



# Sierra Borealis *alaska report*

SIERRA CLUB ALASKA CHAPTER  
SEPTEMBER 2019



## Logging looms larger in the Tongass National Forest

The Forest Service has released a revised area management plan called the Prince of Wales Landscape Level Analysis Project, authorizing 15 years of logging in the Tongass National Forest. This would open 42,635 acres of mostly old growth forest to logging, and an estimated 164 miles of new roads would be built in the Tongass under the Forest Service Prince of Wales Landscape Project.

The Sierra Club Alaska Chapter has joined Earthjustice and other environmental groups to sue the Forest Service, hoping to stop the sale from occurring. The latest news is that the Forest Service made an "emergency declaration", allowing them to rush the Twin Mountain timber sale, citing retaliatory tariffs from China that will add a 20 percent fee to spruce logs, allegedly threatening the economy of Prince of Wales Island. The Twin Mountain sale is expected to happen by September 24 unless our injunction is successful.

Timber accounts for less than one percent of jobs in Southeast Alaska, while tourism brings 17 percent and fishing eight percent (according to the regional development organization Southeast Conference 2018 report.)

Trump recently told Secretary of Agriculture Sonny Perdue to exempt the 9.5 million acres of the Tongass from the 2002 "Roadless Rule" that protects National Forest roadless areas from new road development and consequently the logging that roads facilitate.

This new logging comes even though the Tongass's old-growth trees play a critical role as "Alaska's first line of climate change defense"--storing vast amounts of carbon --an estimated 10-12 percent of all of America's national forests.

The arguments for rolling back the roadless rule

are mostly the familiar refrain: "environmental regulations are burdensome". (yes, burdensome to logging projects, especially clearcut logging. And, yes, possibly some good renewable energy projects like hydropower *could* happen faster and cheaper without the roadless rule. So could open pit mines.)

The cost of old-growth logging to the environment is immeasurable. The ancient trees provide stability, water purification and nutrient cycling that keep salmon streams healthy. When logging happens too close to the streams, sediment destroys salmon spawning grounds or suffocates roe. Sitka deer, northern goshawks, and an exquisite array of beautiful mushrooms, including the yellow foot chanterelle, are all adapted to Southeast Alaska's old-growth forests and would be at risk by more logging and road construction.

When I've visited the Southeast, walking through the old-growth forests in Sitka (places like Starrygavin) I feel what is meant by intrinsic values or "spiritual ecosystem services". A canopy closes over me and feels like a church, the moss breathes under my feet, and I feel

-- continued page 2



photo: Christin Swearingen

This Omphalina mushroom near Sitka is one of many species that would lose habitat from Tongass old growth logging

*You are invited-join Alaska Chapter Sept 20 at  
Climate Strike and at meetings Sep 25 & Oct 23-see p.8*

## Tongass old-growth logging looms -- from page 1

like I'm entering another world. Great blue herons, frogs, totem poles carved in their likeness... everything feels alive and ancient at the same time. When I'm there, I feel Timeless. I can only imagine what it feels like to someone who is from that place- who is part of the Frog Clan or the Raven Clan. These forests are more than the sum of their board feet.

They are a lot older than the U.S. Federal government.

The Tongass, America's largest forest, helps to sequester carbon as long as its magnificent trees are not cut, but forests world wide need to be preserved too for their intrinsic value, their role as wildlife habitat and their increasingly valued ability to sequester climate-disrupting carbon emissions. Thus, recent

news about raging fires in the Amazon watershed has been especially ominous.

The fires in the Amazon



photo: Christin Swearingen

Yellowfoot chanterelle, a valuable edible mushroom, would lose habitat from Tongass old-growth logging

We ask you to submit comments urging adoption of the "no-action alternative" and cessation of this destructive project.

