

Explore, enjoy and protect the planet

Sierra Borealis alaska report

SIERRA CLUB ALASKA CHAPTER **MARCH 2018**



Goodby from 2017 Chapter Chair

I write this short note to let our Alaska Chapter members know that I stepped down from Chair as of the first Executive Committee meeting in January after the election. The reason is personal. I work at UAA as an associate professor of Psychology, and my teaching this spring semester happens to require a lot of time commitment. I found that I cannot commit enough time and energy to the duty of the Chapter chair. It is fortunate that Christin Anderson, newly elected to the ex com, is willing to step in. Christin is young, active, and she is particularly knowledgeable, much more so than I am, about social media and various communication technologies. Please see her introduction on next page. This change should have a positive effect on our Chapter.

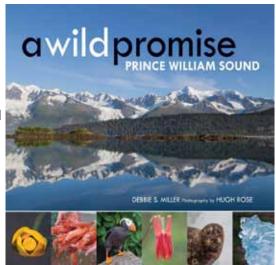
I really enjoyed working as the chair, and learned a lot. In particular, I appreciated the opportunities to meet with many interesting people who all care about Alaska's people and environment. I will continue to be active in organizing various events, leading outings, and contributing pieces to Sierra Borealis. There are many critical environmental and conservation issues facing us--such as the protection for Prince William Sound that will be highlighted in the Chapter event described here--and we need to continue to work hard, and be as effective as possible. I am hopeful that someday in future I will have another opportunity to serve as a chair of this Chapter. For those of you who helped me in various ways to serve as the chair, I thank you very much, and I look forward to continuing to work together. ❖

-- Yasuhiro Ozuru

Celebrate Prince William Sound at May 3 Anchorage Book Event

Protect this wild Alaska gem next door to Anchorage

Join the Sierra Club Alaska Chapter, **Braided River and** partners for an event showcasing the incredible beauty and ecological diversity of the Prince William Sound. Author Debbie Miller will give a talk about her new book A Wild Promise: Prince William Sound. and the book's



photographer Hugh Rose will give a visual media presentation. If "a picture is worth a thousand words," nowhere is that more true than on the pages of this book. Come learn more about one of the largest wilderness study areas in the United States and how you can help to raise a strong voice to protect this area permanently through a wilderness designation. Food and drink will be available to purchase. We hope to see you there!

When// Thursday, May 3rd

Time// 6-8pm

Where// 49th State Brewing Company, Barrel Room East 717 West 3rd Ave, Anchorage, 99501, 907-277-7727

For Details// Visit www.braidedriver.org for more information on the event or to purchase the book. ❖

Meet Christin, new Alaska Chapter chair

Dear reader,

The Sierra Club is one of the oldest and most effective environmental groups in America. I am completely new to the Alaska Chapter of the Sierra Club, but have been an intermittent Sierra Club member most of my life. I am honored to be newly elected chair of the Sierra Club Alaska Chapter, and hope to bring new energy to the group!

For this first year as chair, I am committed to learn all I can about the partnerships between the Sierra Club and other environmental organizations in Alaska in order to boost collaboration and decrease redundancy. I intend to maintain or improve the existing programs and services we provide.

A little about me: I was raised by park rangers in Chiricahua National Park and Death Valley National Park. My family moved to Anchorage when I was 12 and we haven't left yet. My environmental philosophy is mostly preservationist, although I recognize that with climate

change, multiple conservation strategies are needed to respond to uncertainty. I have bachelor's degrees in Biology and Environmental Studies from Oberlin College and a master's of science in Natural Resources Management from the University of Alaska, Fairbanks (UAF).



My passion

is mycology-- the study of fungi! I applied my passion for mycology to the problem of pollution with my graduate thesis: the potential of oyster mushrooms to degrade diesel. I am also on the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Species Survival Commission. The specialist international working group I belong to is focused on fungal conservation.

I have some experience serving on committees from the Oberlin Student Cooperative Association, which I was part of for three years, and the sustainability board at UAF, which I also served on for three years, culminating in vice chair for a semester before my graduation.

I am excited to see what the Sierra Club Alaska Chapter does in 2018, and hope that we gain many new members who share our concern for the natural environment on which we all depend. Come join us for an outing! You can find out more on our Facebook page or by contacting us. 🌣

-- Christin Anderson.

Chair, Alaska Chapter, <mushroomchristin@gmail.com>

DID YOU Know? This Year is for the Birds

2018 is the Centennial year of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act. Passed by Congress in 1918, the Act implemented a treaty signed two years earlier between the U.S. and Great Britain acting for Canada—to protect birds that migrate between the U.S. and Canada.

