



Explore, enjoy and protect the planet

Sierra Borealis *alaska report*

SIERRA CLUB ALASKA CHAPTER
DECEMBER 2022

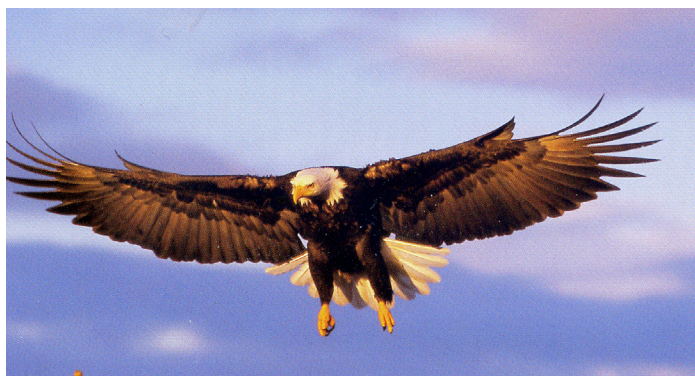


Chapter election is here: candidates are on p. 2

Chapter election highlights importance of volunteers

Elect Alaska Chapter Executive Committee officers in January

As another year comes to end, we are nearing our annual Chapter Executive Committee election. This year, we have four volunteer candidates up for election. We will also have one open seat that can be filled with a special election during the year. If you are interested in filling this open seat, *please reach out to alaska.chapter@sierraclub.org!* During a year full of change and adaptation, we have been lucky to have



had a hard-working, dynamic, and devoted leadership team through 2022.

Chapter elections are an important way to recognize the volunteers who offer to serve to run this influential environmental organization in our country's largest state. A Sierra Club Chapter is only as powerful as the volunteers and staff who help manage it and conduct its outreach and conservation activities. Please show how you care by voting – and, even better, by volunteering a bit of your own time and effort to help Alaska's environment.

Three present Chapter Executive Committee members are seeking re-election for another two-year term. They are Chapter Treasurer Adrienne Canino, Legal Chair Greg Stewart, and Conservation Chair Susan Hansen. In addition, we have Kim Kirby, Compliance Chair, running for her first two-year term on the Executive Committee, after being appointed by the ExCom to an open seat in 2022.

This year's election will be similar to the last two years – it will be all-digital, with voting held on our website from **January 24 through 27, 2023**. This is a departure from our mail-in elections of the past, which accepted a mixture of mail-in and electronic ballots. We hope that in addition to reducing unnecessary waste, this new electronic feature will boost accessibility and member involvement.

We understand this might not be the preferred method for every member and always seek feedback from our members, so do

let us know how you feel about electronic elections and your preference for future elections at alaska.chapter@sierraclub.org – or by sending a letter to our mail box:

P.O. Box 230323
Anchorage, AK
88523-0323.

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Chapter Election: Volunteer! Vote!

--from page 1

Voting is one of the easiest and most powerful ways to engage with your local Chapter, and it is your right as a Sierra Club member to have your voice heard. We would love to engage with all of our members and hear about issues that matter to you so we can all work together to explore, enjoy, and protect this amazing state we call home. Please reach out to us on Facebook or email us

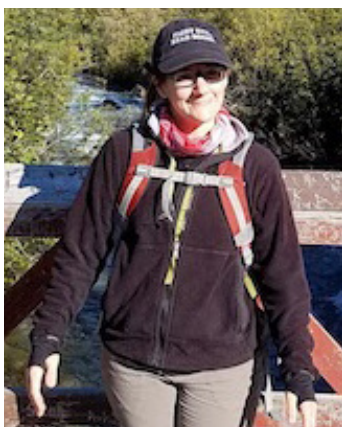
at alaska.chapter@sierraclub.org to get more involved with the Alaska Chapter or share your ideas for change at a local or a global level.

Happy Holidays and seasonal observances to you and your loved ones! ❖

-- Heather Jesse,
Alaska Chapter chair



Executive Committee candidates



**Adrienne Canino,
Treasurer**

Adrienne started as treasurer in 2020. She currently works at a technology company, coming from a position as a Data Librarian at a university library. Before libraries, she worked in environmental conservation, specifically a youth conservation corps that engaged in environmental educating, street tree coordinating, and green infrastructure promoting. Adrienne recently moved to Anchorage from the Finger Lakes area of New York, with her husband and an adorable coonhound.



