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alaska report

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Two Alaska Chapter views of the 2008 Election

Election brings changes to Alaska–*but real change may be less than expected*

-- by Pamela Brodie, Alaska Chapter Chair

Alaska was shaken by a political earthquake with the defeat of Senator Ted Stevens (R) by popular Anchorage Mayor Mark Begich (D). It took a felony conviction only a few days before the election (for failing to report lobbyists' gifts), to narrowly defeat the man who had been referred to as "senator for life" and "Uncle Ted" due to his ability, as senior Republican on the Appropriations Committee, to bring Alaska more federal dollars *per capita* than any other state. Stevens is currently appealing his conviction and has not been sentenced; it is considered unlikely he will serve time in prison. Stevens was one of the Senate's most moderate Republicans – except on the environment!

Representing a generally moderate Republican state, Sen. Begich will probably prove to be one of the Senate's most moderate Democrats. As mayor of Anchorage, Begich signed the Mayors' Global Climate Agreement and took measures to cut greenhouse gas emissions. The local Sierra Club group worked well with him. Environmentalists can expect that as senator, he, unlike Stevens, will listen to our wishes and consider our arguments, but we can take nothing for granted. For the first time in memory, letters and phone calls from Alaskan constituents could well make the critical difference on environmental issues. (See article p. 3, for Begich on the Arctic Refuge.)

Meanwhile, our now senior senator Lisa Murkowski (R), has just been appointed to the powerful Appropriations Committee, ensuring the State will continue to rake in federal dollars, although not at the level to which Alaskans have grown accustomed. We must remain vigilant to ensure that these moneys coming to the state do not lead to environmentally destructive and unnecessary public works, such as the Juneau access road or Alaska's infamous "bridges to nowhere." (Note the "s"; few Americans understand that there are two such bridge projects—one near Anchorage, proposing a crossing of the Knik Arm, and one near Ketchikan in Southeast Alaska.) Murkowski is more moderate in her outlook and approach to constituents than was her father Frank, who appointed her to fill his Senate seat when he became governor six years ago. (She won election to a full term two years later).

In a stunning upset of pollsters' predictions, Alaska's sole Congressional representative Don Young (R) easily won re-election over former state House minority leader Ethan Berkowitz (D). Young won despite the fact that he appears to be heavily implicated in the Jack Abramoff lobbying scandals and has spent more than a million dollars of campaign funds on defense attorneys, although he has not, at this point, been indicted. Young is now the last of what had been for many years a Congressional delegation vehemently opposed to environmentalists.

Dance of the lovebirds © Jon Bottom

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Election brings changes

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Our Governor Sarah Palin, who only this past year became world-famous, astonished Alaskans in her recent state of the State address by calling for the building of a road from Fairbanks to Nome, a distance of more than 500 miles across undeveloped land, as well as the extension of the State's Dalton Highway from the Prudhoe Bay oil fields in the Arctic to an area of potential natural gas deposits. She had not pursued these costly projects when the State was flush with oil dollars--but promotes them now when we face a serious budget shortfall. Before her rise to stardom, Palin had been a remarkably uninvolved governor, generally waiting until the last possible moment to take positions, and even vetoing some bills by fellow Republican without having informed them of her opposition as their bills moved through the Legislature. Many wonder how involved she will be now in the details of governing, considering her apparent national ambitions.

Democrats made marginal gains in the State Legislature, although environmentalists were sorry to lose House member Andrea Doll (D-Juneau). The State Senate continues to be governed by a coalition, now consisting of all ten Democrats and six of the ten Republicans, with moderate Republican Gary Stevens (R-Kodiak) presiding. The State House is controlled by Republicans in coalition with rural Democrats. Committee chairmanships have improved somewhat in both houses. ◆

The Greening of Fairbanks

-- by Andy Keller, Alaska Chapter Executive Committee

Of Alaska's three largest cities, (Anchorage, Juneau, and Fairbanks) Fairbanks, the "Golden Heart City" of Alaska's Interior Region, close to Alaska's geographic center, has the reputation of being the most strongly anti-conservation. The last several election cycles have ushered in a period of change in the Golden Heart City, and Fairbanks is now represented by two conservation-friendly state senators, both Democrats.

