



Sierra Borealis *alaska report*



SIERRA CLUB ALASKA CHAPTER
SEPTEMBER 2018

Action
Alert

Chugach Forest Plan needs **YOUR COMMENTS NOW**

Please help to **KEEP IT WILD**



photo: Amy Murphy

Prince William Sound--typical view in a wild place

The Chugach National Forest draft land management plan (LMP) -- promised for years -- is finally out and in midst of a 90-day comment period until early November.

Of all the wild and wonderful federal lands in Alaska, the Chugach, encompassing much of the Kenai Peninsula, Prince William Sound and the Copper River Delta, is probably closer and more accessible to more Alaska residents than any other wild area.

Whether or not you have enjoyed spending time on the Chugach (America's second largest forest, next to the Tongass), please help get a **STRONG** protective final plan by sending comments **NOW** on the draft plan. Please **DO NOT** wait till November. *This is too important to leave till the last minute.* (See **sierra borealis** June 2018, Sept 2017, March 2016, June 2015, March 2014, Sept and Dec 2013)

Ideally, everyone would actually read the entire plan

and its associated draft environmental impact statement (DEIS.) But that is not going to happen -- so we include (next page) very specific suggestions for writing your comments easily. Comments should address the two most important aspects of the plan: recommendations for future wilderness designation and managing the area protectively.

While only Congress can *designate* wilderness, the managing agency can *recommend* an area to be designated; and a management plan is the best process in which to do so. Many members of Congress place great weight on agency recommendations.

The Chugach is virtually unique among western national forests in having **NO** designated wilderness. It also has the nation's largest legislated Wilderness Study Area (WSA), that must be managed so as to maintain its potential for future inclusion in America's National Wilderness Preservation System. This is the Nellie Juan-College Fjord WSA, covering most of western Prince William Sound.

Of four alternatives in the draft EIS that accompanies the plan, one is the required "no action" alternative continuing present management, (Alt A) and three others. B and C recommend varying amounts of wilderness.

Alternative D has the largest wilderness recommendation--most of the WSA--and some good management language. But even so, Sierra Club members should push for certain vital improvements, particularly in including in the WSA wilderness recommendation lands acquired by the Forest during the Exxon-Valdez Oil Spill (EVOS) Restoration Plan. The draft plan may have omitted these because the Forest does not own subsurface lands here; however, this should not be an excuse to exclude these valuable lands from protection: it is a reason the agency should

-- *continued on page 2*

Chugach Forest Plan COMMENTS NOW -- from page 1

make every effort to acquire this sub-surface estate. (This is relevant mainly for parts of Knight Island and Jackpot and Paddy Bays--about 60,000 acres on the mainland near Port Nellie Juan that is some of the most productive fish and wildlife habitat.

One troubling management change from the current 2002 plan and other earlier documents is the use of the expression "maintain existing character" for the WSA – rather than "maintain wilderness character". Wilderness character – in the Wilderness Act and in subsequent management requirements for wilderness --has a very specific, clear meaning related to an area's natural, undeveloped, and untrammeled (i.e., uncontrolled by humans) qualities. But, "presently existing" character can mean anything goes – whatever damaging impacts may happen then become part of the "existing" character. That is unacceptable as WSA management direction.

Management issues remain crucial in this plan -- because no matter what amount of wilderness the agency may recommend -- Congress is not going to act on these recommendations any time soon, and so how the land is cared for ON THE GROUND in the near future is, in practice, the key part of the plan. While the agency's departure from its longstanding commitment to protect the area by maintaining wilderness character and monitoring wilderness character qualities represents an overall weakening of protections, several good management improvements over the preliminary version from November 2015 show that public advocacy was effective.

⇒ **Suggested comments to send the Forest Service:**

Start (or end, if you prefer) by thanking the Forest Service for a few good changes made since the earlier 2015 draft; thank them for responding to public opinion:

1. The language on snowmachines in the WSA is good, consistent with ANILCA;
2. The proposal to develop a WSA stewardship plan is good and essential to maintaining the area's wilderness character;
3. Under "desired conditions", there is good language on prevention and early detection of invasive species — which negatively affect wilderness character.
4. Language on Minimum Requirement Analysis is improved but still needs strengthening to assure *all* WSA actions must be analyzed.

