America's Symbol of the Wild and home of the Gwich'in: Coastal Plain of the Arctic Refuge

The U.S. Congress is working to open the 1002 Coastal Plain area of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. While the law does not presently allow drilling within the Coastal Plain, the current legislative scheme aims to get around that -- to bypass the prohibition, by making assumed drilling revenues part of the proposed national budget. The legislation to open the Arctic Refuge Coastal Plain is included in the tax cut bills that have just been passed by both Houses of Congress.

So the opening of the Arctic Refuge for drilling is arguably aimed at helping to finance a massive tax cut for wealthy people--which will result in a huge federal budget deficit. Sierra Club’s national team is working tirelessly to derail this attempt. Our Chapter hosted some events in the hope of generating a bigger opposition movement in Alaska.

Due to significant differences between Senate and House-passed versions of the tax cut bill, they need to go to conference to get to a consensus. We are hoping to stop this before it becomes a law. So the fight still continues.

On October 27, we hosted a discussion session in Alaska Center of Anchorage. We invited Bernadette Demientieff, director of the Gwich’in Nation steering committee. The Gwich’in people have strongly opposed the proposed industrial exploitation of the Arctic Refuge.

The October 27 event also featured a presentation by Audubon Alaska's Policy Director Susan Culliney who talked about the role of the Coastal Plain for migrating bird species across the world. Close to 40 people attended the event, with many people ready to take some specific action to keep the coastal plain wild and free.

Based on the support we heard at this event, we had a letter writing session on November 20, again at Alaska Center, with Peter Heisler and Erik Grafe of Earth Justice and Megan Reschke of Alaska Wilderness League providing information about the legislative process and the specifics of just how they seek to manipulate the laws to bring industry into the Refuge. Sixteen people participated in the workshop, and in the discussions we listed many specifics of why we oppose opening the Arctic Refuge. Based on these ideas, several versions of letters were drafted. See next page for one sample letter.

-- Yasuhiro Ozuro, Alaska Chapter chair
Arctic letter to key Senators:

This letter was posted on the our Facebook page, asking viewers to change it as they like, and add their names and contact information and to return it to us through email such that we can send the bundled letters to key decision makers in DC via Club's DC staff.

LETTER TO GO TO: Senators John McCain-AZ; Susan Collins-ME; Angus King-ME; Dean Heller-NV; Lindsey Graham-SC; Bob Corker-TN; Claire McCaskill-MO; Jeff Flake-AZ; Cory Gardner-CO; Heidi Heitkamp-ND; Joe Donnelly-IN; Joe Manchin-WV; Lisa Murkowski and Dan Sullivan, AK:

I am writing to express my opposition to the proposed legislation to open the 1002 Coastal Plain area of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. I understand this area was designated by the 1980 Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act for oil and natural gas study only. There have been numerous attempts to designate the Coastal Plain of the Arctic Refuge as wilderness since then—showing that many people across the United States, including in government, recognize the importance of the 1002 area in the overall ecological health of the entire Arctic ecosystem. The 1002 area’s land and waters are important breeding, nesting, spawning, calving, feeding and denning grounds for caribou, polar bears, musk oxen, wolves, waterfowl, shorebirds, snowy owls, arctic grayling—more than 200 species in all.

Also importantly, the Porcupine caribou herd uses this area as its calving ground, and industrial disturbance threatens this herd that the Gwich’in people use as their main food source. Recent conversations with Audubon researchers informed me that birds species observed in many states in the US use this area as important nesting grounds in summer, so even birds in the Lower 48 would have negative impacts. Overall, the area is considered ecologically unique, and so precious that it warrants careful protection.

I believe that there is no need to try to recover oil there. Scientists generally agree that our fossil fuel based economy is a main driver of climate change that threatens the life of all species living on earth, including human. It is noteworthy that should all of the estimated recoverable oil in this area be put to use, it would probably push the global carbon emissions over what is stated is safe for humanity according to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, as recognized by the Paris Climate Agreement. And renewable energy will soon overtake fossil fuels in economic importance—we are headed that way.