In November 2006, Fairbanks voters, with conservation community support, elected Joe Thomas over Ralph Seekins, thus replacing a persistent conservation foe with a reasonable senator. On Nov. 4, 2008, Fairbanks voters elected Joe Paskvan to the state senate. Paskvan's election created a 10/10 party split in the chamber. The senate president is moderate Republican Gary Stevens, from Kodiak (no relationship to former U.S. Senator Ted Stevens). Gary Stevens is widely respected in the conservation community for his open-minded approach. He is the sponsor of a bill that would create a "Jay Hammond State Wildlife Refuge" in the area of the state where the Pebble Mine is proposed. (See **alaska report**, May 07.) The late Jay Hammond, known for his conservation ethics, was a much-loved Republican governor and had a remote cabin near Lake Clark National Park in the area proposed for a state wildlife refuge. Creating a refuge would honor Hammond, draw attention to the threat of the mine, and put the state senate on a wonderful trajectory.

The assistant leader of the state Senate is Anchorage Democrat Johnny Ellis. Ellis was elected with support from the Alaska Conservation Voters and is a conservation champion. This is the best Senate the state has had in a long time, and I was proud to help by coordinating conservation support for Senator Paskvan in Fairbanks.

In the state House, friendly Fairbanks Democrats Scott Kawasaki and David Guttenberg were re-elected as well as Republican Jay Ramras. Rep. Kawasaki is a big supporter of recycling, and Guttenberg has been pushing for the creation of a "Stampede State Recreation Area" on the northern side of Denali National Park. Fairbanks Republican Representative Mike Kelly, (who is my representative) continues to alienate large segments of his constituents. I was excited to see trails advocate Karl Kassel run and make a competitive showing against Kelly. He lost to Kelly by ONE vote out of over 10,000 cast (four votes, after a recount.) The state House has become more moderate, although not as much as the Senate. Alaskans have plenty of work still left to do.

While the national spotlight has been on convicted felon and now former U.S. Senator Ted Stevens and Governor (and national celebrity) Sarah Palin, local government in Fairbanks keeps greening up. The moderate Republican mayor is a strong supporter of parks and open space and is exploring every possible energy source in collaboration with recycling. The Borough Assembly is the greenest ever and has been working on recycling and energy policy. There is much hope for the future. Alaska's new U.S. Senator, Mark Begich, has opened his door to our concerns. While U.S. Representative Don Young survived the election with 50 percent to 45 percent for Ethan Berkowitz, Young's legal troubles may be far from over. Barack Obama has moved into the White House. It is a time for hope, and, as always, hard work--even in Fairbanks, Alaska--where the daylight is returning. ◆

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Changing the Arctic Refuge Debate

At last change is upon us! After more than 20 years of fighting sustained efforts to open the Coastal Plain of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge to oil and gas development, the conservation community appears to have its best chance yet of securing permanent protection for not only the Refuge, but also for other special places in America's Arctic. With a new administration in place, we have no time to waste in urging our new political leadership to secure lasting protection for sensitive parts of the entire Arctic ecosystem that are threatened by continued oil development, other resource extraction, and climate change. This includes identified Special Areas in the National Petroleum Reserve Alaska– places such as Teshekpuk Lake and the Utokok Uplands--and other sensitive areas in the Western Arctic.

The truth is that America's Arctic along with the entire global Arctic ecosystem is in deep trouble. Recent scientific reports have confirmed that the Arctic is the fastest warming part of our planet. Autumn air temperatures in the Arctic are at a record 9 degrees Fahrenheit above normal. Recent reports also note that 2007 was the warmest year on record in the Arctic, leading to a record loss of sea ice. In 2008, sea ice melt was second only to 2007.

Long time Arctic champions in Congress, Representative Ed Markey (D-MA 7) and Senator Joe Lieberman (I-CT) reintroduced bills this month that would give official wilderness status to roughly 1.6 million acres on the refuge's coastal plain. The bills are S.231 and H.R. 39: – "To preserve the Arctic coastal plain of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, Alaska, as wilderness in recognition of its extraordinary natural ecosystems and for the permanent good of present and future generations of Americans."