Recommend adoption of a modified Alternative D.

Alternative D is good but needs these strengthening changes:

- ** Recommend as Wilderness all WSA Lands .
- ** Keep EVOS-acquired Lands as Recommended Wilderness.
- ** Commit to acquisition of subsurface EVOS-acquired lands.
- ** Recommend Montague Island as Wilderness; this is not in the WSA but is truly wild and deserves wilderness protection.

Most important modification to strengthen management:

- ** Keep the current and longstanding commitment to maintain the wilderness character of the WSA. Do NOT weaken this commitment by changing the language "existing wilderness character" to "presently existing character".



Christine Sundly -akartanddesign.com

** Keep EVOS-acquired lands in the Wilderness Management prescription—which is stronger than the EVOS-lands prescription, having more required standards and less manager discretion. Fulfill the intent of the EVOS Restoration Plan by keeping current direction for these lands, from the 2002 plan.

** Clearly state that EVOS-acquired lands are to be main-tained "in perpetuity for conservation and wilderness purposes" —as required in the legally binding EVOS purchase agreements.

** Keep the current and longstanding commitment to monitor the wilderness character of the WSA – do not weaken current protections by abandoning this monitoring commitment. Without monitoring, the Forest Service cannot be adequately informed on how to maintain wilderness character.

** Assure proper Minimum Requirements Analysis (MRA) of all management actions affecting WSA wilderness character.

You can point out that until congress acts on the lands recommended for wilderness, a strong, protective management for these lands is of the utmost importance.)

Try to put these points *into your own words* as much as you can!--And ADD some phrases about your own personal knowledge of any parts of the Chugach that you have visited!

HOW TO COMMENT:

During the 90-day public comment period, comments may be submitted using any of the following methods:

- **Electronically at www.fs.usda.gov/goto/chugach/plancomments ;
- **FAX to (907) 743-9476;
- **Submit in writing at any public meeting hosted during the 90-day comment period;
- **Send by mail or hand-deliver written comments to:
Chugach National Forest Supervisor's Office,
Attn: Draft Land Management Plan,
161 East 1st Street, Door 8
Anchorage, AK 99501.

Nine public open house meetings are scheduled starting in mid-September to provide information about the LMP and the DEIS. Meetings will be hosted in Anchorage, Girdwood, Seward, Hope, Cooper Landing, Moose Pass, Cordova, Soldotna and Valdez. Find more information on locations and times on our website: <http://www.fs.usda.gov/goto/chugach/planrevision>.

For more information about the public comment process, please visit the website: chugachplanrevision@fs.fed.us. ❖

Public Open Houses Scheduled

- September 12 .. Hope – Hope Social Hall
- September 13 ..Moose Pass – USFS Kenai Lake Work Center
- September 18 ..Soldotna – Soldotna Regional Sports Complex
- September 19.. Cooper Landing – Cooper Landing Community Hall
- September 20 ..Seward – Seward Community Library
- September 24...Girdwood – USFS Glacier Ranger District Office
- September 27 ...Cordova – Cordova Center
- October 9 Anchorage – USFS Supervisor's Office, 161 E. First St.
- October 11Valdez – PWS Community College

Alaska Chapter Election Ahead

WHO will step up to help run the show?

The Sierra Club has the largest, most effective grassroots activist network of any conservation organization in the nation. Sierra Club policy and conservation priorities are set by its active volunteers in democratic processes. In the Alaska chapter, policy and priorities are determined by Executive Committee members—who are elected by the Club's members in Alaska to serve as leaders of the Chapter.

The 2018 elections will soon be held for three 2019-2020 positions on the Executive Committee of the Alaska Chapter.

As your brand new Chapter chair who took on this role just this year, I have come to see that you do NOT need to be an experienced "manager" or "organizer" or "activist" to be an effective volunteer for the Alaska Chapter. Right now, with a hostile administration in place in Washington DC and anti-environmental legislators in Alaska – new volunteers are needed more than ever—and helping guide the Alaska Chapter is something YOU can do !