If the timber project is approved, the Forest Service would provide the timber industry with nearly a quarter billion board feet of primarily Tongass old-growth and some second-growth timber, on up to 13,500 acres, to be cut over the next 15 years. This devastation would occur on Mitkof, Kupreanof, Kuiu, Wrangell, Zarembo and Etolin Islands and the adjacent mainland. The forest landscape in this part of the Tongass is already heavily fragmented, both naturally and from decades of industrial-scale logging. The project would construct about 118 miles of new logging roads, despite almost 1,200 miles of poorly maintained national forest roads already in the area.

In an attempt to sell this travesty to the public, the Forest Service has packaged this destructive activity with a minor amount of largely unfunded recreation improvements and watershed restoration.

To put that in perspective, this single timber project would log 21 square miles of Tongass public land—nearly the size of Manhattan. It will be mostly clearcut and converted in perpetuity into essentially a tree plantation, with greatly diminished scenic resources and biological diversity.

***It is a final nail to decades of cumulative losses of old-growth habitat in this major portion of the Tongass.***

The Central Tongass Project continues the agency's singular quest to make Tongass public lands subsidize two corporations--Viking Lumber and Alcan/Transpac Group. With heavy-handed pressure from Senator Lisa Murkowski pushing this

have been weighing on me. For a while I stopped doing any activist work. I froze up, and finally broke down and talked about it and cried-- then I felt better! If you are feeling the same way, please remember it's OK to feel grief, and healthy to show emotion. As the world burns around us, never give up. Your letters to support the roadless rule help (see below)! Your donations to Sierra Club help make lawsuits like ours for the Tongass happen! But perhaps the most crucial help you can give is to talk with each other and listen, and -- take time to go walk in the forests.

➡ **What can you do?** Please tell your legislators to support H.R. 2491/S.1311: Roadless Area Conservation Act of 2019. The Act would permanently codify the Roadless Rule, which protects 58.5 million acres of National Forest System lands across 39 states from logging and road building, including the Tongass. ❖

-- Christin Swearingen, Chair, Alaska Chapter

## Central Tongass Project DEIS: *comment NOW*

The comment period is now open (**till Sept 16!**) on the Forest Service's proposed Central Tongass Project (CTP) Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS). In effect, the project is a

huge timber sale and road construction boondoggle.

along, the southern Tongass is becoming a *de-facto* sacrifice zone to benefit this small, economically unimportant industry.

Please submit comments by midnight September 16, 2019.

➡ **HOW to comment:**

- (1) Online at: <https://cara.ecosystem-management.org/Public/CommentInput?project=53098>, or
- (2) By email to: [commentsalaska-tongass-petersburg@fs.fed.us](mailto:commentsalaska-tongass-petersburg@fs.fed.us)

The following are helpful points to make:

- The Forest Service must comply with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) by analyzing the site-specific impacts of the Central Tongass Project. (Instead of the NEPA-required site-specific examination, the Forest Service used a new corner-cutting approach it calls a "condition based" analysis. This method does not even disclose where actual logging or road construction would take place.
- The DEIS gives insufficient information for informed decision-making or informed public participation.
- In order to make the CTP timber sale more profitable for industry, the Forest Service proposes to "relax" (weaken) scenic quality standards. This is unacceptable. All the locales where scenic standards would be relaxed are high-use recreation areas and/or are highly visible from routes used by independent travelers, ferries, eco-tour boats, and cruise ships.
- Together with the recently-approved Prince of Wales Landscape Level Assessment, (see preceding article) these massive old growth timber sales show the Forest Service is not honoring its announced commitment to a transition away from old growth logging.
- The DEIS fails to adequately address the impact of climate change by the CTP. The Tongass sequesters more carbon than any other forest in the U.S., public or private--when left standing. The agency glossed over this key issue in its CTP "analysis". So: urge the "No Action" Alternative. ❖

(Based on an alert from Alaska Rainforest Defenders <https://alaskarainforest.org>)

Action  
Alert

# Alaska Chapter Election Ahead

## Alaska's Environment needs YOU now!

-- by Christin Swearingen, Chapter chair

The 2019 Sierra Club Alaska Chapter election will soon be held for three 2020 volunteer positions on the Executive Committee of the Alaska Chapter.