Opening the Arctic Refuge to oil development as a way to help pay for tax cuts for the wealthy is tragically misguided. Historical leasing prices show that it is exceedingly unlikely that selling off the 1002 area would generate the revenues that some project. I feel that attaching this to the tax bill sets a terrible precedent. The opening to development of such an ecologically vital area—now closed to development—is something that deserves its own separate vetting, and should not just be randomly attached to a tax bill; that is just morally wrong.

As an Alaskan I note that many in our state and federal government claim that opening the 1002 area for oil development is good for Alaska, in the sense that it helps Alaska deal with its budget crisis. However, many Alaskans are becoming aware that the (over) dependence on oil development in our state is not the solution but the very cause of the current budget crisis, and further dependence on oil could lead the state to fiscal catastrophe. Many of us Alaskans realize that the opening the 1002 area to oil development is not an effective solution to our fiscal problems.

For these reasons, I strongly ask you to oppose the attempt to open the Coastal Plain of Arctic Refuge via the budget.

-- Your name and address.

The Gwich'in people and the Arctic Refuge

The Gwich'in people of Alaka and north-west Canada have staunchly opposed opening the Arctic Refuge to drilling for the significant damage it would cause to the Porcupine caribou herd, which uses the 1002 Coastal Plain area as its calving ground. Their traditional subsistence livelihood depends on the caribou. They follow the caribou—which winter in the watershed of the Porcupine River in the Canadian Arctic and come to the coastal plain of the Refuge to give birth to their calves and nourish them in summer. The sea winds off the Arctic coast give them needed relief from mosquitos and other summer biting insects.

In the Congressional effort to dodge the law and allow Arctic drilling via a budget maneuver, the Gwich'in have made their voices heard loud and clear. We will stand with these dedicated allies to seek environmental justice for their proudly traditional lifestyles.

vnh

Members of the Gwich’in Nation of Alaska and Canada in Washington, D.C. at a pray-in on Capitol hill, led by the Gwich’in Steering Committee and the Indigenous Environmental Network.
Alaska Chapter election proceeds
--PLEASE VOTE!

This is election time for the Executive Committee of the Sierra Club’s Alaska Chapter. Three of our seven Ex Com members’ term will end as of the end of December. These three are Su Chon, Roxanna Reynolds, and Jared James. Thank you very much to Su, Roxanna, and Jared for your service to the Chapter for this challenging time of transition. You three have made significant contributions to our Chapter by helping its first year with completely new members of Ex Com.

I am happy to announce that we have four highly qualified and motivated candidates running for these three vacated positions. In particular thank you, Su Chon for running for the second term. Also thank you very much for hard work of the nominating committee members chaired by Julie Wahl. The bios of the four candidates appear on the next page—page 4, along with photos. Please read each of the four candidates’ statement carefully before voting. You will be receiving your ballot soon as we have arranged to mail it. Please select three of the four candidates to fill the three vacant positions. This instruction also appears on the ballot.

If your household has two Sierra Club members, you can both vote on the same ballot, using the two columns to the right of the names. If you are a single member household, just vote in the first column. Please sign your name or names on the return address, to limit voting to one membership each. Your vote and your involvement are more important than ever, now when environmentalists face unprecedented challenges ahead, in Alaska and throughout America.

Also please note we are very interested in hearing from you on general Alaska environmental matters that you care about. Please feel free to contact me by sending email to aksierraclub@gmail.com.

-- Yasuhiro

Please Vote!
Alaska’s environment needs your active involvement

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**Bear baiting with human food proposed**

At its April 2018 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 the Eastern Alaska Regional 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.

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 thereby pose a danger to hunters, agency personnel, researchers, and citizens visiting the units or living in nearby villages and communities.