The Executive Committee makes all the major decisions on how this Chapter allocates our resources (e.g., hiring staff, joining or filing lawsuits related to environmental protection, planning major events such as trainings, social or educational gatherings, outings, or commenting to government agencies in response to management plans and actions). Executive Committee members make decisions on the future of environment, conservation, and outdoor life in Alaska

by influencing what the Alaska Chapter will focus on in the next few years.

Executive Committee terms are two years, with terms staggered so that half the committee is elected each year. ExCom members whose terms expire this year are Yasuhiro Ozuru, Suzanne Schafer,

Susan Hansen, and Toshi Hamazaki. Continuing members are Su Chon, Amy Murphy, and myself.

We need more people ready to work to protect Alaska's fish, wildlife, and natural beauty and to influence local decision makers. Are YOU willing to help? Or can you nominate someone else? Please contact a current member of the Chapter Nominating Committee:

Christin Swearingen: mushroomchristin@gmail.com

Su Chon: schon.336@gmail.com

Amy Murphy: koktoya@yahoo.com

Cynthia Wentworth: cynthiawentworth@me.com

The deadline to submit names to the Nominating Committee is Wednesday, October 17, 2018. The Nominating Committee will report the names of nominees to the Executive Committees on Monday, October 29. Members who wish to run for the ExCom but are not nominated may run if they submit to the nominating committee a petition to run signed by fifteen (15) members of the Alaska Chapter. The deadline for candidate petitions to be received is Tuesday, 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 Monday, November 26; no candidates may serve on the Election Committee. Ballots will be printed and mailed on Friday, December 7. Marked ballots must be received at the Sierra Club office in Anchorage by Monday, January 7, 2019, and will be counted by the Election Committee starting at 5 pm.

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

-- Christin Swearingen Alaska Chapter Chair

Comment on NPS proposal to remove its strong sport hunting and trapping standards

On September 5, the National Park Service (NPS) released an Environmental Assessment (EA) that evaluates impacts of a proposal to amend its regulations for sport hunting and trapping on national preserves in Alaska by removing regulatory provisions issued in 2015 that prohibit damaging hunting practices elsewhere permitted by the State of Alaska.

The proposal is in line with many direct measures sought by the new federal administration to undo environmental protection. It would allow the return of cruel and inhumane hunting procedures not allowed in other states—and which the NPS had prohibited in 2015 before the current administration came in. These are hunting practices such as:

- Baiting brown and black bears
- Hunting and trapping wolves and coyotes (including pups) from May 1 through August 9;
- Using artificial light in hunting black bears at den sites, including cubs and sows with cubs;
- Using dogs to hunt big game; and
- Shooting big game that are swimming.

The EA automatically extends an earlier comment period on this NPS proposal, which applies only to hunting on Alaska national preserves. (See *sierra borealis* June 2018: <https://www.sierraclub.org/sites/www.sierraclub.org/files/sce/alaska-chapter/Sierra%20Borealis%20JUNE%202018--final.pdf>.)

⇒ WHAT YOU CAN DO by November 5:

Tell the NPS you strongly support Alternative 2, the "No Action" alternative of their EA. Emphasize that you oppose their planned change in sport hunting regulations. The NPS regulations now in place are much better in protecting key wildlife and in assuring sportsman-like, fair-chase hunting conditions than the state regulations this change wants to align with.

The public comment period for the EA goes from September 6 for 60 days until November 5, 2018. Submit comments on the EA through the NPS Planning, Environment, and Public Comment (PEPC) website at: <http://parkplanning.nps.gov/akro>

Comments may also be mailed or hand delivered to:
Sport Hunting and Trapping in National Preserves EA

Alaska Regional Office, EPC, 240 West 5th Ave.
Anchorage, AK 99501. ❖



Wild and Scenic Rivers Act 50th anniversary celebrated nationwide

But legal cloud hangs over wild and scenic rivers in Alaska

This year, as the environmental community around the country celebrates the 50th anniversary of the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act, Alaska's 24 designated wild and scenic rivers are under attack. Hovercraft operator John Sturgeon, supported by the State and several other groups opposed to federal regulation, is suing the National Park Service in an effort to overturn the agency's ban of his hovercraft on the navigable Nation River in Yukon-Charley Rivers National Preserve. (See **sierra borealis** Dec 2017, March 2016, Dec 2015, JUNE 2012) An adverse decision could threaten all rivers in Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act-(ANILCA) designated national conservation system units (csu's).