**Susan Hansen,
Conservation Chair**

Susan, a Sierra Club life member, is a biologist who worked as a ranger-naturalist in Katmai National Park, Alaska in the 1970s. Later she did a marine mammal subsistence survey in the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta for University of Alaska, Fairbanks. She was a National Park Service research anthropologist, interviewing Yup'ik Eskimo elders about their subsistence and oral cultural traditions. For almost six years she has been Alaska Chapter Conservation Chair and delegate to the Council of Club Leaders. She has organized Chapter workshops to support conservation of Alaska's iconic wildlife--especially predators. Susan is a former board member of Northern Environmental Center in Fairbanks. Currently she is a board member of Alaskans For Wildlife.



**Kim Kirby,
Compliance Chair**

Kim Kirby's love affair of Alaska started with a 1989 Inside Passage ferry trip. The next year she paddled from Juneau to Ketchikan, taking three months. The next year she paddled from Orcas Island to Bella Bella. Moving to Ketchikan full time in 1994 she opened a B&B and started a kayaking company, Southeast Sea Kayaks, guiding tours into Misty Fjords National Monument. She has commercial fished salmon, long-lined halibut and packed shrimp on the west coast of Prince of Wales. Kim now lives on Pennock Island across from Ketchikan. She works for the local Oil Spill Response team and goes on oil spill exercises throughout the year. Her passions are the Rainforest, beaches and wilderness of Southeast Alaska.



**Gregory Stewart,
Legal Chair**

Gregory Stewart is the Legal Chair for the Executive Committee of the Alaska Chapter of the Sierra Club. He works as a Grants Administrator at the Alaska Native Heritage Center, where he primarily prepares applications and reports for projects that preserve and strengthen Alaska Native arts, culture, and language. Originally from the Secatogue and Lenape lands where New York is located, he now lives and works on the Dena'ina lands where Anchorage is settled.

Some Alaska national news notes (editor's pick...: roads)

The Ambler Road --BLM took new comments in fall

The proposed 211-mile Ambler Road would connect the Dalton Highway (pipeline haul road) with the Ambler Mining District in the western Brooks Range. The ore belt that stretches for 200 miles contains copper, cobalt, lead, and zinc and could be one of the most valuable deposits in the world, especially as people turn to electric vehicles.



In addition to NANA and some residents who would benefit from jobs and royalty payments, the road is also supported by the state of Alaska and its Congressional Delegation. The Alaska Industrial Development and Export Authority (AIDEA), who is notorious for environmentally disastrous projects and lack of transparency, would own Ambler Road. Opposition to the road comes from Tanana Chiefs and other Athabascan Indians who fear the road would disrupt subsistence hunting and gathering, as well as Sierra Club and other conservation organizations. (See *sierra borealis* March 2022, June 2020, Dec. 2019, .)

The road, if built, would almost certainly result in road sprawl and sharply increased expansion of development in the region, including potential oil development in the National Petroleum Reserve-Alaska, north of the Brooks Range. Conservationists view this road—opening a path to development in a present extremely remote area— as a major threat to northern Alaska's wildlife and undisturbed wildlife habitat.

The stated goal of the road is to increase mining capacity in the area. The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and the Corps of Engineers under the Trump Administration approved the road plan in 2020, and officials agreed to issue a 50-year right-of-way for the Alaska Industrial Development and Export Authority, the state public corporation working to develop the project.

However, in September the Biden Administration halted the road project while a Supplemental EIS process mandated by the courts was completed.

According to the Bureau of Land Management, the supplemental environmental impact statement was to address "deficiencies" in its analysis involving impacts to subsistence hunting and consultation with Alaska Native tribes. It also was meant to "ensure compliance with applicable law including the National Environmental Policy Act," and other laws, the agency said.

The respite offered by this autumn supplemental review may be very temporary. The comment period ended on November 4., According to the mid-November Bloomberg Law newsletter, the Bureau of Land Management will publish a

Izembek Wilderness road—wilderness gets another (temporary) reprieve

A federal appeals court has vacated a March court ruling that would have helped to clear the way for a project to build a road through federal wilderness in Alaska's Izembek National Wildlife Refuge. In early November, the appeals court agreed to rehear the case, which involves a land swap that was approved by the Trump administration. The land swap would have taken the strip of land for the desired road out of wilderness. The Wilderness Act prohibits any permanent roads within designated wilderness.

