



Sierra Borealis

alaska report

SIERRA CLUB ALASKA CHAPTER
MARCH 2011



Hallelujah, the Tongass is back in the Roadless Rule

On March 4, 2011, U.S. District Court Judge John Sedwick restored the Tongass National Forest to the broad protection from roadbuilding which President Bill Clinton granted to national forest roadless areas in 2000, via the national Roadless Area Conservation Rule.

Judge Sedwick wrote in his ruling that the 2003 decision by the U.S. Forest Service to exempt the Tongass from the national roadless rule was "arbitrary and capricious". As Sierra Club forest activist Mark Rorick, in Juneau, asserted, "It certainly was. The Tongass exemption was the result of a court settlement between the Bush



Ketchikan: Totem Bight State Park

administration and the State of Alaska, and it could not stand up to a laugh test."

In December 2009, a diverse group of plaintiffs, including the Sierra Club, filed the lawsuit in federal court to challenge

the Tongass exemption. The new ruling has assured the plaintiffs have won the case on almost every argument.

Led by the Village of Kake, on Kupreanof Island in Southeast Alaska, the December 2009 lawsuit claimed that the Tongass exemption was arbitrary, capricious

and adopted without following procedures set out in federal law. The Village of Kake asked the court to vacate the exemption and to cancel two timber sales in the vicinity of Kake--the Scratchings and the Kuiu timber sales, and portions of the Iyouttug timber sale.

Judge Sedwick explained in detail why each reason given by the Forest Service for the 2003 exemption of the Tongass from the roadless rule was lacking in legal substance.

Celebrating its 10th anniversary this year, the Roadless Area Conservation Rule exists to protect national forests from destructive energy development, logging and road building. As Fran Hunt, Director of the Sierra Club's Resilient Habitats Campaign, commented: "Over the past decade we've seen that the roadless rule works. It has protected millions of acres of forests across the country, ensuring that both wildlife and American families have space to live and explore.

"The recreational opportunities provided by our forests contribute billions to our economy and employ thousands of people. This is especially true in the Tongass National Forest, where tourism has more than doubled.

"The Tongass is the largest coastal temperate rainforest in the world, and is home to economically valuable salmon populations as well as the highest concentrations of bald eagles anywhere in the U.S. As new threats emerge, from logging to a rapidly changing climate, protecting forest ecosystems like the Tongass becomes even more important. Forests can provide vital safe space for wildlife while providing critical drinking water supplies. It is simply common sense to protect this last wild frontier for future generations to enjoy."

(Mark Rorick contributed to this article.)

ACT NOW: Comments needed!

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Keep offshore drilling off our coasts: *No new lease sales in the Arctic Ocean*

America's Arctic is one of our nation's unique and valuable natural treasures, and citizens who care about Alaska now have an opportunity – until March 31 -- to speak up for protecting that sensitive region. The Bureau of Ocean Energy Management, Regulation and Enforcement (BOEMRE--formerly Minerals Management Service) has issued a Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement to gather public comments on what you wish to see available or unavailable for offshore drilling in the Arctic Ocean's Beaufort and Chukchi Seas. (as well as Cook Inlet.)

With the BP oil disaster less than a year behind us and oil still coating Prince William Sound 22 years after the Exxon Valdez ran aground on Bligh Reef, Big Oil keeps working to drill in new territory: America's Arctic Ocean. Each time they assure us this drilling plan will be safe and risk-free; that they have learned from the past. But we've learned time and time again that we cannot trust polluters, especially with America's Arctic--a national treasure.

Oil companies like Shell Oil are pushing to move forward with risky drilling in the Arctic Ocean. Yet, we do not have the know-how to clean up an oil spill in Arctic conditions. We have seen no advancement in oil spill response technology. Oil companies offer no reliable assurance that they know how to clean up a spill in ice-choked waters.

We also have a serious lack of scientific understanding of the region's biological resources or how to measure the effects of an oil spill on the Arctic ecosystem. Industrial noise, traffic, toxic discharges, and seismic activities could impact bowheads, walrus, fish and other subsistence resources.

America's Arctic waters are home to diverse wildlife, including walrus, bowhead and beluga whales. And the landmass of the Arctic is home to more than just stunning scenery, diverse wildlife and vast unspoiled wildness. For the indigenous Gwich'in and Inupiaq people, the region sustains a traditional, age-old way of life.