Sturgeon and his supporters claim that section 103(c) of ANILCA prohibits the NPS from regulating uses on navigable rivers inside national park system areas, if, as with the Nation River, the bed and banks are state-owned. They argue that this gives the State exclusive control of uses of the water column and the banks up to the ordinary high water mark.

This litigation is now before the U.S. Supreme Court for the second time. Initially, the NPS prevailed in federal district court and at the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals, based on the agency's interpretation of ANILCA Sec.103(c). Sturgeon appealed to the Supreme Court, which found the NPS's interpretation inadequate and sent the case back to the Ninth Circuit. The appellate court, this time using a different argument, again rejected Sturgeon's claim. Heavily financed by his supporters, Sturgeon has now successfully petitioned the Supreme Court to review the Ninth's decision.

On November 6 the high court will hear oral arguments on "whether [ANILCA] prohibits the National Park Service from exercising regulatory control over state, native corporation and private land physically located within the boundaries of the national park system in Alaska."

In defining this issue in this way, the justices have broadened the issue beyond just rivers in the park system. And since Sec. 103(c) applies to all Alaska conservation system units, what the justices decide will apply to rivers on other federal lands units as well.

If the high court rules against the NPS, motorized mayhem and degradation of natural values is in store for 24 rivers. Hovercrafts, air boats, jet boats, and high-powered river boats would have unrestricted access. Helicopters, prohibited in csu's except for administrative and research uses, would also have free access. Brought in by boats, all terrain vehicles and dirt bikes racing around stream banks, gravel bars and braided stream channels would damage fish habitat and alter natural stream flows.

Some ATV operators would most likely trespass

on adjacent csu's. Besides having no way to prevent incompatible uses on the rivers, federal managers would be hard pressed to prevent damage to adjacent lands under their jurisdiction.

Wild and Scenic Rivers in Alaska

In 1980, 25 Alaska rivers and river segments were added to the Wild and Scenic Rivers System (System) as part of ANILCA. Of the 25, 19 are classified wild--13 in park system units, and six in national wildlife refuges. Another six in BLM areas have wild, scenic and recreational river status. There are no designated rivers in the two national forests. (Although there are 24 different rivers, technically ANILCA considers 25 river segments, as the Alagnak is two separate segments, one in Katmai National Park and one on adjacent Bureau of Land Management land.)

Because the public land these navigable rivers flow over was not federally reserved in public ownership when Alaska joined the Union, ownership of the beds and banks could go to the State if the high court rules in favor of Sturgeon and the State.

Thus while the citizen supporters of the Wild and Scenic Rivers System celebrate its 50th anniversary and vow to expand it, in Alaska 24 of the nation's most pristine free-flowing rivers face an uncertain future. ❖

-- Jack Hession

24 Designated Rivers in Alaska

Alagnak River - NPS, Katmai NPP and also on BLM land
Alatna River - NPS, Gates of the Arctic NPP
Andreafsky River - FWS, Yukon Delta NWR
Aniakchak River - NPS. Aniakchak NM & Preserve
Beaver Creek - BLM, White Mountains NRA
Charley River - NPS, Yukon Charley Rivers NP
Chilikadrotna River - NPS, Lake Clark NPP
Delta River - BLM
Fortymile River - BLM
Gulkana River - BLM
Ivishak River - FWS, Arctic NWR
John River - NPS Gates OTA NPP
Kobuk River - NPS, Kobuk Valley NP
Koyukuk River (North Fork) - NPS, Gates OTA NPP
Mulchatna River - NPS Lake Clark NPP
Noatak River - NPS, Noatak NP
Nowitna River - FWS, Nowitna NWR
Salmon River - NPS Kobuk Valley NP
Selawik River - FWS, Selawik NWR
Sheenjok River - FWS, Arctic NWR
Tinayguk River - NPS, Gates OTA NPP
Tliikakila River - NPS, Lake Clark NPP
Unalakleet River - BLM
Wind River - FWS, Arctic NWR

Sierra Club national outings in Alaska: Fall Foliage, Fish, and Berries

Assistant leader Sarah Hake and I just completed our 10-day backpack—entitled “Fall Foliage, Fish, and Berries” along the Kivalina River in the Wulik Peaks area of the Western Arctic. The trip, based on previous exploratory trips by leaders Fred Paillet and Don Murch, was on BLM land due west of the Noatak National Preserve. This western end of the Brooks range is known as the DeLong Mountains.

