, the oil industry has been trying to get access to the area for years. Oil drilling would destroy this last wild place forever.

The land, waters and wildlife of the Arctic Refuge are already under stress from the impacts of climate change. Oil and gas development in the Arctic Refuge – the only area on Alaska's North Slope where exploration and development is specifically prohibited by Congress - would add further stress to these unique ecosystems.

The Arctic National Wildlife Refuge represents our nation's finest example of intact, naturally functioning Arctic and subarctic ecosystems. Such a broad spectrum of diverse habitats occurring within a single protected unit is unparalleled in North America, and probably the entire circumpolar north.

If we don't protect the Arctic coastal plain now, we will lose a vital connection to the natural world that has already been lost across the rest of our nation. Nowhere else will future generations experience the wildness of a whole ecosystem untrammelled (unmanipulated) by human-kind.

President Eisenhower realized the importance and beauty of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge 50 years ago, and we should honor his vision by preserving the region's special values for future generations.

To protect its scientific and historical values, its imperiled ecological and wildlife communities, its multifaceted landscapes and waterscapes, and its living Native cultures, President Obama should designate the coastal plain of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge as a National Monument. The area would remain a national wildlife refuge managed by the Fish and Wildlife Service, but with an extra layer of monument protection -- which has never been undone.

Through this act, President Obama and Interior Secretary Ken Salazar would leave an historic legacy of Arctic and sub-Arctic wildlife, wild lands, and living cultures for all future generations of Americans.

⇒ What you can do:

Ask the President to use his authority to proclaim a national monument for the Arctic Coastal Plain.
<https://secure2.convio.net/sierra/site/Advocacy?alertId=3883&pg=makeACall>

Or, a personal phone call to the White House comment line may be even more effective: (202)456-1111.

And don't forget the power of a real, mailed letter!
President Barack Obama
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Ave., N.W.
Washington, DC 20500 ♦

-- Dan Ritzman

Morning-After-Election Reflections: Murkowski at a Crossroads

Six years is a long time -- especially in politics. As Senator Lisa Murkowski settles down from the euphoria of her apparent historic victory as a write-in Senate candidate, after losing her bid in the Republican primary, she must look at how she can be re-elected for another term--and how that might affect her political choices in the Senate. Her situation is the opposite of that of the rest of her Party.

While polls show that Americans want more cooperation between Republicans and Democrats in Congress, they have elected a Congress even more partisan than the last one. Senate Republican Leader Mitch McConnell announced, "The single most important thing we want to achieve is for President Obama to be a one-term president." The way for Republicans to make Obama a one-term president is to deny him any legislative victories, while cutting domestic spending--which serves the dual purpose of appealing to voters while keeping the economy as weak as possible, a situation for which the president is always blamed. I expect little environmental (or any other) legislation to pass. Environmentalists will likely focus on the executive branch.

Meanwhile, Murkowski was elected by Republicans, Independents, and even Democrats who value her ability to bring federal dollars to Alaska, as did her mentor the late Sen. Ted Stevens. She won valuable support from Alaska Natives, a bi-partisan group. While Murkowski will be immediately embraced by elected Republican leaders in the state and

nation, she owes them nothing. Considering that Tea Party candidate Joe Miller received roughly 35 percent of the vote despite an extraordinary path of self destruction, it seems clear that the Republican base in Alaska, which Murkowski tried so hard to cultivate, bitterly rejects her. My guess is that she will find another platform on which to run, perhaps resurrecting the Republican Moderate Party. She was a moderate in the State Legislature and now has reason to cultivate non-Republicans. While favoring development, especially oil, she does not employ anti-environmentalist rhetoric, as did her father.

To be re-elected, she must continue to deliver federal dollars, but her own party will make that very difficult. House Republicans will see no reason to protect her precarious position. She could try for help from Senate Democrats but may not have much to offer in return. While she works with Republicans to position them for winning the presidency, she may even find that their candidate is her nemesis, Sarah Palin.

For the environment, earmarks are a mixed bag. While we have less to fear now in terms of proposed new roads and bridges, we must also expect less federal support for parks and wildlife management, and for environmentally neutral projects that benefit all Alaskans. It appears Murkowski will be our senator for at least the next six years, and she may be more open-minded now than ever. I urge Alaskans to reach out to Lisa Murkowski as she works to consolidate a new base of political support. ♦

-- by Pamela Brodie, Alaska Chapter chair

Sierra Borealis / alaska report

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