An oil disaster is occurring in Norway's waters right now. On February 17, a tanker ran aground near Norway's only marine reserve, leaking some of its 204,800 gallons of



Bull Walrus © Dale DeArmond

heavy fuel oil. Reports say oil has seeped into layers of ice, making it impossible to get out; ice, not oil, is filling up containment booms, and snowfall is masking the oil. Imagine such a spill in our Arctic Ocean. Norway has

already killed about 200 oil-coated shorebirds on the spot to put them out of their misery—imagine doing that to our endangered Arctic wildlife.

With so much at stake and so little certainty, we cannot allow new lease sales in the Chukchi or Beaufort Seas during the 2012-2017 Oil and Gas Leasing Program.

➔ What You Can Do (by March 31):

Tell the Obama administration to prevent dangerous new drilling off our Arctic coast: Email James Bennett, BOEMRE Chief, Department of Interior, at james.bennett@boemre.gov.

- Subject: "Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the new five-year Outer Continental Shelf oil and gas leasing program for 2012-2017."

In your own words, point out that, until issues such as the inability to clean-up an oil spill in the Arctic waters and the lack of science knowledge are addressed, the federal government cannot make informed decisions about whether to lease Arctic waters. Therefore no lease sales should be scheduled in the Arctic's Chukchi and Beaufort Seas. Include your full name and mail address. *Write by the March 31 Public Comment deadline!*

Thank you for helping preserve the integrity of America's Arctic. ♦

-- Lindsey Hajduk

Chapter election results

Thank you, Sierra Club Alaska Chapter members who voted by mail in our chapter and group elections. And thanks, also, to our volunteers willing to serve.

Irene Alexakos of Haines, Russ Maddox of Seward, and Mike O'Meara of Homer were re-elected to two year terms on the Alaska Chapter Executive Committee. This December, terms will expire for the other "at-large" Ex Comm members--Pam Brodie, Jack Hession, and Richard Hellard. In addition, the Executive Committee includes representatives chosen by the Chapter's regional groups: Mark Rorick from the Juneau Group (Southeast Alaska) and Andy Keller from the Denali Group (Fairbanks and Interior Alaska). The Knik Group seat (Anchorage and Southcentral AK) is currently vacant.

The Executive Committee re-elected Pam Brodie chair and Irene Alexakos secretary, and elected Mike O'Meara as vice chair; Patrick Fort continues to serve as treasurer. The Chapter Executive Committee meets monthly by teleconference, and welcomes input from Sierra Club members.

Sierra Club members of the Juneau Group re-elected Mark Rorick, Kevin Hood, and Layla Hughes to their Group Executive Committee. Denali Group members elected Douglas McIntosh, Nancy Kuhn, and Magali Vincent. ♦

-- Pamela Brodie Chapter chair

In Memoriam: Clifford Dale Lobaugh--the man who loved Admiralty Island

A founder of the Juneau Group of the Sierra Club, Dr. Clifford Dale Lobaugh, known as Cliff to his friends and family, passed away on Jan. 5, 2011. He was 74 years old.

Cliff was the first, and for many years, the only veterinarian in Southeast Alaska, and he spread his practice into the Yukon Territory and Northern British Columbia. He held weekend clinics in communities that needed a veterinarian, including communities that were not, to say the least, pro-environment. This was helpful, because in the 1970s Cliff was a leader in efforts to stop the largest timber sale in our nation's history, a 8.75 billion board feet sale to fuel a new pulp mill. This sale would have devastated Admiralty Island and much of the other lands adjacent to Juneau.

The pro loggers did hate Cliff's environmental stance, but as Cliff said, even land skimmers love their dogs, and therefore they needed him. So, as Cliff said also, as the only veterinarian in Southeast Alaska, he was insulated from the land skimmers' "Sierra Go Home" campaign.

Stopping a new pulp mill was not the end of Cliff's working to protect Admiralty Island and the Tongass National Forest. He led conservation efforts to seek Wilderness status for Admiralty Island, he worked to stop the devastation being done from the existing pulp mills, and he worked to get roadless-area protection for the Tongass, among a few of his successful efforts. For his leadership on all this, Cliff received the Sierra Club's Special Achievement Award in 1982.