We had a great group of engaging, fun participants. They must have been living right because our collective weather karma was amazing—we had super weather. For several days we lounged on the tundra outside the cook

photo: Jay Anderson



Western Arctic trip members enjoy “the trip every leader hopes for”

shelter and used its shadow for a little welcome shade. We all came home sunburned! Eventually we got some afternoon and evening showers, but always after shelters were pitched. A couple of nights were frosty because the clear skies allowed the earth’s heat to radiate into deep space. Nights with a little cloud cover were much warmer. Fly-out day was clear with only a light breeze from the wrong direction.

The trip title was apt. Fall colors were starting as we flew in just after mid-August, and they exploded into full beauty during the trip. We picked quarts of blueberries, crow berries, and cranberries. We enjoyed cranberries on our turkey and stuffing dinner and had warmed berries on several breakfasts. Wildflowers were off the charts -- much better than I expected for fall. The fishermen delivered: twice we had fish for a third course. Sea-run arctic char are one of the best eating fish. Grayling are easy to catch and provided a contrast so you knew just how good the char tasted. We observed many big char in crystal-clear pools in small tributaries with waterfalls. Hard to imagine a better place to cast a fly.

We saw a few caribou; several of us got very close when scaling a local peak. Two saw the big butt of a fleeing griz. We observed large groups of Dall sheep with lambs -- we were close enough to get good views. While looking at caribou just across the upper river, we spooked a red fox and had a brief but good view of him and his fluffy tail. That night an ermine (weasel) gave us a great show while he hunted in the rocks right in front of us. He was not afraid of us and ran right by us several times while we talked and pointed. He

stopped to stare at us with his big, cute eyes - very adorable unless you are a rodent. Then the topper happened. On our last day of hiking we stopped to view the caribou nearby. We were greeted with a wolf howl at close range. Beth spotted him about 150-200 yards away, and we all got great views through binoculars. He howled at us for 20-30 minutes alternately sitting on his haunches, standing, or lying down, but always howling and looking right at us. I was ready to pitch camp right there and watch him forever. We eventually continued upriver, and he trotted downstream looking over his shoulder to make sure we kept going the right way. Wow!!!

To get back to the airstrip, we snuck through a magical slot canyon that bisects what looks like a huge, impenetrable mountain. It required some teamwork to get our oldest participant carefully through the loose scree on the banks of the slick-rock creek bed, but we managed without incident.

This is a fantastic backpack route, and I hope we can interest more of our leaders in going there in the future. ❖

-- Jay Anderson, Sierra Club national outing leader

(Jay Anderson lives at Lake Tahoe, California, and has led outings to Alaska since 2006. In 2019, he will lead a new national Service trip to Serpentine Hot Springs in Bering Land Bridge Preserve, possibly the first Sierra Club outing to that remote park.)

Artifacts and Ancestors: Archaeological Service in Western Alaska

For another 2018 Sierra Club national outing in western Alaska, trip leader Holly Wenger reports:

National Geographic magazine alerted me to a new climate-change-exposed extremely rich archaeological site on the Bering Sea south of Bethel. It is an underground structure which housed several families in their own alcoves. The dig at this extraordinary site is a joint effort of the Nunalleq, Qanirtuuk Native Corporation and the University of Aberdeen archaeology department. It has been written about in Alaska magazine and the American Archaeological Conservancy magazine. After I contacted Rick Knecht, one of the organizers of the dig, who previously lived in Alaska, we arranged for a 2018 service trip there. This July, 14 Sierra Club volunteers participated in the dig for a week, and I'll bring in 14 more during 2019. ❖



photo: Linda McDowell

Holly Wenger and trip members contributed to the ongoing archaeological work near the Yup'ik village of Quinagak.