The decision by the Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit to reopen the case is at least a temporary victory for conservation groups, including Sierra Club, who oppose the project. The litigating conservation groups, including former President Jimmy Carter, also fear that allowing such a land swap would effectively gut the landmark 1980 Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA) that protects tens of millions of acres of public lands across Alaska.

The decision vacated a ruling made in March by a panel of three of the court's judges. The November announcement said the full court would hear arguments in the case in December.

The Sierra Club's Alaska newsletter has reported frequently on this issue since 1998. *Stay tuned.* ❖

(And see *sierra borealis* June and Sept 2022, June 2020, June 2017, March 2013, March 2012, and earlier.)



draft supplemental environmental impact statement for the Ambler Industrial Access Project by the second quarter of 2023. This draft is to be followed by a final statement and decision by the end of 2023 whether to allow the state of Alaska to build the controversial 211-mile road, according to a legal status update filed Tuesday. This "status update" was part of Northern Alaska Environmental Center v. Haaland, a lawsuit filed against the project in 2020 by environmental groups in US District Court for the District of Alaska.. ❖

LNG Pipeline is a Pipe Dream

The False Promise of LNG for a Sustainable Future in Alaska

The State of Alaska and the Alaska Gasline Development Corporation (AGDC) are determined to continue denying the reality of climate change and build an 800+ mile Natural Gas pipeline. This pipeline would stretch from North Slope gas fields to a plant in Nikiski (on the Kenai Peninsula north of Kenai and Soldotna) that would liquify the gas (making liquid natural gas known as LNG) for export overseas. The project would involve the construction and operation of Gas Treatment, Mainline, and Liquefaction Facilities.

At the first annual "Alaska Sustainable Energy Conference", host and Alaska Governor Dunleavy asked presenter Tony Seba, world-renowned Silicon Valley entrepreneur, what role liquid natural gas (LNG) will play in Alaska's future. "None." Seba responded, "in the U.S., no one is building new natural gas power plants because just the operating costs are higher than solar. There is a market over the next 10 years but I would not look beyond that." Unfortunately, the State of Alaska, our electric utility co-ops, and the Alaska Gasline Development Corporation (AGDC) seem poised to ignore this advice in favor of continuing to line the pockets of Outside oil and gas companies.

State agencies (Department of Natural Resources and Alaska Energy Authority) and Alaska rail belt utilities have formed a working group to "explore long term gas supply solutions to meet utility and customer demand." Although rail belt utilities have expressed goals of carbon reduction, this movement towards a carbon-based fuel is very concerning. For example, Golden Valley Electric Association has a carbon reduction goal of 26 percent by 2030 and recently took an important step forward away from coal in deciding to close Healy 2 coal fire plant, but the utility has not explained how LNG reliance will meet this goal. In fact, this carbon-reduction goal seems unreachable if utilities simply substitute gas for coal.

Although companies have tried to "green brand" LNG as an alternative to coal or a "bridge" to renewable energies, LNG is still a fossil fuel that emits a high amount of CO₂ during combustion. Studies have shown that the full emissions produced by LNG haven't been accurately accounted for, and it also has a high tendency for methane leakage along infrastructure lines with numbers ranging from 6-17 percent leakage depending on region. That is a sobering statistic when considering the regions where companies and the state would like to expand LNG infrastructure, like the Cook Inlet, where fisheries are already struggling.

The pipeline from the North Slope to the Cook Inlet would cover half the state--crossing countless streams and wetland complexes while impacting multiple communities. Pipelines like this have been proposed and scrapped multiple times over the last few decades because it just isn't a good financial investment for Alaska. This truth remains today.

An LNG pipeline would likely become a stranded asset, causing major financial losses because carbon free energies are more economical and will make LNG obsolete before the pipeline can pay for itself. Not to mention the cost of climate change and

EPA frowns at Pebble Mine

GOOD NEWS ALERT!

We are so close to blocking the disastrous pebble mine for good. The EPA's Region 10 administrator Casey Sixkiller has sent a recommendation to EPA headquarters to protect the area by vetoing the proposed mine. In his written statement, he said "After evaluating an extensive record, including scientific and technical information covering nearly two decades, and after considering public comments received on the 2022 Proposed Determination, EPA Region 10 determined that these discharges would be likely to result in unacceptable adverse effects on salmon fishery areas in the South Fork Koktuli River, North Fork Koktuli River, and Upper Talarik Creek watersheds of Bristol Bay."