Simply voting in the elections lets you, a Sierra Club member, help decide policy indirectly, but why not go a step further and run for office yourself? Or nominate someone else? Volunteer Executive Committee members elected by the Club's members in Alaska set policy and conservation priorities for the Sierra Club in Alaska and make all the major decisions on WHAT issues the Chapter will focus on in the next few years and HOW this Chapter allocates our resources (e.g., hiring staff, joining or filing lawsuits forenvironmental protection. ExCom members also plan trainings, educational sessions, outings, social gatherings, comment to government agencies on management plans or other actions, (and write articles for this newsletter.)

The Sierra Club has the largest, most effective grassroots activist network of any conservation organization in the nation, and it is the Chapter Executive Committee members who make the big decisions for the future of our state's environment.

Executive Committee terms are two years, with terms staggered so that half the committee is elected each year. If you are a Sierra Club member and would like to run for ExCom, or would like to nominate another member who is willing to run, please contact one of these members of the Chapter Nominating Committee for the 2020 term:

Susan Hansen: [skhansen@ak.net](mailto:skhansen@ak.net)

Yasuhiro Ozuru: [yasozuru@gmail.com](mailto:yasozuru@gmail.com)

Hope Meyn: [meynhope@gmail.com](mailto:meynhope@gmail.com)

Toshihide Hamazaki: [toshihide\\_hamazaki@yahoo.com](mailto:toshihide_hamazaki@yahoo.com)

The deadline to submit names to the Nominating Committee is Tuesday, October 15, 2019. The Nominating Committee will report the names of nominees to the Executive Committee on Wednesday, October 23. Members who wish to run but are not nominated may run if they submit to the nominating committee a petition to run signed by fifteen (15) members of Alaska Chapter. The deadline to receive candidate petitions is Wednesday, November 6. This is also the deadline to

submit ballot issue petitions.

The Chapter Executive Committee will appoint an Election Committee at its regular meeting on Wednesday, November 27; no candidates may serve on the Election Committee. Ballots will be printed and mailed on Friday, December 6. Marked ballots must be received at the Sierra Club office (PO BOX 230323) in Anchorage by Monday, January 6, 2020, and will be counted by the Election Committee starting at 5 pm.

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

My term as chapter chair is ending this year, and I would love to open the chair's position up to a fresh face! Other ExCom officer roles up for election are secretary, outings chair, and assistant treasurer.

### Some job descriptions

#### Chair :

The chair is responsible for ensuring that the Chapter complies with Club policies and enjoys a safe and productive environment for members and leaders. The chair will work to hold accountability for delegated items and follow up to see that people have the support they need. Duties of the chair (which may be delegated) include but are not limited to: arrange for executive committee meetings, facilitate the Chapter election process in consultation with the ExCom, communicate with the national office, keep the club active and organized, generate content for the newsletter, ensure Chapter sustainability, plus administrative duties.

#### Secretary:

The secretary has the overall responsibility of maintaining the records of the Chapter, serving the quasi-legal role of advising the Chapter on its formal responsibilities to the Club and to the membership, and helping to assure that those responsibilities are carried out. Responsibilities include writing minutes, having a firm understanding of the bylaws, working with the ExCom on elections, maintaining records, and being a point of communication.

#### Outings Chair

The Chapter Outings Chair provides leadership, direction, and oversight to the Chapter outings program, as well as any outings programs of local groups and sections. The Chapter Outings Chair works to make outdoor activities an integrated and vital element of Chapter efforts.

#### Treasurer:

The Treasurer provides oversight of the finances for all Chapter entities. The treasurer must have an understanding of grants, investments, tax issues, insurance, contracts, legal services, hiring staff, and political regulatory compliance. The treasurer communicates financial status, policies and procedures to volunteers and staff. The treasurer also serves as the liaison between the Chapter and the Sierra Club Finance Department on all financial matters. Additional responsibilities include submitting year-end financial reports, reviewing invoices and payments, preparing budgets, and obtaining necessary licenses or permits. ❖



photo: Irene Alexakos

Chapter treasurer Pat Fort gets a visit from past Alaska Chapter chairs Paul Forman, Pam Brodie, and Irene Alexakos.