Trump Administration and Forest Service attack Roadless Rule in Alaska

Comment period ending October 15 lets forest lovers fight back

On August 2, the Trump administration announced a plan to work with the state of Alaska to craft a special state-specific version of the National Forest Roadless Lands Conservation Rule (called the Roadless rule) that would undermine protections for millions of acres of pristine, old-growth forest in Alaska's Tongass National Forest and Chugach National Forests.

By end of August they began a 45-day comment period **until October 15** under their stated "Intent to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS)."

The Forest Service intends to create an emasculated version—just for Alaska—of the Clinton-era Roadless Rule, which currently safeguards 58.5 million acres of pristine National Forest System lands across 39 states from destructive logging and road building.

The announcement came in response to a petition from the State for a complete exemption from the Roadless Rule. The new process has also been pushed for on the federal side by the members of the Alaska delegation – Senators Lisa Murkowski and Dan Sullivan, and Congressman Don Young.

The goal of the Alaska delegation and the State of Alaska is to roll back protections from road building and clearcut logging under the 2001 Roadless Rule for designated inventoried roadless areas on the Tongass National Forest.

The announcement was also a response to the introduction, in the same week in early August, of the Roadless Area Conservation Act of 2018, S 3333, by Senator Maria Cantwell (D-WA), ranking minority member of Senator Murkowski's Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee. This bill would permanently codify the Roadless Rule and give lasting legislative protection for all inventoried roadless areas within America's National Forest System, including in Alaska, covered by the existing administrative rule. Senator Cantwell was joined by 16 Senate cosponsors.

The Sierra Club put out the following statement decrying the joint agency and State of Alaska move and will work with our partners on and off the hill to push back against the proposed change:

"The Roadless Rule is a critical conservation tool that protects some of America's most valuable and ecologically sensitive wildlands. This effort to undermine environmental safeguards for Alaska's national forests threatens these extraordinary places and opens the door to even broader attacks on public lands nationwide. Congress should act immediately to codify the Roadless Rule and permanently protect our country's roadless forests and grasslands."

The 2001 Roadless Rule currently protects some 9.2 million acres of Tongass National Forest lands from being casually roaded for logging purposes. Construction of new logging roads in intact forest lands is widely understood and well-documented as having a profound negative impact on the quality of habitat, species diversity, and other characteristics of a natural, wild forest.

The Southeast Alaska Conservation Council (SEACC) points out: "Since its adoption early in 2001, the Roadless Rule has maintained the resiliency of our intact forests, provided key habitat for abundant wildlife, and safeguarded Southeast Alaska's extraordinary salmon runs and the subsistence, commercial, and sport uses they support.

Much-loved local treasures like Berners Bay, Chicken Creek on North Chichagof

Island, Ushk Bay near Sitka, Port Houghton and Sanborn Canal near Petersburg, Cleveland Peninsula near Ketchikan, and the Honker Divide on Prince of Wales Island are all roadless areas."

At end of August, the Forest Service announced that it is moving forward with an Environmental Impact Statement and public review process to develop its plan to strip Alaska roadless areas of protection. The new notice kicks off a 45-day comment period through October 15, during which the public will have the first chance to weigh in on this proposed attack on Alaska's national forests. (This notice is an "Intent to Prepare"; there will be further opportunities to comment when the actual EIS appears.)

The Tongass and Chugach National Forests are home to some of the last remaining stands of temperate old-growth rainforest in the world and serve as a hub for tourism, fishing, and outdoor recreation in Southeast and Southcentral Alaska. **Sierra borealis** has reported on varied threats to the integrity of Tongass Forest lands over the years—see issues of Dec 2017, Sept 2016, Sept 2015, March, June and Sept 2014, March, June and Dec 2013, Dec 2012, March and Dec 2011, June 2010.)



⇒ **WHAT YOU CAN DO:**

Sierra Club members are urged to comment by October 15—strongly protesting loosening protections and urging the agency to keep the 2001 roadless rule intact for Alaska forests—and for local communities that depend on them.

Comments may be submitted electronically at <https://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=54511>.