National Geographic and the National Audubon Society are celebrating 2018 as the Year of the Bird and seek to help people understand the importance of birds to our world. For Alaska, host each summer to exceptionally many birds that migrate from afar, this anniversary may be of special interest.

The 1916 Treaty and the 1918 Treaty Act came in response to growing public concern about the extinction or nearextinction of various bird-species – which had been hunted for sport, for food, or for feathers—to satisfy a craze for ornamenting wealthy women's hats. Particularly shocking had been the 1914 death, in captivity, of the last passenger pigeon. Extinction of this species, endless vast flocks of which had not so long before darkened skies for miles upon miles, alarmed the nation.

The Migratory Bird Treaty Act made it unlawful to pursue, hunt, take, capture or kill any migratory bird, without a special permit from the Secretary of Interior. Since its passage, the MBTA has broadened its international scope via later treaties with Mexico, Japan, and Russia, and has covered additional species. It was amended in 1962 to allow Native American tribes to collect feathers for religious ceremonies. By now, more than 1,000 species--nearly all Native birds, and their nests and eggs--are included, so that the term "migratory" is mainly historically symbolic. Nearly half of all known bird species are migratory. Species the Treaty is credited with saving from extinction include the snowy egret, wood duck, and sandhill crane—among others. The Act is said to have saved many billions of birds.

New threats to birds today, from climate change as well as from an administration averse to enforcing protective laws and bent on reducing protections for many species, make it especially relevant to celebrate birds and learn about their value during 2018. 🌣

Update

Hovercraft ban in Yukon-Charley Rivers National Preserve

In October 2017 the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals upheld the National Park Service's hovercraft ban in Yukon-Charley Rivers Preserve. John Sturgeon sued the agency after he was told he could not operate his hovercraft on the Nation River, a tributary to the Yukon River. (see sierra borealis, June and Dec 2017, March 2016, Dec 2015.)

In response to the Ninth Court's decision, Sturgeon has now petitioned the Supreme Court to rule on the merits of the decision. The Department of Justice, which is defending the NPS, can submit its comments on the petition to the high court.

Pebble Mine - status update: EPA weighs in

In January, the Environmental Protection Agency, (EPA), issued a statement acknowledging "possibility of significant and irreversible harm" to fishing habitats near Bristol Bay in Alaska if the Pebble Mine were allowed to proceed. This statement followed a fall 2017 submission of more than one million mostly negative comments on the EPA's proposal to withdraw from the previous Obama adminstration's opposition to the proposed Pebble Mine project.

In 2017, the EPA under Director Scott Pruitt, had announced it was moving to withdraw the Obama administration's proposal to block the mine project under the Clean Water Act. This meant that EPA would not stand in the way of allowing the Pebble Partnership to seek federal permitting for the mine. The EPA implemented a public comment period on this proposal between July and October, 2017 as a part of this process. (See sierra borealis, June and Sept 2017) We asked people to submit critical comments to the EPA. We also requested Sierra Club's national's "Our Wild America" campaign for support for our effort; in response the Club ran a nation-



Halibut Israel Shotridge ©2016

wide email campaign, asking members across the U.S. to send a comment to EPA.

Thanks to all the concerned people, who poured more than one million comments into the EPA's mail boxes. (Of course, the overwhelming majority of these comments were vigorously negative).

So, what is the result? EPA administrator Scott Pruitt reversed the course. EPA is expected to set up another round of public comments. Although a bit short of a clear victory, this change of direction is a significant accomplishment.

This really shows that people's voices can affect an outcome when everybody speaks up!!

Unfortunately, this encouraging statement from the EPA neither deters nor derails the application process of Pebble Limited Partnership's proposed project. The Pebble partnership continues to have the right to submit permit application with specific project details, albeit, eventual approval is a bit less likely due to the EPA's clear acknowledgement of the risk. In late December, Pebble Partnership already applied for the permit for the mining project to the Army Corps of Engineers.

Pebble's current plan calls for a smaller mine than its parent company, Northern Dynasty Minerals, initially publicized. Yet, the plan still includes an enormous open-pit mine more than a mile across, a 188-mile natural gas pipeline, an on-site power plant, and a ferry to carry mined ore across nearby Lake Iliamna to the port. For more details of the proposed mine, visit this site https://static1.squarespace.com/ static/55319e94e4b02842e0615731/t/5a8deb98ec212d8e 1f2534e9/1519250331160/2018PebbleFactsheet-final.pdf.