However, despite strong scientific arguments for protection, the Arctic continues to be a party to political maneuvering. There may not be strong motivation for Democratic leaders to move ahead with the Arctic wilderness legislation in this Congress. Advancing the bill in the Senate would deal a strong political blow to freshman Alaska Senator Mark Begich (D) whose constituency generally supports the oil industry, a major employer and revenue source in the state.

Begich, in one of his first public statements as senator, attacked Lieberman's bill even before it was formally introduced, calling it "another misguided attempt at locking up 'ANWR' to appease environmentalists across the country." He said Arctic National Wildlife Refuge drilling should be part of a "comprehensive" energy policy that includes renewable resources and oil and gas.

The Obama Administration's pick for Secretary of the Interior, Senator Ken Salazar from Colorado, might prove helpful for Arctic issues. As a senator, Salazar was a consistent champion for legislation designating the Coastal Plain of the Refuge as wilderness. However, as a political appointee, Salazar will have to balance the wishes of the conservation community with the complex realities of managing our nation's public lands.

Amidst this change, the broader Arctic conservation community has a number of strategies at its disposal. Since 1987, Arctic wilderness legislation has been introduced in every Congress, never passing out of committee. Now that we have a new friendlier administration, there may be opportunities without congressional action to achieve a higher level of protection than the Coastal Plain now enjoys.

Despite political change one factor remains constant: the need to build additional national grassroots support for the remote, yet highly-contested Arctic Refuge. And this time we aren't defending the refuge from imminent threats, we are seeking its permanent protection! ◆

☞ **WHAT YOU CAN DO**:

** Contact your Senators and your Congressional representative and ask them to sign up as cosponsors of the Lieberman or Markey Arctic wilderness bills, S. 231 or H.R. 39.

** Write a short (less than 200 words) letter to editor of your local paper expressing your satisfaction that Arctic wilderness bills are back in Congress and that we can now hope for permanent protection for the unique wildlife habitat of the beleaguered Arctic Refuge.

** If you're interested in being part of our new Arctic Activist Network, send an email to Kit McGurn, kit.mcgurn@sierraclub.org, or call at (206)378-0114 ext. 324.

-- Kit McGurn,
Arctic Campaign National Conservation Organizer

Introducing Kit McGurn

Kit McGurn is the Sierra Club's **Arctic Campaign National Conservation Organizer**. He joined the Sierra Club's Seattle office in June 2008, and his responsibilities include developing effective outreach methods and tools to engage the SierraClub membership and general public on Arctic issues. Kit's position represents a significant increase in outreach efforts for the Sierra Club's Arctic campaign. Prior to joining the Sierra Club Kit worked for the Greater Yellowstone Coalition on public land policy and organized around issues such as Northern Rockies wolf protection and preservation of Idaho's road-less areas. Kit completed dual undergraduate degrees in Economics and Environmental Studies at Pacific Lutheran University. An avid backpacker, climber, and snowboarder, he tends to spend most free time exploring wilderness ecosystems. Kit will be in Washington DC for Alaska Wilderness Week, Feb. 27–March 3, 2009. ◆

Kit McGurn on a climb of Mt. Rainier

The Tongass Future Roundtable
A Flawed Process with a Bad Result

Through a Southeast Alaska stakeholder process called the Tongass Future Roundtable (TFR) a draft of a bill containing numerous forest-related elements including some protection components has been produced by a number of environmental organizations in collaboration with the Forest Service, timber industry corporations, and other members of the TFR. These environmental groups are The Nature Conservancy (TNC), the Alaska Wilderness League, Audubon, Trout Unlimited, The Wilderness Society, and the Southeast Alaska Conservation Council (SEACC). The strategy is to get support from the timber industry and the Alaska delegation for their bill. They are using the TFR to produce a so-called consensus for their bill. There is no real consensus. The Sierra Club is not a member of the TFR and along with other dissenting environmental groups has no input in the process of reaching the so-called 'Tongass timber solution'. The rest of our country's citizens, who care about the magnificent rainforest of the Tongass, have not even been informed about what is going on.

Membership diversity in the stakeholder process has been filtered out. The members of the TFR themselves select new members, and through this process dissenting views have less and less input. This has resulted in a flood of resource development advocators becoming members, and current and past Forest Service staff becoming voting members of the TFR. The few remaining TFR members that do step up and say "no" to what is going on have little effect on the process. There have been attempts to change the bylaws to evict these members from the TFR or to make their votes meaningless.