Radhika Fox, the assistant EPA administrator for water, now has 60 days to consider Sixkiller's recommendation and decide to outright accept or reject the recommendation, or make changes to it.

Protecting Bristol Bay and the salmon runs of the region is immensely important to our environment and our communities. Thank you to everyone who submitted a comment and made their voice heard on this issue. We are not across the finish line yet, but it is certainly in sight. ❖

-- Andrea Feniger



environmental degradation in Alaska. Instead of spending billions of dollars on infrastructure that will lock us into several decades of fossil fuels, let's diversify our economy and prioritize our communities by putting that money directly into renewable energy sources.

Want to learn more or get involved in fighting this pipeline? Reach out to andrea.feniger@sierraclub.org or Arleigh@fbxclimateaction.org. ❖

--Arleigh Hitchcock and Andrea Feniger

Two Sierra Club Alaska volunteers offer tribute to Jim Kowalsky, recently departed Alaska conservation leader

From Susan Hansen:

Jim Kowalsky passed away in spring of 2022. He was 83 years old. From the time he arrived in Alaska, Jim passionately devoted himself to Conservation issues of Alaska's wildlife and to exposing the anti-predator policies of the Alaska Board of Game and Alaska Department of Fish and Game.



Jim arrived in Alaska as a Friends of the Earth Representative. He then founded the Northern Alaska Environmental Center in Fairbanks. He became director of the center, and I began working there as a volunteer in the early 1970s. Jim also worked for the Tanana Chiefs Conference and then became Director of Summer Rural Alaska Honors Institute (RAHI) at UAF for 19 years.

After retirement from RAHI, Jim formed a group of conservationists devoted to changing Alaska anti-predator policies. In Jim's view, wilderness is only scenery without the wildlife which includes both predators and prey.

In October of 2020, Jim was honored with the Alaska Conservation Foundation's Lifetime Achievement Award.

I add here a celebration of Jim's impact, written by Marybeth Holleman, a writer and conservationist from Anchorage, that appeared in *The Northern Line - Winter 2022*:

"Jim was a true champion of the more-than-human world. He was a creative and tireless advocate for Alaska's wildlife, especially our much maligned wolves and bears. What I most appreciate about his efforts are how creative he was—using old-school sixties-type modes of resistance, gathering friends to band together in protests; sending fiery letters to government officials and the media. All his work was no-holds barred. And that's what we need more of, not less. So his passing leaves a crater-sized hole in Alaska, one we all must band together to fill."



From Jack Hession:

I first met my friend Jim when he was Friends of the Earth's Alaska representative. Early in his career he participated in the Alaska Coalition's ultimately successful campaign to enact the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act. He cooperated with Alaska Native organizations on their efforts to include subsistence provisions in the Act, alerting them to the benefits of permanently protecting millions of acres of wildlife habitat necessary to sustain subsistence resources.

One of Jim's major projects was blocking oil and gas leasing of the coastal plain of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, and adding the area to the existing refuge wilder-

Mat-Su Transportation Fair



photo: Andrea Feniger

*Our Commuter Rail Working group has been hard at work spreading the word about the environmental and community benefits of commuter rail. (See **sierra borealis** Sept. 2022) We loved chatting with folks at the Mat-Su Transportation Fair and look forward to tabling at the Anchorage Transportation Fair in January.*



photo: Andrea Feniger

ness. He was also involved in the congressional fight over the Trans-Alaska Pipeline construction and routing.

Later, he served as director of the Fairbanks Environmental Center, and on the staff of the Tanana Chiefs Conference. More recently he founded Alaskans For Wildlife, was its chairman, and attracted veteran expert environmentalists to the executive committee. Based in Fairbanks, Jim and his colleagues focused on protecting the Arctic Refuge and on opposing the Board of Games' predator control rules aimed at wolves.