The proposed state-wide rule would apply to all public lands, including national conservation system units, with the possible exception of 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). If the Board exempts NPS areas, the proposal would still open the wildlife refuges, forest service areas, wild and scenic rivers, and Bureau of Land Management lands.

This fall the ten Regional Advisory Councils held hearings on the wildlife proposals applicable to their regions, including WP 18-51. Their recommendations will be considered by the Board at the spring meeting, along with an analysis and recommendation by an inter-agency staff committee, and comments from the public.

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-- Jack Hession

** 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.
Richard McElmurry
Richard McElmurry was born in Oregon and raised in Alaska, where he spent much of his time in the wilderness, hunting, fishing, camping, and hiking. He continues to enjoy many of these activities today. For most of his adult life he served in the military and then worked for the State Department where he learned leadership, teamwork, and dedication. Richard recently decided to go back to school, and he is now pursuing a degree in environment and society at the University of Alaska Anchorage. He plans to dedicate the rest of his life to the protection of our natural resources so that generations to come can enjoy them.

Amy Murphy
Amy Murphy grew up in Wyoming and moved to Alaska in 1983. Amy spent much of her early life exploring all over Wyoming, camping, hiking, rock hunting, fishing, kayaking, attending pow-wows and archeological digs, etc. Amy and her siblings all grew up enjoying the outdoors. Her older brother and she took up backpacking, backcountry skiing, and rock climbing as teenagers, and Amy still enjoys backpacking, hiking, and backcountry skiing. Amy has spent countless hours in the Chugach; she values the challenges the mountains present as well as the peaceful solitude. She joined the Mountaineering Club of Alaska in 2000 and started leading numerous non-technical trips, mainly hiking, backpacking, biking and back-country ski touring. Amy became involved with the Alaska Chapter in 2005-2007, leading outings, mainly hiking. Amy strongly believes in protecting our environment, especially for future generations, including her grandchildren. Getting people out in nature to explore, enjoy and protect the environment is fun, but also critically important, especially now. She wants to increase people's awareness of our fragile environment and to become more pro-active in trying to save it. A Sierra Club member for 17 years, Amy lives in Anchorage.

Christen Anderson
Christin grew up in the National Park Service and has a fascination with fungi. She studied the potential for oyster mushrooms to clean up diesel-contaminated soil for her master’s thesis at the University of Alaska Fairbanks. She has degrees in Biology and Environmental Science from Oberlin College, and studied amphibian chytrid (pronounced kit-trid) at Cornell in undergrad. In Alaska she has travelled all over the state helping arctic mycologist Dr. Gary Larusen teach mushroom identification. She hopes that by joining Sierra Club she can help protect plant and wildlife habitat for future generations.

Su Chon
Su Chon was born and raised in Anchorage, Alaska and went to school at Ohio State University for her Environmental Policy Degree. She started interning with the Sierra Club in 2014 and has been volunteering with the organization ever since! She started her term on the Executive committee last January and helped the Chapter get freshly organized with a Letter to the Editor writing workshop, with keeping the social media page active, and finding other ways to keep the Chapter’s work going vigorously. Su is running for a second term to help keep the momentum going and to continue being active in empowering the community and in advocating for Alaska’s beautiful wilderness. Su has been with the Sierra Club since 2014 and loves to hike and draw in her free time.
Great News Hikers!—for the Frosty Glow of Winter

This season the Sierra Club's Alaska Chapter will continue offering outings throughout the Frosty Alpen Glow of Winter right back to Sunny Days of Summer.

It is so tempting to get stuck in the cold and dark mindset of Alaskan winters and Igloo up until the ice melts and it’s time for the breakup boots! But Yasuhiro, Julie, Toshihide, and Amy are eager to bust out the snow clothes and tromp down the crunchy trails continuing our weekend outings throughout winter. Because it is cold and dark we need to stay active and knock off those extra pounds from the holidays! More than that—as proud Alaskans, we know that this is one of the most beautiful times of the year, with crisp air, deep blue sky and white snow covered mountains. The frozen lakes and rivers offer rare opportunity to explore deep into places where we do not normally venture.