According to Tim Bristol, executive director of the conservation organization Salmon State, this proposal is about four times what the EPA thought would be an acceptable level of risk. Because the Pebble deposit is a low quality deposit, a very large scale mining operation is being sought for the project to be financially a viable.

The good news for us is that Pebble faces major obstacles now including the current EPA acknowledgement of the serious risk to Bristol Bay. And Pebble also faces financial challenges as Northern Dynasty Minerals stock plummeted following Pruitt's statement. It is also worthwhile to report that the California State Treasurer requested that Canadian mining company First Quantum Minerals "sever any connections—financial or otherwise" with the Pebble Mine (see https://www.adn.com/businesseconomy/2018/01/30/california-treasurer-urges-pebblefunding-partner-to-drop-the-project/)..

(For further background on this long-standing issue, see sierra borealis, June 15, March, June and Sept. 2014, June 2013, March and June 2012, Dec. 2011, March and Dec. 2010.) Sierra Club has fought this massive mine proposal since it surfaced about 2005.

Yet the bottom line is that we have a significant chance of stopping the proposed environmentally hazardous mining from happening. We hope that the EPA continues to hold on to the 2014 Clean Water Act requirements for the Bristol Bay region and deny the permit. Be prepared for another round of fight. We'll keep you updated. �

-- Yasuhiro Ozuru

Zinke Bought and Paid For: An Alaska Case Study

"Under ice" is how the Arctic is labeled on a satirical cartoon called "Trumpworld" by Peter Kuper.

It's oversimplified, but it stings because it is true. Trump's administration, including Secretary of the Interior Ryan Zinke, see the complexities and wonder of America's Arctic landscapes, waterways, and the life sustained there, as red tape between the oil industry and drilling. And Zinke seems to see his role as helping bust through that tape.

Zinke said it himself, "The road to energy dominance goes through the great state of Alaska."

It's clear where Zinke's alliances lie, and it's not with the majority of the American people who want to see places like the coastal plain of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge protected, not drilled. It's not with the Gwich'in Nation, for whom the Porcupine caribou herd equals their ability to survive and thrive as a people.

Roads are not what makes Alaska great, and the Secretary of the Interior of all people should know this. Alaska is one of the few remaining strongholds of intact natural landscapes left in the world. As steward in chief of our nation's public lands, particularly in a time of climate crisis, Zinke should act with an eye toward guarding our shared heritage. Instead, he's ready to sell Alaska's lands and waters off to the highest bidder.

It's no secret that Alaska is rapidly thawing, experiencing the warming impacts of climate change at twice the rate of the rest of the country. Every year brings new heat records. Arctic ice off the coast gets thinner and thinner. This is due largely, of course, the burning of fossil fuels.

At the same time, Zinke recently unveiled a plan that would attempt to open nearly all of Alaska's offshore waters to drilling. This is a plan that is so reckless, even some in Alaska's pro-drilling delegation have asked him to scale it back. Offshore drilling would hurt Indigenous populations reliant on healthy

> marine waterways for food. The thin ice caused by climate change, and accelerated by, well, drilling, also

The road to energy dominance goes through the great state of Alaska."

--Secretary of the Interior Ryan Zinke

makes it perilous for people to hunt. People die every year as they go farther on thinner ice to hunt for their food to feed their families.

Then, Zinke brokered a costly and unnecessary deal to move forward plans for a road through the Izembek National Wildlife Refuge. [See article, p. 6]. This

land swap and road proposal has been repeatedly studied and consistently rejected - due to deep flaws in the road building plan, exorbitant cost, and impacts on wildlife as well as local residents. If this road moves forward, it will set a dangerous precedent for existing wilderness across the U.S. – a precedent that Zinke would pay heed to if he weren't already bought and paid for.

And the coastal plain of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, arguably the best of the best for wild intact ecosystems in our nation, is also part of Zinke's "road to energy dominance".



In the Arctic Refuge --"best of the wild best" -- photo: Micah Baird

Last year, Zinke declared Alaska "open for business" and expressed his interest in authorizing seismic testing on the fragile coastal plain. Then, in late December, Congress passed a budget that will, for the first time, allow drilling in the coastal plain of the Arctic Refuge. Zinke, of course, applauded this environmentally disastrous move.

It's now up to us to pressure the companies and banks that would back Arctic drilling never to set foot in this special place - hope is not lost, but it's going to take all of us.