The result of the TFR stakeholder process and the campaign strategy is the production of a draft bill that has a huge giveaway to the Southeast Alaska timber industries. This bill is still in a concept stage, and some participating groups have at this time not accepted all parts of the bill. Negotiations are ongoing. Because this proposed bill is not just a protection bill I have named it the Tongass Land Use Designation bill.

What the Draft Tongass Land Use bill would do

1] 4.6 million acres into some protection that we support though it is clearly less than full wilderness protection. Mining would be allowed, and most likely existing designated transportation corridors would also be allowed. (This is not what the wilderness act was designed to do.)

2] 1 million acres in a "stewardship forest" category. These are places that were "previously developed," and the main purpose of the designation is supposedly for restoration. Commercial use of the cutting byproduct would be allowed to make the cutting economic. The byproduct would be used to make bio fuel or used to heat schools and homes. *Of note: Sealaska Timber Corporation , a subentity of the regional 'Sealaska Native Corporation,and TNC are also now requesting millions of dollars for a Tongass bio fuel industry, to be included in the Obama economic stimulus legislation. It would basically mandate that the Forest Service treat several hundred thousand acres of clearcuts for the purpose of bio fuel.* (The Sierra Club does not support using our forests to create bio fuel.)

3] 250,000 acres as a "working forest." This would be "primarily young growth developed watersheds." Since it is mostly second growth, there would be aggressive thinning until the second growthis ready to cut. This would be 40 to 50 years from now, and the remaining old growth would be cut away by that time. The legislation would include intent language that these lands are designated to be available for logging. The intent language is a way to provide 'certainty' to the timber industry. It would legislate perpetual timber plantations on these acres. (The Sierra Club does not support bills that guarantee timber cutting.)

4] 70,000 acres for Sealaska. This is a land exchange of Sealaska's un-cut, but not profitable timber lands, for more of the public's best remaining old growth forest acres. Sealaska logging practices have virtually no wildlife protection guidelines. Their Standards and Guidelines are based on Alaska State Forest Management regulations which allow cutting from alpine to beach and have inadequate wildlife standards. Stream buffers are a third of the size they should be, and the state always grants exceptions for logging in the buffers. Sealaska has devastated their lands in an un-sustainable rotation and are running out of readily accessible timber supply. Thus their desire to exchange non economic lands for better logging lands. This part of the bill is to get Sealaska on board. (The Sierra Club's wilderness policy guideline does not support adding land exchanges to protection bills.)

5] 180,000 acres to a private timber land trust that would be managed by the State of Alaska Division of Forestry but considered private rather than public lands. The purpose would be to provide a guaranteed timber supply to the timber industry. About 90,000 acres are in roadless areas. The land would be treated as private land under the State Forest Practices Act, just like the Sealaska lands. This is a privatizing of our national forest. Its purpose is to give certainty to

Tongass Future Roundtable, continued

the timber industry, and it is an attempt to bypass all federal forest management laws. Under Alaska State Forest management practices timber cutting trumps all other uses. The wildlife protection Standards and Guidelines are virtually non-existing so that there are almost no merits to litigate a sale. There is no National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process for state timber sales. If litigation is done through the Alaska State court system the plaintiffs would be liable for state attorney costs if they lose the case. This could amount to more then $50,000 for a single timber sale litigation. This part of the bill is the major quid pro quo that they think they need in order to get the industry and the Alaska delegation on board. Allowing this would set an unacceptable precedent. While I was observing the last TFR meeting many voting members were up front that the purpose of the land trust is to avoid public involvement and stop litigation. It is to make sales more economic by deleting wildlife protection requirements. (The Sierra Club does not support the privatizing of our national forests.)

The Roadless Rule would be legislated for all parts of the Tongass not covered by the above. These areas are mostly rock and ice on the mainland and are already de facto protected from logging. The roadless rule does not protect against mining.

In conclusion: If introduced, this bill must not get through Congress in its current form. To get Sierra Club support it will have to have radical changes to delete the give aways, delete anything that violates our nation's environmental laws, and delete any attempt to turn our forests into energy plantations. ◆

Juneau *Road-to-nowhere* update

The Alaska Chapter has steadily and vigorously opposed the construction of a road that would attempt to connect Alaska's capital, Juneau, with the state's road system—although an actual connection would not even be possible, as this road would go from Juneau to a new ferry terminal not far from the present road system. Previous **alaska reports** have detailed the many environmental reasons to oppose such a road; this recent "op-ed" by Juneau Group chair Mark Rorick focuses on the financial reasons.