To really enjoy every outing there are critical components to winter hiking. As the winter solstice approaches, the days are oh so short, the sun is lower and the temps can get pretty darn cold. Dressed with a thermal base layer, fleece middle layer, and wind breaking shell, we can have amazingly comfortable outings. Kahtoola Micro Spikes are also very useful gear that will help you maintain a grip on frozen surfaces without the use of heavy crampons. Head lamps, warm shoes and hot drinks are a must along with snacks. Our outings try to reach a variety of interests ranging from very easy routes such as trail systems in Campbell Air Strip—mostly flat, to moderate surface such as single track trail and multipurpose trails in the hillside areas and on to more challenging ones like Near Point, Flattop, and Peak 2. During the core winter months (December and January) most hikes will be about 2-3 hours long during afternoon, but we will plan longer ones as the days get longer. We also hope to get some ski and snowshoeing outings on the schedule as the snow improves.

So let’s get out together and have fun, and we can also enjoy warm coffee afterwards at our favorite coffee shop. Winter outings make the coffee taste even better.

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

-- by Julie K Wahl
Alaska Chapter Outing Chair
Urge your state senator to support HB 105—to protect Denali wolves
Via Stampede Trail Buffer Zone

As Alaskans gear up for the next state legislature session, to begin next month, January 2018, citizens concerned about the welfare of wildlife—and especially the wolf population around Denali National Park—are focusing on getting support for House Bill 105 which passed the Alaska House of Representatives by a vote of 22-18 last May. It is very important that Alaska residents begin now to contact their state senators and ask them to support this legislation which establishes a buffer zone prohibiting the killing, trapping and shooting of wolves in the Stampede Trail area. Due to likely reluctance by many Senators, steady pressure is needed.

The Stampede Trail area is a parcel of state land that juts into the northeast portion of Denali National Park. Since it is state land, rather than federal, like the surrounding national park, the Alaska Department of Fish & Game and the Board of Game regulate hunting here, and currently allow baiting stations which attract bears, wolves, and wolverine. The baiting stations in Stampede Trail have been laced with rotting hog carcasses.

The Stampede Trail has been used by a few hunters, trappers and hunting guides from the Healy area. Healy is located about 11 miles north of the road entrance to Denali National Park and Preserve along the George Parks Highway in Interior Alaska.

Anchorage-area representative Andy Josephson championed the effort to pass HB 105 in the House. He deserves continued thanks for his persistence and hard work. We will inform readers on how to support Andy Josephson’s efforts in the next session which starts January 16, 2017.

HB 105 is expected to go to the Senate Natural Resource Committee, chaired by Senator Cathy Giessel (R-Anchorage) The bill may face a tough time getting through that pro-development committee. We strongly support HB 105 and hope that HB 105 will get a hearing by the committee once it is assigned there. A hearing is necessary for the bill to have a chance of passing.

We will inform readers of the status of this bill so Alaskan residents can support HB105 when it reaches this committee.

The decline of the wolf population across the 6 million acre national park has reduced the opportunity for the half million visitors to Denali Park to view wolves. (sierra borealis, Dec 2013)

The economic value of living wildlife to the state of Alaska far exceeds the value of wolf pelts, bear pelts, etc. In 2011, wildlife viewing activities supported more than $2.7 billion. This is twice as much as the $1.3 billion provided by hunting activities in Alaska in 2011. Denali National Park contributes over $560 million per year to Alaska’s economy. It is the third largest revenue-generating park in the nation.

What You Can Do:

Please contact your state senator—during the remainder of 2017, urging him or her to give Alaska wolves—and Alaska wolf lovers—a holiday present and support the buffer zone. And remind them that tourists come from afar to see wolves: emphasize the economic value of the tourism industry in Alaska.