It is callous and short sighted for the Secretary of the Interior to attempt to line the pockets of industry friends at the expense of the American people. It is up to us, who see Zinke for what he is, to hold our lines until our wild lands and waters are once again competently overseen by a real conservation leader with a real vision for the future. ❖

-- Lena Moffitt

(Lena Moffitt is the Washington, DC, Senior Director of the Sierra Club's Our Wild America Campaign, which is dedicated to protecting our lands, water and wildlife, to increasing equitable access to the outdoors, and to keeping fossil fuels in the ground.)

(Thanks to Our Wild America's Alaska staffer Alli Harvey for providing much of the information in this article to Lena Moffitt.)

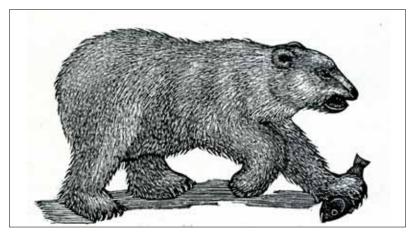


Federal Subsistence Board to hear proposal to bait bears with human food and bear scent

Please contact Subsistence Board to oppose

At its April 2018 public meeting the Federal Subsistence Board will consider proposals from the public to adopt changes in its subsistence hunting and trapping regulations (rules). Wildlife Proposal 18-51, from a subsistence advisory council, would allow bear hunters to use human food and bear scent for baiting black and brown bears at bait stations on the federal public lands. If adopted, WP-18-51 would be the same as the State's baiting regulation, which allows the use of human food and bear scent in addition to natural bait.

Natural bait consists of entrails and other parts of animals legally bagged or that have died from natural causes. Human food includes bread, donuts, other pastries, grease, and popcorn among other items.



© Dale DeArmond

Background (from December 2017 sierra borealis)

The existing Board rule allows hunters to use only natural bait at bait stations or in the field. Human food is prohibited in part because of public safety concerns. Bears that can avoid being killed or wounded at bait stations stocked with human food can associate humans with human food and thus endanger humans in the area. (See sierra borealis, March and Dec. 2017, March and June 2016.)

The proposed statewide rule would apply to all public lands, including national conservation system units, except National Park System units. An existing National Park Service rule allows only natural bait for baiting black bears (brown bear baiting by subsistence users is prohibited in all NPS units except Wrangell-Saint Elias National Park and Preserve). The proposal being considered at the April 10 to 13 meeting in Anchorage would open the wildlife refuges, forest service areas, wild and scenic rivers, wilderness areas, national trails, and Bureau of Land Management lands to bear baiting with human food and bear scent.

➡ What You Can Do:

Contact the Federal Subsistence Board and express your opposition to WP 18-51. Comments submitted in March have the best chance of being considered by the full Board.

Write to:

Anthony Christianson, Chair, Federal Subsistence Board 1011 E. Tudor Road, Anchorage, Alaska 99503

Gene Peltola, Assistant Regional Director, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Office of Subsistence Management 1011 E. Tudor Road, Anchorage, Alaska 99503.

Ask Chairman Christianson and Assistant Director Peltola to make your comment available to the Subsistence Board members. (The Board members in addition to the chairman are Charles Brower, Public Member, Barrow; Rhonda Pitka, Public Member, Beaver; Lynn Polacca, Acting Regional Director, Bureau of Indian Affairs; Karen Mouritsen, Acting State Director, Bureau of Land Management; Herbert (Bert) Frost, Regional Director - National Park Service; Gregory (Greg) Siekaniec, Regional Director - U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service; and Beth Pendleton, Regional Forester - U.S. Forest Service.) •

-- Jack Hession

Update

Izembek land exchange challenged in federal court

Sierra Club and other environmental organizations sue

On January 22 Secretary of the Interior Ryan Zinke and the Alaska Native village corporation of King Cove (KCC) agreed to a land exchange designed to allow construction of a 12-mile road across the Izembek Wilderness to connect the village with the community of Cold Bay. (See sierra borealis June 2017, Sept. 2017, March 2013, March 2012.).

Anticipating the trade, Trustees for Alaska (TFA), on behalf of plaintiffs Sierra Club and several other environmental organizations, on January 31 asked the federal district court in Alaska to enjoin the exchange. TFA argues that Secretary Zinke's decision "is arbitrary, capricious, an abuse of discretion, or otherwise not in accordance with law, [and] in violation of the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA) and the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA)."