# Trump Administration works to significantly weaken the Endangered Species Act

In mid-August, 2019, the Trump Administration published its series of rule changes to the Endangered Species Act (ESA) in the Federal Register. (These changes were first proposed by the Department of Interior in July of 2018).

These changes switch species selection for ESA protection from a scientific to a political process and include;

- allowing actions that gradually destroy listed species;
- depriving newly listed threatened species from receiving automatic protections; and
- including economic considerations in decisions that, until now have been purely based on scientific analysis.

These new rules make it easier to remove species from the endangered list and weaken protections for newly listed threatened species. For the first time, regulators can consider economic reasons NOT to select or list a species as endangered.- for instance, estimating lost revenue from a prohibition on logging in a critical habitat-when deciding whether a species warrants protection. Removal of language that in the past prevented economic impacts from affecting whether or not a species qualifies as endangered shifts the listing process away from being based solely on science, and could give extractive industries greater influence over the process.

One of the new Trump rules prohibits using “foreseeable” impacts of climate change when assessing the threats a species faces. This prevents protecting species impacted in the foreseeable future by warming temperatures, sea level rise or melting sea ice. This change affects threatened species such as the polar bear and ice-dependent seals.

Trump’s ESA regulation rollbacks come when eminent scientists affirm we face a climate crisis, with a staggering loss of biological diversity. Of eight million species on the planet, about ONE million could go extinct in the next few decades.

## Who benefits from weakening the endangered species act?

Extractive industries such as the oil and gas industry, the mining industry, the logging industry and the agribusiness industry all benefit from weakening the ESA regulations. So this boon to extractive industries is not a surprise. Many of Trump’s regulatory appointees are former industry lobbyists. Secretary of Interior Bernhardt was a lobbyist for the oil and gas industry.

Environmental and animal protection groups are suing the Trump administration over their regulatory changes to the ESA. Earthjustice filed a lawsuit on behalf of several environmental and animal protection groups on August 21, 2019. These groups include Sierra Club, The Center for Biological Diversity, Defenders of Wildlife, Natural Resources Defense Council, National Parks Conservation Association, Wild Earth Guardians, and the Humane Society of the United States.

This lawsuit alleges the Interior Department, U.S Fish & Wildlife Service and the National Marine Fisheries Service violated the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) by failing to disclose the negative environmental impacts of the new rules. The lawsuit alleges the administration inserted new changes into the final rules that were never subject to public comment.

## Background:

With the purpose of conserving threatened and endangered species and their ecosystems, the ESA has stood as a bedrock environmental law since Richard Nixon signed it into law in 1973. The ESA is widely popular among the public and has proven remarkably successful in protecting imperiled wildlife. The law has been credited with the rebound of the bald eagle, the grizzly bear, the humpback whale and many other species.



photo: Jim Liscover © 2006

A polar bear family. The polar bear is a threatened species in Alaska

Two Federal agencies, the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), have been responsible for maintaining lists of species that meet the definition of threatened or endangered under the ESA. NMFS maintains the endangered list for most marine species and manages these once they are listed. The FWS maintains the list for, and manages once listed, terrestrial and freshwater species, plus three marine species: polar bear, Pacific walrus, and sea otter.

NMFS and USFWS must determine if any species is endangered because of *any* of the following factors:

- The present or threatened destruction, modification, or curtailment of its habitat of range;
- Overutilization for commercial, recreational, scientific, or educational purposes;
- Disease or predation;
- The inadequacy of existing regulatory mechanisms;
- Other natural or manmade factors affecting its continued existence.