If you do not know who your Alaska State Senator or Representative is contact your Alaska Legislative Office (LIO). The Anchorage Legislative Office phone is (907) 269-0111. For Fairbanks the Legislative Office is (907) 452-4448. And for Juneau—(907) 465-4648.

Also—please contact Governor Bill Walker to urge him to help create a Stampede Trail buffer zone.

Letters to Senators and Representatives are valuable. They make a difference. But probably the most valuable effort is to arrange a meeting with your Senator or Senator’s staff in their local office.

—by Susan Hansen, Fairbanks, skhansen@ak.net
**Update: Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals upholds hovercraft ban in Yukon-Charley Rivers National Preserve**

On October 2 the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals ruled “...that the federal government properly exercised its authority to regulate hovercraft use on the rivers within conservation system units in Alaska.” In addition to upholding the National Park Service’s hovercraft ban on the Nation River, the Court clarified the federal government’s authority to ban hovercrafts on rivers within other units of the park system and on rivers within the other national conservation system units in Alaska, the wildlife refuge, wild & scenic rivers, national trails, and designated wilderness areas.

The Court’s opinion is the latest stage in this long-running legal battle. Plaintiff John Sturgeon, after being told by the National Park Service that he could not use his hovercraft on the Nation River, in 2011 sued the Service in federal district court in Alaska. He claimed that the State controls uses on the surface waters, because the State owned the land beneath the river, Hence, the NPS had no authority to regulate uses on the river or ban hovercrafts, he argued. **

In its opinion in favor of the NPS, the district court cited the federal government’s authority under the Commerce Clause to regulate navigation on navigable waters regardless of the ownership of the submerged land. Sturgeon then appealed to the Ninth Circuit. When that court upheld the district court’s decision, he appealed to the Supreme Court.

The Supreme Court early in 2016 found the opinion by the two lower courts inadequate and sent the case back to the Ninth Circuit for further review. In its October opinion, the three-judge panel decided in favor of the NPS, citing a Ninth Circuit precedent, based on the reserved water doctrine, that “...the United States had an implied reservation of water rights, rendering the river [within another Alaska national park] public lands.”

Sturgeon has until January 2, 2018 should he decide to appeal the Ninth’s decision to the Supreme Court.


**-- Jack Hession**

**The Nation is a navigable river whose riverbed (and banks to the ordinary high water mark) are owned by the State. When Alaska joined the Union in 1959, it assumed ownership of land beneath navigable water bodies unless the land was reserved for federal purposes prior to statehood. For example, land beneath navigable rivers within Glacier Bay National Park (former Glacier Bay National Monument was reserved 1925) are federally owned. Yukon-Charley National Preserve was established in ANILCA (1980).**

**Izembek Wilderness: -- up in the air!?**

For years and then more years, we have followed the attempts of the Alaska delegation to put in a road--unneeded, and damaging to the environment--within the present designated Wilderness of Izembek National Wildlife Refuge--far down the remote Alaska Peninsula. To get around the legal prohibition of a road in Wilderness, they seek a land exchange--to take the desired road corridor OUT of wilderness and exchange it for Alaska state non-wilderness land.

That land exchange--is now in the hands of the Interior Department. We await more definite news. In the meantime, your editor plans a trip to the Izembek Refuge next summer--by ferry from Homer. I’d love to hear if anyone might be interested in joining me; exact timing still -- up in the air.

-- Vicky Hoover
vicky.hoover@sierraclub.org

**Note from Sierra Club Marine Team chair, Doug Fetterly**

Our Sierra Club national Marine Team seeks to meet with people in coastal regions to engage on subjects of ocean conservation. In November, two Marine Team members (myself as Chair for the team, and Brice Boland—a Core team member out of Tacoma, WA) went to Alaska and shared views on marine & coastal ecosystem conservation, fisheries management, marine protected areas, and marine wildlife & habitat at two universities in Anchorage. We also had a dinner meeting with Sierra Club Chapter members Yasuhiro Ozuru, Alli Harvey, and Su Chon. Others were invited but could not make it.