NEPA requires federal agencies to publish draft environmental impact statements on proposed major federal actions for public review and comment. Secretary Zinke side-stepped a draft EIS in deciding to trade away Izembek Wilderness acreage.

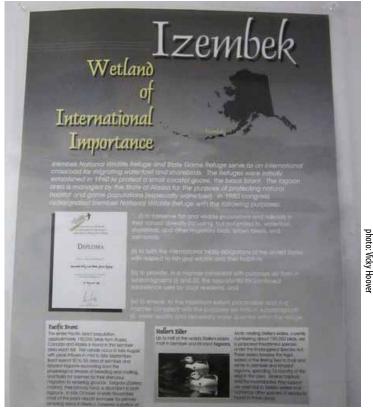
Title XI of ANILCA provides for congressional consideration of proposed transportation and utility system projects "in and across, and access into, conservation system units," including designated wilderness, a conservation system unit of the Act.

Rather than utilize the Title XI process or back the similar Izembek land exchange bill sponsored by the Alaska delegation, Secretary Zinke is attempting to avoid Congress altogether via the land exchange authority of ANILCA. This authority does not require that proposed exchanges be referred to Congress for final approval or disapproval.

However, the exchange authority mandates that exchanges must "carry out the purposes of [ANILCA], which are to "preserve"..." nationally significant natural, scenic, historical, archeological, geological, scientific, wilderness, cultural, recreational, and wildlife values" (emphasis added.) Exchanges under the Act are obviously intended to enhance protection and management of the conservation system units, not create new inholdings that would have the opposite effect. The Secretary's land exchange would



The hovercraft funded by Congress to speed King Cove medical evacuations; later sent away by King Cove



Portion of display in Izembek Refuge Visitor Center in Cold Bay: Izembek as a globally-famed "Wetland of International Importance"

create a major new inholding that would complicate refuge management, and, as earlier studies by the Fish and Wildlife Service have shown, would do major damage to this wilderness wildlife refuge.

Thus, thanks to the framers of ANILCA, the land exchange authority is a big legal burr under the Secretary's saddle. His task is to rope the federal court into believing that his purpose in ramming a road across the Izembek Wilderness is to preserve the wilderness values of the refuge.

The other plaintiffs in this suit are Friends of Alaska National Wildlife Refuges, The Wilderness Society, Defenders of Wildlife, National Audubon Society, Wilderness Watch, Center for Biological Diversity, National Wildlife Refuge Association, and Alaska Wilderness League.

For a comprehensive analysis of this issue, including the history of attempts to push a road across the wilderness area, see the Trustees for Alaska's Complaint For Declaratory and Injunctive Relief of January 31 by attorneys Katie Strong, Brook Brisson, and Valerie Brown, available at https://s3.amazonaws.com/arc-wordpress-client- uploads/adn/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/31022933/2018-01-31-complaint.pdf.

(Editor's note: The exchange, taking this area out of wilderness, is necessary in order to construct a road, because it would be illegal to put a road within federally designated wilderness.) *****

-- Jack Hession

Book Review

On the Arctic Frontier: Ernest Leffingwell's Polar Explorations and Legacy

By Janet R. Collins. (Reviewed by Vicky Hoover)

This new biography about a long-ago explorer in what is now the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge comes at a time when the Refuge is much in the news and much at risk. Not a bad time to review some history. And see what visiting the Arctic was like many years ago.

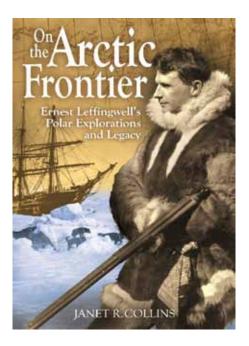
Between 1906 and 1914 young American geologist Ernest Leffingwell spent most of this time in far northeast Alaska. His first taste of Arctic exploration came when, as a graduate student at the University of Chicago, he joined the Baldwin-Ziegler International Expedition to Franz-Josef Land, in the high Russian Arctic. After that ended, he was drawn to Alaska to help resolve a long-standing puzzle about whether there was land north of Alaska. He and companions determined that the edge of the Continental shelf was very close to Alaska's Arctic coastline—so land farther north was extremely improbable.

For eight years, he stayed in the far north and was the first to map accurately the Arctic coastline between Barrow and the Yukon border. He worked mostly from a base on Flaxman Island, where he helped build a sturdy cabin that could (sometimes just barely) withstand the severe Arctic winters. His father, from back home, helped financially, and Leffingwell steadily received crucial help from the Native Inupiat people who made these harsh landscapes their home; they helped him hunt for food, made him warm clothes, offered friendship and simple social interaction. He recognized and honored his great debt to them.