What We Need to Know About the Road

Throughout the last three years numerous requests have been made for an independent cost analysis of the Juneau road project. These requests to Alaska's Department of Transportation (DOT) and Governor Sarah Palin were put out by environmental groups, by both Republican and Democrat state delegates, by Southeast towns, and by individual Alaska citizens. So far these requests have been denied or not accepted. Why is this? Well, in regards to DOT,

this bureaucracy has been obsessed with building the road for decades. Having agency engineers who are trained to build roads, and who want to build roads, produces a bias that results in minimal and inaccurate cost predictions. (This is a nationwide issue in building transportation projects and has been researched and documented.) So it is no surprise that DOT has stopped the only independent engineering analysis from going forward when it identified major construction problems.

In regards to Governor Palin, while running for vice-president she portrayed herself as being against transportation boondoggles, but she has not demanded that DOT contract out an independent cost analysis. She has at least refused to allow the project to go forward until the legal issues, including appeals, are resolved. This prevents the project from being included in the new economic stimulus legislation. I applaud her for that.

So what do we need to know about the real costs of the Juneau road project? We know that avalanche and debris slides are going to happen. We know that the cost of shoveling snow in downtown Juneau using DOT's gas-guzzling plow trucks is $3000 per hour and that the amount of snow on the proposed 60 mile road to a new ferry terminal increases the farther out you go. So what is the cost and how is DOT going to pay it? Where are they going to put the removed snow? They can't dump it into the Berners Bay estuary, because that would devastate aquatic wildlife. So they will have to truck it to somewhere else, miles away, using tremendous amounts of diesel fuel.

And what about using helicopters to bomb the avalanche sites? We know that helicopters use a huge amount of gas and that even this bombing does not stop avalanches. What will be the cost of repairing sections of the road that are destroyed by avalanches and debris-filled landslides? $1 million, two million, ten million per mile? What will be the cost of concrete barriers to try to stop the destruction? And the cost of regular road maintenance, such as removing debris, filling pot holes, and repaving?.

There are two ways to find out the real costs of this boondoggle road to a costly new ferry terminal or to get an acceptable estimate. One is to build the road. If this happens I predict that the cost will be over a billion dollars for the road alone. I hope I will not have to be proved right about this. The other is to get an independent cost analysis estimate from a company that has no bias. This is the best path to becoming informed about how much we could spend on a road that is an environmental and fiscal disaster. ◆

Supreme Court hears Kensington mine-tailings case

On January 12 the Supreme Court heard arguments to help them determine how tailings from the proposed Kensington gold mine will be regulated. The question is whether Kensington tailings dumped into Lower Slate Lake should be regulated as fill, because tailings would raise the bottom of the lake, or classified as discharge from gold extraction. (See **alaska report,** May 07, Oct 06, Oct 05, Sep 02, Jun 98.) Tailings are the ground-up waste rock leftover after metals are extracted.

The U.S. Corps of Engineers gave Coeur Alaska Inc. a permit under the "fill" classification. But in 2007, the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals agreed with environmental groups that the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency should have handled the tailings as discharge, which prohibits dumping tailings into the lake. Coeur's permit was then invalidated. Coeur Alaska Inc. is owned by Idaho-based Coeur d'Alene Mines Corp.

The Supreme Court is expected to issue its ruling by early summer. If Coeur loses, it has another option - albeit a more expensive one - to store the tailings in a paste form in the uplands. That plan is even preferred by environmental groups.

According to the Juneau *Empire*, "The National Mining Association says that because so much of Alaska is wetlands, such a ruling 'would make it nearly impossible for many mines to legally store their tailings.' " Environmental groups emphasize that mining waste harms the environment, and if tailings are classified as *fill* mines could dump pollutants into bodies of water..

Tom Waldo and Mark Rorick outside Supreme Court in DC

Sierra Club Juneau group chair, Mark Rorick commended Juneau Earthjustice attorney Tom Waldo for his strong presentation in the case.