One additional important connection was with people from the Eyak Preservation Council [http://www.eyakpreservationcouncil.org/about/](http://www.eyakpreservationcouncil.org/about/) in Cordova, (arranged by Carol Hoover of EPC)—especially tribal leader Dune Lankard, followed by Elizabeth Swain, and Sheryl Shook, PhD, a neuroscientist and Sierra Club member, as well as fishermen and women in the coastal town of Cordova. Discussions included Pebble Mine, salmon, marine mammal preservation, and a host of other subjects.

-- Doug Fetterly, fett4paz@gmail.com
End of year Threats to the Tongass

The Forest Service has just announced its plans for analyzing the largest old-growth timber sale anywhere in the country in decades – 475 million board feet (MMBF) – known as the Prince of Wales Landscape Level Analysis Project. According to the Forest Service, “[t]he purpose of the POW LLA Project is to improve forest ecosystem health (sic!) on Craig and Thorne Bay Ranger Districts, help support community resiliency, and provide economic development through an integrated approach to meet multiple resource objectives.” This project started as a “landscape analysis” and quickly morphed into pursuing the most aggressive and destructive old-growth timber sale project that our country has seen in many years.

In the first week of December, the agency initiated a 14-day public comment period to address the Draft Issues and Alternatives that the agency plans to analyze in an EIS. The agency’s three action alternatives range in old-growth logging volumes from 200 to 475 MMBF (or more than three times as large as Big Thorne). And all of this logging would take place on Prince of Wales Island, an area that has already suffered the worst effects of the Tongass old-growth logging program.

Comments on the EIS’s proposed issues and alternatives are due Tuesday, Dec. 19. (from Earth Justice)

Oppose harmful Tongass budget bill riders

Please oppose egregious, poison pill riders attacking Alaska’s national forests, in the Senate’s fiscal 2018 spending bill for the Interior Department and related agencies—now being considered—by Congress.

Section 509 would bar the Roadless Area Conservation Rule from applying to national forests in Alaska. The Roadless Rule is enormously popular nationwide. It has helped control the Forest Service’s multi-billion dollar road maintenance backlog, reduced conflict over creeping loss of intact public wildlands, protected water supply for 60 million people, and preserved wildlife habitat and other vanishing natural values on public lands. Alaska’s national forests were included—expressly because undeveloped forest wildlands persist there on a scale unknown elsewhere. Federal scientists found that retaining the existing intact roadless areas of the Tongass is a “key element” in sustaining the region’s extraordinary salmon runs (and their commercial, subsistence, and recreational fisheries).

Because developing roadless areas for logging is so uneconomic in Southeast Alaska, and the Rule allows public roads, utility connectors, and access to inholdings (including mines), in Alaska it does not interfere significantly with community growth. Section 508 would nullify a Forest Service plan for moving the Tongass away from taxpayer-subsidized old growth clearcutting long since abandoned elsewhere.

Urge your members of Congress to vote against these riders and the harm they would cause to centuries-old rainforest.

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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: Yasuhiro Ozuru <yasozuru@gmail.com>
VICE CHAIR: Toshihide Hamazaki <toshihide_hamazaki@yahoo.com>
SECRETARY: Roxanna Reynolds <roxyreynolds@icloud.com>,
COUNCIL DELEGATE: Susan Hansen: <skhansen@ak.net>,
Su Chon: <schon336@gmail.com>,
Jared James: <jamesjs@muni.org>,
Suzanne Schafer: <suzeqzin@gmail.com>,

Other 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:
Dan Ritzman, Alaska Program Director, 206-378-0114,
dan.ritzman@sierraclub.org
Alli Harvey, Our Wild America Alaska Campaign Rep 907-276-4088, alli.harvey@sierraclub.org.

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