The ESA also made it illegal to “take” (harass, harm, pursue, hunt, shoot, wound, kill, trap, capture, collect, or attempt to do these things) a species listed as endangered. Under the new rules, which go into effect in mid-September, all these factors may be changed--or ignored.. ❖

-- Susan K. Hansen, Alaska Chapter Conservation Chair

### Endangered Species in Alaska

- Aleutian Shield Fern
- Blue Whale
- Cook Inlet Beluga Whale
- Eskimo Curlew
- Fin Whale
- Leatherback Sea Turtle
- North Pacific Right Whale
- Sei Whale
- Short-Tailed Albatross
- Steller Sea Lion (west of 144 degrees)
- Bowhead Whale
- Humpback Whale
- Sperm Whale

### Threatened Species in Alaska

- Green Sea turtle
- Loggerhead Sea Turtle
- Northern Sea Otter ( SW AK population)
- Olive Ridley Sea Turtle
- Polar Bear
- Spectacled Eider
- Steller’s Eider
- Wood Bison

## New Chugach Plan abandons protecting wilderness character in WSA

The Chugach National Forest Land Management Plan has been released -- a final plan revision following several years of public meetings and then a draft plan with a comment period a year ago. **Sierra Borealis** had numerous articles urging our Alaska members to attend the public meetings and then to submit personal comments about their desire to KEEP THE CHUGACH wild. (See **sierra borealis** March & Sept 2018, Sept 2017, March & Sept 2016, June 2015.)

The new plan is in its 60-day public "objection period", before the final "Record of Decision" is signed, during which previous commentors can file formal objections if their substantive comments were not answered.

This vast national forest (second largest in Alaska -- AND in the nation) covers a considerable portion of the Kenai Peninsula, Prince William Sound, and the Copper River Delta region farther east. Scenically spectacular and wild, it receives much recreational use from the Anchorage area. The Chugach contains America's largest legislated Wilderness Study Area--the Nellie Juan-College Fjord WSA, 1.9 million acres in extent, covering most of western Prince William Sound.

Unfortunately the new plan abandons the previous 2002 plan's intention to "maintain the "wilderness character" of the Wilderness Study Area, and instead replaces that with a weak and virtually meaningless phrase of maintaining "present existing character". By law, the WSA should protect wilderness character that existed at the time of designation as a WSA, not just the "presently existing character".

The new plan also weakens management for the WSA, eliminating use of the Minimum Requirement Analysis (MRA) tool, used by managers to determine if a proposed activity should be allowed in the WSA. Eliminating both wilderness character language and the MRA go hand in hand to toss out previous Forest Service protections for the WSA.

The new plan fails to improve the earlier inadequate wilderness recommendation for the WSA; we urged and continue to urge agency recommendation of almost the entire WSA for wilderness. Simply using the 2002 Plan recommendation makes no sense now, because the opening of the Whittier Tunnel since then, bringing more people to the area, has shown that stronger protections are needed close to Whittier--to ensure opportunity for a wilderness experience where people can access it close to home without spending a fortune to get way out in far reaches of Prince William Sound.

The agency also shortcutted the new plan by simply using the old 2002 classification for WSA recreation management of "semi-primitive non-motorized", whereas a careful analysis should have led to the more protective "Primitive" classification. In 2016, the Alaska Chapter signed on to an environmental community letter commenting on inadequacies of the first draft plan in the new revision process. The plan has not been significantly improved, and environmental groups in Alaska are now considering a possible formal "objection". ❖

## A Big week in Congress for the Arctic House passes no-drilling; Senate bill introduced

A bill introduced in the Senate on Wednesday, September 11, would establish the coastal plain of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge as a wilderness area, permanently protecting it from destructive oil and gas exploration. The Arctic Refuge Protection Act was introduced by Senator Ed Markey (MA); with Sen. Maria Cantwell (WA); Sen. Tom Udall (NM); Sen. Michael Bennet (CO); Sen. Sen. Charles Schumer (NY); and Sen. Tom Carper (DE).

The new bill declares the 1.5 million acres of the contested Arctic Refuge coastal plain as wilderness. Arctic wilderness bills have appeared in every Congress for 30 years.