The Alaska conservation community has lost a champion for wildlife. ❖

Avalanche safety for winter snow travel in backcountry Alaska

I've recreated in the mountains for as long as I can remember. I grew up enjoying weekend camping adventures with my family, ski trips to Alyeska, hiking in the front range, and so much more. The mountains have always been a big part of my life, but even more so over the last decade. As I transitioned from collegiate sports into the next chapter of my life, I found myself looking for new and exciting ways to enjoy the stunning landscapes that Alaska offers. I found backcountry skiing, and it was love at first turn. Alaska has endless accessible terrain – everywhere you go there are lines begging to be skied and limitless snowy landscapes waiting to be explored. While the wintry backcountry beckons Alaskans to enjoy its chest deep powder days – those that partake must recognize that while the snowy slopes can provide endless fun and enjoyment, they also come with inherent risks.

Avalanches are the number one risk we face when exploring snowy slopes. While we can never completely eliminate the risk of being caught in an avalanche (except by avoiding

The best ski day ends with coming home to your loved ones with a smile on your face.

avalanche terrain altogether), we can significantly mitigate the risk by learning about what causes avalanches, how to avoid them, and what to do if you or someone in your party is caught in one. I emphasize that I am not a professional. I do not have the credentials to teach avalanche rescue or education in any formal capacity. I am simply an avid backcountry skier who would like to provide some resources and



Deanna Nielson provided photos for this article

Human visitors are small in the big winter mountain world

information to make entry into this sport a little less intimidating and more accessible.

Before we can understand how to travel safely in avalanche terrain, we must first understand what it is. Avalanche terrain is any place, on or near a mountain slope, where avalanches can occur under the right circumstances. The slope must be steep enough for snow to slide. Avalanches are

possible on slopes steeper than 30 degrees but occur most frequently on slopes that are 35 to 50 degrees. Understanding what type of terrain you're in is an important part of avalanche mitigation. That being said, most people enjoy skiing slopes that are right within that avalanche sweet spot of 30-50 degrees – that's just the nature of the sport. For those unfamiliar with determining slope angle – the slope of the bunny hill at Alyeska is somewhere between 12-15 degrees, and the slopes that extreme athletes are skiing in ski movies are usually somewhere between 50-60 degrees. So, as you can imagine, most of us want to play somewhere in the middle – right in the risky zone. But fear not – there are tools, resources, information, and education programs available to significantly reduce the risk of recreating in avalanche terrain:

Get Educated – Take a Formal Avalanche Training Course

Before entering avalanche terrain, you should take an avalanche training course through a local education company. The two best-known programs offering avalanche training in the Anchorage area are Alaska Avalanche School and Alaska Guide Collective. These courses are anywhere between 1 to 4 days in length and cover topics including but not limited to: making trip plans, avalanche beacon/rescue equipment use, terrain analysis, snow stability evaluation, decision making, route selection, and safe travel procedure. Such a course is a crucial first step for anyone trying to get into the sport and it should never be overlooked.

Get the Gear & Know How to Use It

Aside from all the gear you'll need to participate in the sport like skis, boots, poles, skins, bindings, backpack, clothing layers, helmet, goggles etc. – the most important equipment to have when traveling in avalanche terrain is your rescue equipment: a beacon, a shovel, and a probe. The beacon should be on your body in the provided holster in the 'transmit' position, and the shovel and probe should be in an accessible location within your backpack. However, having these items with you is helpful only if you know how to use them. I will not go into detail about the avalanche rescue procedure here, however all the education programs referenced above cover this topic at length.