Here is the url for an audio of the Supreme Court arguments hearing: http://kfsk.org/modules/local_news/index.php?op=sideBlock&syndicated=true&ID=514 . ◆

Denali National Park faces key issues: A Vision for 2009

One of America's premier national parks and perhaps the single-best known national park in Alaska to Americans in the Lower 348, Denali is often in the limelight. Sierra Club activists work closely with the local environmental Citizens' group, Denali Citizens Council. (DCC). DCC has recently published a comprehensive Vision for this iconic national park and for the greater geographical region that surrounds it. This vision helps promote good stewardship for our public lands in a positive time of change.

Vision: *Preservation of wildlife and wilderness resources for which this park was established and the direct experience of nature for visitors are primary goals*.

** Wilderness ecosystems must exist in a natural and minimally managed condition-["untrammeled" -uncontrolled].

** In cooperation with conservation partners, DCC will advocate for completion of park Wilderness eligibility reviews and Wilderness designation in Denali's ANILCA additions.

** We will encourage NPS to be more proactive in management of snowmachines, by [further]defining the term "traditional activities".

Vision: *The park is a haven for natural sounds, where motorized vehicles and aircraft do not disrupt the natural* quiet.

** DCC will retain a seat on the Denali Aircraft Overflights Council, advocating for voluntary measures to protect the soundscape [natural in Denali National Park and will advocate, in our comments on the Vehicle Management EIS, for soundscape protection when considering changes to the transportation system in the park.

** We will hold NPS accountable for protecting park soundscapes from inappropriate noise intrusions by snowmachines using the park for traditional activities.

Vision: *Park Road character is protected.*

** This is a core value for DCC and we support the Adolph Murie vision of a simple road that conforms to the landscape rather than dominates it. This calls for careful maintenance, limited vehicle access, and minimal presence of infrastructure.

Vision: *Gateway communities outside Denali National Park plan sustainably and retain their rural character.*

** Local communities must embrace their role as part of the gateway to Denali, appreciate their location next to the park, and recognize the greater Denali ecosystem.

** DCC will continue to support habitat protections for important wildlife corridors on lands adjacent to the park .

For Denali park issues, also see **alaska report**, Mar & Sep 06, Jun 02, Feb, Sep & Dec 01, Feb 00, Apr 99, Jan 99, Mar, Jun & Sep 97, Apr & Jun 96, Dec 94, Sep 93, Mar 92, Dec 91.

To learn more about the work of the Denali Conservation Council, check their website at www.denalicitizens.org. ◆

Public Lands Omnibus passes Senate – with harmful Izembek road

Battle continues against "road to nowhere"

The 111th Congress got off to a running start and immediately, before mid-January, passed the big public lands omnibus bill left over from last fall. The massive legislative package contained more than 150 separate lands bills, including more than 2 million acres of new wilderness in nine states. Sierra Club joined other environmental organizations in applauding this significant land protection bill, while at the same time expressing vehement opposition to its inclusion of the Izembek Land Exchange bill.

The Izembek provision removes a key portion of the designated wilderness in the remote Izembek National Wildlife Refuge on the Alaska Peninsula and turns that area over to the state of Alaska, thus paving the way, so to speak, for a road to be constructed there. In exchange the state is to grant the Refuge an area of state lands for addition to Refuge wilderness. Designed to give the community of King Cove road access to the airstrip of the nearby community of Cold Bay, this project has for more than a dozen years been pushed by the Alaska delegation.

In spite of strong opposition by Sierra Club and other environmentalists, this Izembek land exchange was attached to the public lands omnibus during committee markup in September. While committee staff moderated the bill to require a public input process through the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and gave the Interior Department some flexibility in potentially opposing the road, the loss of designated wilderness, the impact

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on a key wildlife habitat corridor, and the ominous precedent for our entire national wilderness system assured the Sierra Club remained firm in its opposition.