Although not identical to it, this new bill is effectively a companion to HR 1146, introduced in the House of Representatives earlier this year by Rep. Jared Huffman (D-CA2), as the Arctic Cultural and Coastal Plain Protection Act, which would repeal the provision in the controversial December 2017 tax bill that opened up the coastal plain for drilling. (It is not a wilderness bill.) The House passed this historic bill on Thursday, Sept 12. The vote of 225-193 followed passage of two offshore drilling bans the day before. The Senate, however--that will be a different story.

Despite overwhelming public opposition, the Trump administration is rushing to hold a lease sale for drilling in the Arctic Refuge coastal plain as soon as this fall. In recent months, major oil companies and banks faced protests from activists and shareholders urging them not to support drilling in the Arctic Refuge, and British Petroleum (BP) recently announced that it will sell off all of its assets in the Arctic and not pursue drilling in the Refuge. Most recently, Royal Scotland Bank and the largest bank in Australia have agreed not to invest in drilling the Arctic.

In response, Sierra Club Lands Protection Program Director Athan Manuel issued the following statement:

"Drilling in the Arctic Refuge would threaten the food security and human rights of the Gwich'in people and permanently destroy one of the world's last wild places, all to dig up more oil that would worsen the climate crisis. That's why the overwhelming majority of Americans oppose drilling there, as do a growing number of investors and financial institutions. Now Congress has an opportunity to protect this special place from corporate polluters. We applaud Senator Markey and the bill's co-sponsors for their leadership in protecting America's Refuge." ❖ (mostly from a Sierra Club press release)



# Recreational plans for Kantishna and Wonder Lake in Denali National Park

Developing further recreational opportunities in this area was supported by Ryan Zinke (former Secretary of Interior) and encouraged by Denali National Park's present Superintendent, Don Striker. Increased recreation opportunities being planned would include creating a network of trails (up to 80 miles), additional lodging and camping options such as roadside camp grounds, backcountry campsites, and rustic lodging. Currently there are maybe 25 miles of existing informal trails. The National Park Service would have to build a bridge over Moose Creek.

## Areas that may be developed for recreational tourism

Kantishna, a community located within Denali National Park and Preserve, was founded as a gold mining camp in 1905. Thus the focus here is on its mining history. Visitors to Kantishna can stay at Denali Backcountry Lodge, Kantishna Roadhouse, North Face Lodge, Camp Denali, etc.

Private vehicles are not permitted to drive across Denali National Park. A visitor to these lodges can reach them via lodge buses on a 92.5-mile, six hour trip from the Denali Park Train Depot. A visitor can also reach Kantishna by Kantishna Air Taxi, from the Denali National Park Airport. Hiking trails near Kantishna are subject to a limited number of hiking permits per day.

Wonder Lake is a few miles south of Kantishna. Wonder Lake Campground, at mile 85 on the Denali Park



photo: Vicky Hoover

A rare clear day reflection of Denali in Wonder Lake

Road, offers 28 tent-only sites. No campfires are allowed at these sites so you must bring a cook stove. Potable water, toilets, and a food storage building are available, but no electricity. Ranger-Naturalist programs occur nightly in the summer. On a clear day when the mountain is visible, the reflection of Denali Mountain in Wonder Lake is spectacular.

The Park's plans for increasing recreational opportunities in the Kantishna and Wonder Lake area have been met with caution and sometimes negative reactions. Concerns include overuse of the Denali Park Road by buses

and the negative impact of more hikers, more camping sites as well as more rustic lodging and administrative sites on wildlife and wilderness values in Denali National Park.

Camp Denali commented on the DNP plans in their PtarmiganTracks newsletter. Camp Denali was homesteaded in 1951 by avid conservationists Morton (Woody) and Ginny Wood and Celia Hunter, whose vision of providing natural experiences for travelers to the Park still influences activities offered to visitors staying at Camp Denali. The current owners/managers of Camp Denali and North Face Lodge emphasized that "improved access and opportunity [for Kantishna and Wonder Lake] must proceed cautiously in order to protect wilderness and wildlife values."