In addition to his coastline mapping—a prodigious ongoing project over many years, Leffiingwell was the first scientist to explore the river valleys coming north to the coast in the area of the Sadlerochit Mountains--especially trips up the Okpilak, Hulahula and Canning River valleys. He carefully created geologic maps identifying the area's main igneous and sedimentary rock formations. He described and named the Sadlerochit Formation—main deposit of the Prudhoe Bay oil field. The local Inupiat people were well aware of numerous oil seeps in the region.

In both winter as well as summer he carried out his exploratory trips, although at the time of ice melt, when it was too easy to break through the surface ice, things could be the most difficult. He learned how to keep warm with the right clothes, but in periods of heavy winds, he sometimes had to cache his gear and return to Flaxman Island to wait it out. He tried to keep the indoor house temperature above or at freezing in winter. He pioneered knowledge of "ground ice"—or permafrost, and explained ice wedges. Some names that he gave to Arctic features remain to this day – such as Peters and Schrader Lakes, and more.

A couple of years after Leffingwell's 1914 return



from the Arctic, he married Anna Meany Leffingwell, and she helped him finish the long labor of writing up his detailed report of his Alaska Arctic work. He died in 1971, at age 96, at their final home, in Carmel, California, where his wife was a founder of the local Sierra Club Chapter.

Many aspects of Arctic travel are not all that different nowadays—but the two biggest changes are in how he got there – by slow steamer from Seattle; ships' erratic travel schedules were especially a concern for explorers waiting to retreat south----would the ice sheets melt to allow ships to arrive on the Arctic coast in any given summer? And--communication. Letters then took a long time. No emails, no facebook posts. Not even longdistance phone service.

In 1978, Leffingwell's Flaxman Island base camp was designated a National Historic Landmark administered by the National Park Service. He might have received more recognition, earlier, if his explorations had not coincided with the widely-publicized race to the North Pole by a number of explorers. Leffingwell's slow and careful, meticulous exploratory work was less "jazzy" than these much-heralded competitive ventures.

Several "Leffingwell" place names persist today in the Arctic: his colleague Stefansson named Leffingwell Crags. The U.S. Board of Geographic Names recognizes Leffingwell Creek (flowing into the Okpilak), Leffingwell Fork, and Leffingwell Glacier—on south and east side of Mt Michelson (all within the Arctic Refuge.)

From Washington State University Press, © 2017. Paperback, \$27.95, 217 pp, plus end notes, bibliography, index, black & white photos, maps. wsupress.wsu.edu. ❖ Email: wsupress@wsu.edu.

Chapter Outings — January Blue Moon Special

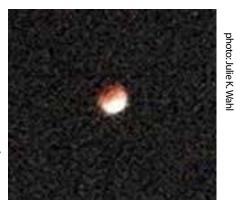
For all the star and moon gazers out there we took advantage in January of a lunar event that could not be missed. Not just once in a Blue Moon-- not even once in most people's lifetime! This once-every-150 year-event played out as perfectly as you could get.

We enjoyed perfect viewing of the first of two Blue Moons this year, a Blue Moon event that happens only once every 19 years. (A blue moon is what you call the second full moon in any particular month.)



Even better, this January Blue Moon was a Super (Blood) Moon being 14 percent bigger and 30 percent brighter than we normally see it.

The real bonus event was that this Super Blue Moon had a total eclipse which was visible from Alaska! And it could actually be seen to totality before the clouds obscured our view.



https://qz.com/1189777/a-supermoon-and-total-lunareclipse-will-coincide-for-the-first-time-in-152-years/

If you didn't get to join us for January's Blue Moon Walk, March gives us a second opportunity to hike by the light of the full moon--March 31. Keep an eye on our FaceBook page for details on this and upcoming hikes.

Wanted! Your favorite hikes!!!

We would love to go where you love to go, if you just let us know. Message us on FaceBook and we can work your asked-for destinations into our Spring & Summer schedule.

Heads up: Sierra Club national is changing our requirements for signed waivers for all our outings. We will post links and instructions on our FaceBook page.

See you on the trail! ❖

Sierra Borealis / alaska report

is the newsletter of the Alaska Chapter of the Sierra Club

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https://www.facebook.com/SierraClubAlaska



-- Julie K Wahl Alaska Sierra Club Outings.

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