Cliff speaks up for the Tongass

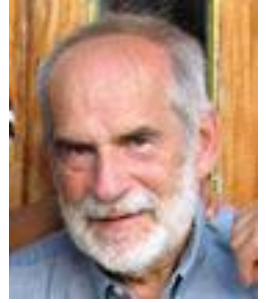
Cliff's passion for protecting Admiralty Island went beyond just stopping logging on the island. Cliff owned half of an old homestead parcel which is approximately 200 acres on the island. When he was asked to use it for a tourist destination point, in partnership with a tourist company, he refused to do it. Instead in the later years of his life he provided in his will that his land be put into a conservation easement to stop future development, but still allow his family to enjoy the place as he has.

Cliff loved his piece of the island and spent a lot of his time there pursuing his other high passions, story telling -- and gardening. He was a master gardener, fond of raising primroses, and was a member of the Primrose Society. Cliff gave presentations at local and state wide conferences, but he did not sell his primroses, he gave them away to whoever asked for them, including me. Not only is my backyard full of Cliff's primroses, they have spread into gardens all over Southeast Alaska. When spring comes and the primroses rise up from the ground, I am always reminded of Cliff. ♦

-- Mark Rorick

More thoughts of Cliff

"My first winter in Alaska, I worked for one month in the intern program in Juneau of the Alaska Environmental Lobby. Interns stayed with volunteer hosts... and Cliff and Sharron Lobaugh generously opened their home to me. I will always be grateful for their hospitality and treasure my opportunity to have known such a remarkable person and environmental leader as Cliff. This included a trip to Admiralty Island, and Cliff's cabin and garden." (Pam Brodie)



"Around the campfire on wilderness outings and in his Admiralty cabin, Cliff regaled his friends and guests with stories of his Alaska adventures. On Admiralty they were happy to work in his famous vegetable garden, and if lucky they got "woofed" by Cliff the brown bear in hiding just off the trail, all in fun of course. On behalf of his bear friends, Cliff strongly objected to the state-sponsored trophy brown bear hunting on Admiralty by resident and guided non-resident hunters, kept bear hunting off his acres, and proposed that Congress make Admiralty Island National Monument Wilderness a world-class brown-bear sanctuary." (Jack Hession)

"Cliff was a charming companion on the Copper River trip that Jack Hession led in summer of 2000. Cliff was the main oarsman and captain of one of our three rafts. It was he who discovered the huge fresh grizzly footprints in the sand where we walked by the river. Farther back, in 1991 I recall my one and only visit to Cliff's cabin on Admiralty: when he heard that a Sierra Club national outing I was co-leading would visit Juneau, he insisted we all come out to the island, where he put on a dazzling salmon feast for us." (Vicky Hoover)



Cliff rows past Childs Glacier, Copper River, July, 2000

Wilderness, Wildlife, and Predators on Unimak Island

A precedent-setting change in federal wildlife management efforts could soon begin on Unimak Island, the easternmost island of the Aleutian chain. Unimak Island, slightly larger than the state of Rhode Island, is located about 700 miles southwest of Anchorage. Part of the Alaska Maritime National Wildlife Refuge, it is the only island in the Aleutians that has naturally occurring populations of caribou, brown bears, and wolves. But declining caribou numbers led the Alaska Department of Fish & Game to propose helicopter shooting of wolves to reduce predation.

Wildlife activist Tina Brown called the proposal, "A precedent-setting travesty of wildlife mismanagement."

According to the ADF&G, the problem on Unimak Island is that there are not enough bull caribou to sustain the Unimak caribou herd (UCH). And also according to ADF&G, the solution is to kill wolves -- despite the fact that 98% of Unimak Island is congressionally designated wilderness. Wilderness lands are to be kept "untrammelled", which means uncontrolled, unmanipulated. In wilderness, nature should be free to follow its own course.

Because most lands on Unimak Island are part of the National Wildlife Refuge System, the US Fish & Wildlife Service (FWS) must approve any "wolf management" plans for the area. FWS prepared an EA (environmental assessment) with four alternatives for stopping the decline of the UCH. Alternative A was a "no action" alternative with no predator control; Alternative B represented ADF&G's proposed action to use helicopters to selectively shoot wolves preying on caribou calves; Alternative C was an adaptation of ADF&G's proposed action, but using fixed-wing aircraft with marksmen or ground-based teams dropped off by helicopter to shoot wolves preying on calves; Alternative D called for using ground-based teams to shoot wolves in the area of calving grounds, with support by reconnaissance airplanes.