The Denali Citizens Council commented: "Denali Citizens Council has many concerns about the extent of this plan, and its departure from existing planning intent for the region [and we] continue to regret that the NPS's decades-old intent of holding the line on commercial expansion through purchase of inholdings has been incomplete. Developing expansion on private inholdings could and probably will lead to violations of Vehicle Management Plan and Backcountry Management Plan standard." (Denali Citizens Council Sept. 2019)

The Vehicle Management Plan refers to the limitations of traffic on the Denali National Park Road. At present there is more traffic use of the Park Road than the vehicle plan allowed. In addition the Denali National Park Road is deteriorating in many places. Higher summer temperatures have caused melting of the ice uphill and below the road which leads to subsidence and sliding of loose material. This has caused mudslides, slumps and other erosion problems. In addition the current backlog for maintenance for Denali National Park is \$50 million.

At scoping meetings held on August 21 and 22 in Denali National Park other concerns were raised:

- the Denali National Park recreational plans hardly mentioned their impact on wildlife.
- What kind of experiences does the NPS want the visitor to have? Do they want a "box experience" for the visitor? Some visitors want to experience a trail-less wilderness.

There was also a discussion of former NPS plans in 1983 and 1986 to purchase inholdings and mining claims (as in Kantishna). The Park Service responded to this discussion saying that land acquisition was currently not included in this plan.

## WHAT YOU CAN DO

Comments on this Denali National Park recreational plan to develop trails, campgrounds, rustic lodging, housing for NPS staff, bus drivers, administrative sites, bus bar, fueling station, etc in the Kantishna and Wonder Lake area are due on **October 31, 2019**. To read the plans and make comments please google "Kantishna and Wonder Lake Area Plan, Denali National Park and Preserve". ❖

-- Susan K. Hansen, Alaska Chapter conservation chair  
skhansen@ak.net

**Upcoming Chapter Outing:**

**International Coastal Cleanup Day!**

Grab some friends and join our trash cleanup along the Coastal Trail on September 21, International Coastal Cleanup Day! We will meet at the Westchester Lagoon parking lot at 10 am and start from there. Trash bags and gloves will be provided. Please wear sneakers or hiking boots and layers. Contact Alyssa at alyssaschaef@gmail.com with any questions. See you there!

Here is an account of a National Sierra Club outing that took place in Alaska's Bering Land Bridge National Preserve this summer--from National Park Service and our Outing Co-leader Jay Anderson:

**(From Bering Land Bridge National Preserve website:**

Bering Land Bridge NP recently granted the Sierra Club – Alaska Outings Subcommittee a two-year permit to lead outings and service trips within park boundaries. This past week, the Sierra Club kicked off its first service trip alongside Bering Land Bridge staff at Serpentine Hot Springs for the annual maintenance trip.

Serpentine Hot Springs is the most visited and accessible portion of the preserve. Granite monoliths, also known as tors, stick out of rolling hills encircling a small pool of hot water. It is a strange land, but alluring as well. It has drawn people for thousands of years.

A bathhouse, outhouse, bunkhouse, and gravel airstrip support visitation to this area, but after a year of use, it is in need of much TLC. Long summer days give ample time to



photo: National Park Service

NPS team and Sierra Club trip members join forces for work and fun

tackle chores. Our joint accomplishments include clearing and leveling the airstrip, maintaining the boardwalk and other wooden structures, hauling out trash, scrubbing the bathhouse, and securing the outhouse.

Presentations on geology, wilderness survival, and interpretive techniques were shared from both organizations. When NPS staff and Sierra Club participants were not battling mosquitoes, they found respite in the bathhouse, shared dinners, and even participated in the occasional dance party. Working communally in a remote part of the world comes with its own rewards.

**National Sierra Club Western Alaska outing marks partnership with NPS**



photo: Jay Anderson

The trip's camp in the tors above the Serpentine Hot Springs. Here they held their Tours de Tors.

**(From trip co-leader Jay Anderson)**

In late June, we completed the first-annual Serpentine Hot Springs Service trip in Bering Land Bridge Preserve, as our trip joined the National Park Service staff for their annual maintenance week.