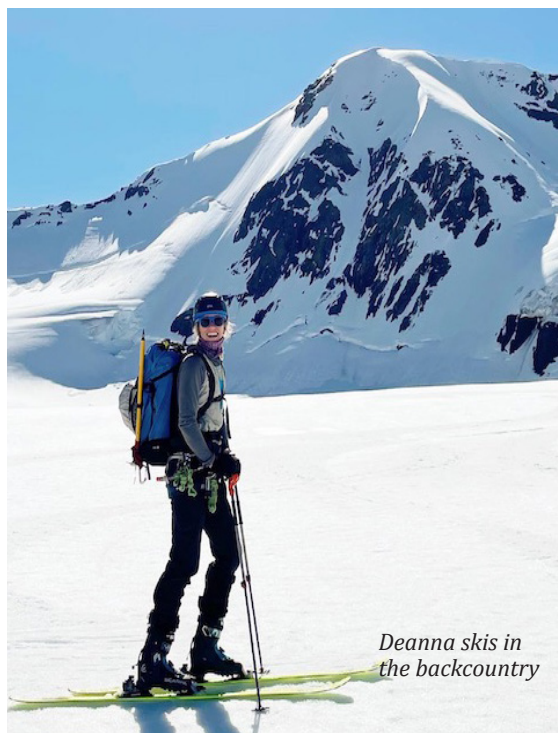
Practice Makes Perfect

Once you've learned how to use your rescue equipment, don't let that be the end of it! Avalanche rescue is a skill like any other – if you do not practice it, you will become rusty and forgetful. Avalanche rescue is a rarely needed skill, but if/when you do, it is a matter of life and death. So, to be prepared, practice rescue skills as often as necessary to feel confident in your abilities. Imagine trying to rescue someone whose life is at stake with adrenaline flowing when you learned how in a course five years ago and never tried out any rescues! Repetition and practice lead to

-- continued page 7

Nature beckons!
Get Outside

ALASKA LOCAL OUTINGS



Deanna skis in
the backcountry

-- from page 6

muscle memory. If there's an avalanche, practiced muscle memory will ensure that you are as prepared as possible to rescue a fellow skier.

Read Avalanche Reports

Before going out into avalanche terrain, read the snow reports provided by Chugach National Forest Avalanche Center (CNFAIC) to help you decide where to go, or if you should go at all. Reports by professional avalanche forecasters are available for both Hatcher Pass and Turnagain Pass at the website:

<https://www.cnfaic.org>. These reports provide information about weather, recent observations, avalanche problems, avalanche probability, and snow level and type.

These are just a few tips to help guide fellow skiers in their backcountry winter journey. Make use of the endless good resources about how to be safe as you head "out of bounds". My hope is that this can serve to help those looking to explore Alaska's winter backcountry but are unsure about where to start.. Let's be diligent and take the necessary steps to enjoy these epic mountains as safely as possible. The best ski day ends with coming home to your loved ones with a smile on your face. ❖

-- Deanna Nielson



UPCOMING EVENT:

Composting 101 Class! Tuesday, 12/13, 6-8pm

At the Seed Lab, 111 W. 6th Ave, Anchorage

Do you want to learn how to start composting or build on what you're already doing? Join Sierra Club Alaska and The Seed Lab for a seminar on composting in Alaska year-round. We will cover the basics of composting, how to keep your pile in the winter, and how to utilize compost. There will also be a Q&A to cover any additional questions or specific needs. This seminar will be led by Jeremy Flynn and Kaylee McClain, Soldotna residents with expertise in composting and farming.

RSVP to alaska.chapter@sierraclub.org



photo: Andrea Feniger

Halloween Hike: Our first snowy outing of the season was a success! Thanks to everyone who joined us for our hike in Anchorage's Far North Bicentennial Park on the Halloween weekend..

Consider joining our new Alaska Chapter finance sub-committee

Dear Alaska Chapter members,

Solstice greetings to you! The new year is around the corner as I write this, and 2023 should be a big year for our Sierra Club Chapter. We're excited for the growth we are planning, and I am writing to ask you for some help.

In my two years as Treasurer, so far, we have slowly built little bits of momentum towards a really engaged and vigorous Chapter. I have certainly learned a lot. It is the work of the Executive Committee to keep that momentum going, so that our Chapter can join opportunities, start new works, and provide new entry ways for volunteers not only into important environmental work, but also equally important recreation and appreciation for our beautiful Alaska. And so that we can help strengthen our organization--Sierra Club--nationally in its urgent efforts for a livable, equitable planet.

As treasurer, I realize the time has come for me to have some partners in my work on accounting, financial oversight, and grant seeking. So, yes, why I write you today is to ask for volunteers for the financial sub-committee.

This sub-committee will provide important work verifying and accounting for how the Chapter spends and seeks funds. Over the course of the year, we will help monitor the Chapter budget, transition the chapter's finances to be in line with the latest best practices, as guided by Na-

tional Sierra Club, and assist developmental planning with our ExCom members.

This is a great fit for folks who are excited to help make the wheels turn behind the scenes of the Sierra Club's mission to explore, enjoy, protect. Training will be provided as needed. We expect the time commitment to be approximately two to four hours per month. Please reach out to me with questions and interest, I look forward to working with you. ❖

Sincerely,
Adrienne Canino
Alaska Chapter Treasurer
<adrienne.canino@gmail.com>



photo: Beth Blattenberger

Eurybia siberica --arctic aster--on Wulik River bar

Sierra Borealis / alaska report

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