In addition, written comments can be submitted via hard-copy mail to: Alaska Roadless Rule, USDA Forest Service, Alaska Region, Ecosystem Planning and Budget Staff, P.O. Box 21628, Juneau, Alaska 99802-1628.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Ken Tu, Interdisciplinary Team Leader, 303-275-5156; or akroadlessrule@fs.fed.us. ❖

Alaska Chapter Outings

Trip Notice:

Johnson Pass Trail Hike – September 22, 2018

Outing organizer: Amy Murphy
with the Alaska Chapter Executive Committee

The popular Johnson Pass Trail is located in the Kenai Peninsula area of the Chugach National Forest, a few miles past Turnagain Pass on the Seward Highway (Milepost 64). This trail is part of the Iditarod National Historic Trail that starts in Seward and ends in Nome. Only 16 trails throughout America have received National Historical Trail designation and here is a chance for you to explore this historic area.

During summer you hike through lush vegetation, brightly colored flowers and thick forests. The delightful, well-marked trail meanders through valleys and crosses babbling creeks fed by snowmelt from some of the huge peaks that surround this area. The trail has mostly gradual ups and downs with some steep sections. During winter deep snow usually covers the trail.

The pace for our September hike will be moderate, with breaks to admire the scenery, take photos, listen to the birds and catch our breath. We will hike a couple hours and stop to eat lunch. At that point we will decide if we want to continue for another 30-40 minutes or turn around and return to the trailhead. Expect to cover 8 - 10 miles, depending on the pace.

If you want to spend more time in this peaceful, scenic area, there will be an optional car-camping overnight stay at the Granite Creek campground, located very near the Johnson Pass trailhead. The campground has no fee and no services, so we have to haul out what we bring in.

For the hike, dress in layers. Bring rain gear, hats, gloves, warm clothing to suit the temperature, good hiking boots, any necessary medication, mosquito spray, and plenty of snacks and water for the day. If you decide to camp overnight, bring food, water and all the gear you need for camping out in chilly temperatures. On our way home next morning we can stop and do an additional hike in the Portage Lake area.

I hope to leave the trailhead around 10:30 a.m. so we need to leave Anchorage by 9:00 a.m. For questions or to sign up, contact Amy via e-mail at koktoya@yahoo.com This hike will take most of the day as we explore, enjoy and, I hope, work to protect this amazing area.

Find more information on this and more outings on the Alaska Chapter website and Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/SierraClubAlaska>.

Sierra Club Local Outings

Chapter Outing Report: Prince William Sound Marine Debris Cleanup

As Sierra Club members we sadly learn about all sorts of environmental issues. While we care about potential damage to our lands and water and wildlife and want to do something to help, there are so many issues none of us can possibly help out with all of them. Therefore I feel extremely lucky that I recently had the opportunity to participate on a service trip to help with one particular BIG issue close to home—cleaning up marine debris in Prince William Sound near Whittier.

Prince William Sound is a really special place in southcentral Alaska that countless people visit year-round. There are numerous glaciers, islands, and marine life, including whales and abundant fish. The tourism and fishing industries rely on the income they make in this area, and keeping the water and beaches “healthy” and clear of debris is very important. (See related Chugach Forest article, pp 1 and 2.)

Marine debris is an ugly, hazardous mess that has been building up over the years, damaging our coastlines, oceans, and marine life. Alaska has more coastline than any other state so we have more areas that are increasingly getting impacted. The group I was with included U.S. Forest Service personnel (a n d organizer extraordinaire) Barbara Lydon and Predeger; Cece and

Steve Mendonsa with the Prince William Sound

Cruising Prince William Sound with a boatload of trash



photo: Graham Predeger

Stewardship

Foundation; and Michael Finnegan and I representing the Sierra Club. This was a great group of dedicated, hard-working people that made it enjoyable to work together. It was like being on a treasure hunt, but the treasure we hunted for was elusive garbage that we picked up to haul off.

We spent two days on a boat, cleaning up numerous beaches while enjoying rare sunshine during the day and peaceful solitude at night. I will never look at styrofoam in the same way--as it was disgusting and disheartening to see how this sinister manmade material degrades and becomes micro pieces of garbage that are really hard to pick up.

A special thank you to a NOLS (National Outdoor Leadership School) kayaking group that we met that helped us lift a huge, dilapidated buoy we found on to the boat. It was too heavy and cumbersome for us to bring on board alone.