Winter is the high-use season when locals can access the Hot Springs via snowmobile. It is a sacred site and is treated with respect despite being unlocked, unsupervised, and open to all. By June, the airstrip dries out, and the NPS comes in to clean and maintain the buildings, systems, and tub.

This is a roadless preserve - we accessed Serpentine Hot Springs by bush plane and established a backpack-style base camp in the spectacular granite tors above the airstrip and creek. We were happy to learn that we could use the 140F, crystal-clear water from the prismatic spring for hand and dishwashing. We used a two-bucket, foot pump-operated hand washing system. We also enjoyed a clean, relatively bug-free outhouse – a major upgrade from exposing your buns over the tundra. The topper was soaking in a glorious hot tub every day.

It turned out the week we arrived is also their big staff development gathering and is the only time most of the rangers are actually in their park which is about 100 miles from the Nome visitor center. Many of the rangers--young seasonal employees--were excited to be in the field and develop new skills.

So, mornings were for work and afternoons were for training and curriculum development. The Sierra Club team joined these activities and led several training sessions including stream crossing techniques, food containment and bear canisters, water filtration, and stove operation. The rangers were thrilled to have experienced Alaska backcountry travelers explain these systems and tell stories to drive home the points.

It was fun for us to learn about NPS operations and to help with interpretive materials. We contributed to the new park brochure and helped develop "hip -pocket" exercises that they can use with groups of kids. Gary taught tango lessons in the bunkhouse, and Natalie led a yoga session on the airstrip. Every activity was filled with laughter--and the level of collaboration. was very high. ❖

## Sierra Borealis / alaska report

is the newsletter of the Alaska Chapter of the Sierra Club

Sierra Club Alaska: 907-276-4088

601 W 5th Ave, Anchorage, AK 99501 (also the Chapter mail address)

There is a NEW Chapter email address to reach the chair and administrative staff: [alaska.chapter@sierraclub.org](mailto:alaska.chapter@sierraclub.org).

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## Join Global Climate Strike September 20, and come to Alaska Chapter meetings on Sept.25 and on Oct. 23--JOIN US!

On September 20, the Alaska Chapter invites all to support the Global Climate Strike on Sept 20th in Anchorage. Join Chapter leaders!

**Start: Friday, September 20, 2019• 1:30 p.m.**

**Location: Cuddy Family Midtown Park•**

**201 E 40th Avenue, Anchorage 99503**

**Why participate?** Be a voice for climate sanity! Scientists estimate that we only have 12 YEARS until the effects of climate change become IRREVERSIBLE. We have to take responsible, major action NOW.

Help Sierra Club promote a "Green New Deal". Show up to become a vital part of the movement.

### September 25 Alaska Chapter general meeting

Join us at 7 p.m. at the Arctic Rec Center, at 4855 Arctic Blvd, south of Tudor Road--phone: (907) 868-3270; expect a SURPRISE conservation speaker--to be announced.

### October 23 Alaska Chapter general meeting

On October 23 at 7 PM, again at ARC, Karlin Itchoak, who is the Alaska State Director for The Wilderness Society will speak at our meeting on the topic: *Spotlight on wildlife conservation*:

Meetings begin promptly as 7 pm and munchies will be provided. ❖



Please keep an eye on our Facebook page, <https://www.facebook.com/SierraClubAlaska/>

Find Sierra Borealis at: <https://www.sierraclub.org/alaska/newsletters>

### Anchorage has banned plastic bags!

Chapter Chair Christin Swearingen gives us some good news for Alaska's environment:

Did you know it takes 500 (or more) years for a plastic bag to degrade in a landfill? Let's keep them out by reducing our use now! The Municipality of Anchorage is implementing a plastic bag ban (effective Sept 15) to minimize the use of single use plastic and extend the lifespan of the Anchorage Regional Landfill and reduce plastic pollution in the ocean.

Learn more at: [www.muni.org/plasticbagban](http://www.muni.org/plasticbagban) ❖