The FWS set a public comment period from December 17, 2010, through January 31, 2011. The agency did not select a preferred alternative but chose to wait for the completion of comment on the EA, stating that it was interested in the public's views. The FWS response is critical.

This is federal land. On state lands the State of Alaska has long bowed to trophy hunting interests and used aerial killing of wolves -- although with little scientific backing,. But it has not yet been able to expand this policy to federal land - land that belongs not only to all Alaskans, but to all Americans. And, if the State of Alaska receives permission to conduct aerial killing of wolves on this parcel of federal land, then the door is open for aerial killing of wolves - and other predators such as bears -- on federal lands throughout the state -- and beyond.

ADF&G claims that local subsistence hunters need the caribou, but residents of False Pass, Unimak's only community, hunt most of their caribou on the Alaska mainland because the terrain there is less challenging.

Moreover, the diet of the residents in False Pass consists mainly of seafood. In 2000, for example, only 12 caribou were hunted by local residents, while 90 were killed by guided, nonresident (trophy) hunters.

The EA makes no mention of reducing predation by brown bears -- because brown bears, like bull caribou, are valuable to trophy hunters.



photo: © Johnny Johnson

While the UCH population plummeted dramatically from 2002 to 2009, from nearly 1,300 animals to about 400, ADF&G did not stop caribou hunting until

2009. Promptly reducing or halting hunting when numbers began to decline would have been prudent.

In the mid 1970s, the herd declined to a level even lower than it is now, and it recovered naturally. The UCH is even believed to have emigrated off the island entirely more than once in the last hundred years. Unimak Island is marginal habitat for caribou, on the fringe of suitable habitat for caribou in Alaska, so movement of the herd and fluctuation in its size is a natural, expectable occurrence. Indeed, Nancy Hoffman, manager of the Izembek National Wildlife Refuge which administers Unimak Island, stated: "With the recorded history of the Unimak herd and several documented extreme caribou population fluctuations (including one wild swing from 5,000 animals in 1975 to a few hundred in the early eighties), why is it now suddenly an emergency? We don't consider it to be an emergency. We don't see a crisis." (Quoted by Bill Sherwonit in Alaska Voices/Anchorage Daily News/January 28, 2011.)

The Alaska Chapter comments, written by Mark Rorick, opposed helicopter shooting and asked for a full Environmental Impact Statement due to the major policy change such action would herald. Sierra Club also asked ADF&G to consider an alternative of importing caribou bulls from elsewhere to augment the low numbers of bulls relative to cows.

The bottom line is that the State of Alaska has mismanaged the Unimak caribou herd. Therefore, it is targeting wolves--an important part of the natural ecosystem of Unimak Island--by urging the USFWS to manipulate wolf and caribou populations artificially in order to provide an unnatural surplus of caribou to benefit non-resident trophy hunters.

FLASH: as we go to press, we've just received notice that the Fish & Wildlife Service has selected the "No Action" Alternative of its EA. That means -- no helicopter shooting, no predator control. We're changing the "action" requested to: thank FWS, thank Mr. Salazar! -- and Alaskans, please help counter the aggressive pro predator control groups such as the Alaska chapter of Sportsmen for Fish and Wildlife who are sending messages opposing the FWS decision. See next page:

30th Anniversary of ANILCA is Time for Reflection

December 2, 2010 marked the 30th anniversary of President Carter's signing of the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA). It is an appropriate time to reflect on ANILCA and its significance.

Alaska has 373 million acres, all but a tiny part of which was in federal ownership upon passage of the statehood act in 1959. The act authorized Alaska to select 104.5 million acres out of the federal lands. The discovery of oil in Prudhoe Bay accelerated state land selections and led to the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act of 1971 (ANCSA). ANCSA created Native corporations and included a 44 million-acre settlement. Conservationists succeeded in including section 17(d)(2) in the 1971 law, which opened the door for the establishment of millions of acres of conservation lands.

With the Carter Administration and the emergence of congressional leaders willing to push a bill through the legislative process, the struggle for Alaska's conservation lands began in earnest in 1977. The Alaska Coalition, with Sierra Club a key player, was formed to generate public support.