While not everybody will get an chance to volunteer in stunning locales like Prince William Sound, there are lots of ways to make a difference. Even if it's just picking up trash in your home neighborhood or doing trail clearing and maintenance on your favorite trail, every little bit helps preserve our environment for future generations. ❖

-- by Amy Murphy, outing leader and member Alaska Chapter Ex-Com

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

This is also the Chapter mail address.

Chapter Directory

Executive Committee:

CHAIR: Christin Swearingen <mushroomchristin@gmail.com>

VICE CHAIR: Suzanne Schafer: <suzeqzin@gmail.com>

SECRETARY: Su Chon: <schon.336@gmail.com>

COUNCIL DELEGATE: Susan Hansen: <skhansen@ak.net>

Yasuhiro Ozuru <yasozuru@gmail.com>

Toshihide Hamazaki <toshihide_hamazaki@yahoo.com>

Roxanna Reynolds <roxyjreynolds@icloud.com>

Amy Murphy <koktoya@yahoo.com>

Other volunteer officers:

Treasurer: Patrick Fort, Anchorage: c.patrick.fort@gmail.com

Outing Chair: Julie K. Wahl: AKfrogprincess@gmail.com

Webmaster: William Taygan: will.taygan@alaska.sierraclub.org
(Newsletter editor: Vicky Hoover: vicky.hoover@sierraclub.org)

Alaska Field Office staff:

Dan Ritzman, Alaska Program Director, 206-378-0114,
dan.ritzman@sierraclub.org

Alli Harvey, Our Wild America Organizing representative,
907- 276-4088 alli.harvey@sierraclub.org

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



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I went to Izembek this summer

Alaska has sixteen national wildlife refuges, that together amount to well over half of all the country's Refuge acreage. The smallest of these is the 300,000 acre-plus Izembek National Wildlife Refuge--near the end of the Alaska Peninsula. This summer I paid my second visit to this remote refuge.

Why Izembek? Why is THIS refuge special, and why have I gone out of my way to visit there twice?

** This refuge is globally celebrated as a Wetland of International Importance, or so-called "Ramsar Site" according to an international convention that recognizes certain wetlands for their value to all humanity. (Izembek is the only Alaska Ramsar site; the U.S. has 36--out of some 2000 worldwide.)

** The Izembek Lagoon is of critical importance to migrating birds because its unique eelgrass beds provide nourishment for millions of waterfowl and other birds flying north or south;

** the Alaska delegation has gotten the current administration to approve its long-standing effort to build a road across sensitive designated wilderness in the Izembek Refuge;

** since it is illegal to build a road in wilderness, they instead authorize a "land exchange" with King Cove Corporation lands, to take the desired wilderness road corridor out of wilderness; this sets a disturbing and potentially lethal precedent for America's entire treasured Wilderness System;

** The road would have to cross the fragile wetlands at the edge of the lagoon, endangering the health of eel grass beds, and creating a huge management headache for the Fish &

Wildlife Service managers, who would have to deal with significant trespass of off-road vehicles from this planned road--unusable in winter and unnecessary, as the village of King Cove has other ways to reach the big Cold Bay airstrip;

** Sierra Club is one of six organizations that have sued the Department of Interior for giving the nod to the delegation's costly and unnecessary road push; we want to make sure that designated Wilderness stays protected.

So I enjoyed four leisurely days as a visitor to the tiny community of Cold Bay, Izembek Refuge headquarters, where I arrived after five days on the Alaska state ferry Tustumena,— I went primarily to enjoy the ferry experience as far as Dutch Harbor in the Aleutians, but the chance to relish the Izembek Refuge was the clinching impetus. I hung out at the Refuge visitor center and spoke with Refuge staffers; one day I rented a local truck and leisurely drove the minimal road system with many stops to enjoy and photograph landscape, birds, wildflowers, and even

bears. In town, I chatted with friendly locals who appreciated my visit and interest in local birdlife and other wildlife. The remote area gets tourists rarely, beyond a few bird watchers and hunters in fall. ❖

-- Vicky Hoover



Izembek's mountains and wetlands