Other obligations, on energy legislation and the national financial crisis, prevented Senate action on the omnibus last fall. It had already been long delayed by obstructive tactics by Sen. Tom Coburn (R-OK). But Senate on majority leader Sen. Harry Reid (D-NV) kept his promise to the numerous senators who pressured him to finally get the bill passed and brought the omnibus up first thing in

Sierra Club will continue to fight this road every step of the way

January under a special rule that let him bypass normal reintroduction requirements in a new Congress. Many senators had their own long-hoped for provisions in the massive omnibus and resisted any proposal to alter the bill -- since any change would require the bill to go back through all the procedural hoops and be again torpedoed by Coburn. Thus Sen. Reid was adamant in refusing to make any change—even to delete an anti-wilderness provision. For the same reasons, the House of Representatives planned to approve the bill in early February without changes. If the House made any changes, that too would require the bill to go back through the Senate and run the Coburn gauntlet.

However, Sierra Club will continue to fight this road every step of the way. The next opportunity to send a plea to your legislators will be the public involvement process whenever an EIS is prepared. Sierra Club will work with the Interior Department to persuade them to oppose the road during the upcoming public involvement processes. Please contact Vicky Hoover (Vicky.hoover@sierraclub,.org, (415)977-5527) for more talking points on Izembek or see **alaska report,** Jun & Sept 08, Dec 07, Sept & Dec 03, May, Sept & Dec 01, Jan & Nov 99, Oct 98, Sept 97**.)**

WHAT YOU CAN DO:

Please contact your own legislators; congratulate them on the Senate's passing (and the House about to pass) a truly historic land-protection bill; thank them for helping make that happen. Express your sadness or disappointment that it was not possible to remove the very anti-wilderness Izembek land exchange bill from the package. State your fear that is this is likely to lead to a highly damaging road through present wilderness in Alaska.

Tell your legislators that people in your state care about Alaska's wild places and about wilderness. (If you sent a plea to your senators earlier, remind them of it--and that you're still fighting.) In the public involvement phase you'll get back to your legislator to urge him/her to persuade the Secretary of Interior to take action to ensure such a road can not be built. Reach your legislators through the Capitol switchboard at (202)224-3121. ◆

-- Vicky Hoover

Alaska's energy dilemma: renewables versus coal?

Alaska was hard hit by the rapid rise in energy prices last year; and Alaskans currently have the highest fuel costs in the nation. Many of the state's residents are seeing their energy bills double and triple. Communities that rely primarily on diesel fuel for their energy production are in crisis. Alaska has been moving to invest in renewable energy, but state leaders are feeling the pressure to find quick solutions to lower energy cost.

In mid-January, Governor Palin revealed her goal for the state to receive 50 percent of its energy from renewable resources by the year 2025! In her Jan. 15 press conference, Governor Palin highlighted the importance of energy efficiency and conservation measures, of getting rural communities off high-priced diesel fuel, and of finding local sources of energy.

Despite this pledge, the Palin administration promptly pushed through a deal to re-start the Healy Coal Plant near Denali National Park by selling the plant to Golden Valley Electric.

The Healy plant was a demonstration project by the Alaska Industrial Development and Export Authority (AIDEA) and the U.S. Department of Energy to test alternative coal-burning technologies. The HCP was designed to reduce air pollution by burning coal in stages to minimize the formation of nitrogen and sulfur oxides and particulate matter. This decade-old technology, though less polluting than its predecessors, was not designed to mitigate the more recent concerns of mercury and greenhouse emissions. Construction of the 50 megawatt (MW) facility was completed in 1997, and test runs occurred for approximately six months in 1998-1999. However, "scaling up" the facility's laboratory design into an operating power plant proved highly problematic, resulting in frequent shut-downs and various operational disruptions.

Now Golden Valley Electric plans to re-start this coal plant and sell its power to Homer Electric even though the plant failed its feasibility studies in 2000.

On January 20, Sierra Club Homer volunteer Mike O'Meara led more 75 protesters in Homer who rallied against Homer Electric for entering into this agreement to buy coal fired power in an era when the nation is starting to back away from coal-burning emissions because of concerns over global warming.

If Alaska really intends to move to a renewable energy future, then Alaskans may need to push their state to abandon this failed 20th century technology, and pursue the the abundant renewable energy resources the state possesses. (See **alaska report**, June 08, May 07, Oct 06, Dec 04.) ◆

-- Trish Rolfe

alaska report

alaska report is the newsletter of the Sierra Club Alaska Task Force, encouraging advocacy on Alaska federal lands issues, particularly as they pertain to the passage and implementation of the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act of 1980.

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ACTION NEEDED