The road to ANILCA was marked by many twists and

turns. The House passed strong legislation while the Senate did not act. The Senate failed to pass a bill before temporary protections expired in 1978. This triggered President Carter and his Secretary of the Interior, Cecil Andrus, to act administratively to protect these lands.

Two more years of work produced ANILCA. The bill protected 104.3 million acres of national parks, wildlife refuges, wilderness areas, wild rivers and other conservation units. It established subsistence management and use for local residents, further settled Native claims, created a study area on the coastal plain of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, doubled the size of the Arctic Refuge, and provided a subsidy for logging in the Tongass National Forest.

My involvement with ANILCA began in the mid-1970s, when I learned about Alaska conservation proposals. It was clear that there would never be an opportunity to protect land on this scale anywhere in the U.S. again. I grew up in Illinois, where only two percent of the land is in federal ownership and less than a tenth of a percent is protected as Wilderness. Urbanization and agribusiness dominate Illinois.

I organized a congressional district in Illinois, conducted outreach to Minnesota, mobilized college students in Washington and educated youth in Alaska. As the House voted on the bill, a bellicose Representative Don Young said "This [ANILCA] would never happen in New York or California." (New York hosts the nation's largest state park -- about the size of Denali -- and California has more national parks than Alaska -- and the largest one in the lower 48.)

On December 2, 1980, I observed from Juneau as President Carter signed ANILCA. Not only had Carter lost the election, the Senate changed parties. President-elect Reagan and the new congressional leaders opposed the idea of ANILCA. The decade of the environment ended.

ANILCA's accomplishments stand. In 1990 Congress amended the Tongass National Forest provisions of ANILCA, abolishing the logging subsidy and protecting more land. Attempts to open the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge to oil drilling have failed. The Refuge remains protected.

My life has taken me from the contested tundra on the Arctic Refuge coastal plain to the temperate rainforests of the Tongass Forest. One constant theme that I hear is the profound effect that these lands have had on people from all over the globe. ANILCA lands provide for a variety of recreation needs, biological services like clean drinking water, food, scientific study and for the intangible values that people tell me about as I work as a ranger and guide.

Fairbanksans Celia Hunter and Ginny Wood were instrumental in organizing the Alaska conservation movement in the ANILCA effort. Celia and Ginny said that Alaska would provide the world with the opportunity to experience wilderness values that have been lost elsewhere. The value of these lands only increases with time. ♦

-- Andy Keller, Fairbanks

Unimak Island wolves and caribou -- from previous page

WHAT YOU CAN DO

Please thank the Department of the Interior for ruling against helicopter-based wolf killing in Unimak Island Wilderness.

Explain briefly why this matters to you.

Honorable Secretary Ken Salazar, Department of the Interior, 1849 C Street, NW, Washington DC 20240

Or email to feedback@ios.doi.gov

Or call (202) 208-3100.

Also please thank Mr. Geoffrey L. Hazlett, the Alaska Regional Director of the Fish & Wildlife Service. Contact him at: geoff_hazlett@fws.gov.

Alaskans: please let Governor Parnell and Alaska's members of Congress know you support the FWS "no action" decision for Unimak Island's wolves.

Please send an email to staff of the following:

Governor Parnell's Chief of Staff: mike.nizich@alaska.gov

Sen. Lisa Murkowski: karen_knudson@murkowski.senate.gov

Rep. Don Young: erik.elam@mail.house.gov

Sen. Mark Begich: pamela.day@mail.house.gov

Talking Points:

1. The FWS decision on Unimak was based on science not politics.
2. Commercial trophy hunters, not residents, killed 75% of the mature Caribou bulls on Unimak in 2008.
3. The FWS approved other options to actively manage the caribou herd including transplanting bulls to the island from the nearby mainland.
4. The Unimak Island caribou population declined to the current level during the 1980s and the herd rebounded naturally. ♦

-- Tina M Brown, President Alaska Wildlife Alliance, member, Alaska Chapter Conservation Committee

Increasing Coal Exports cause new problems for Seward's Environment

As global demand for Alaska's low-rank coal has skyrocketed, in 2010 Alaska coal exports from Seward increased to over 800,000 tons, and now predictions are for exporting 1.1 - 1.2 million tons in 2011. The owner and operator of Seward's coal export facility, the Alaska Railroad and Usibelli Coal, (via its operating subsidiary Aurora Energy Services, Inc.) have decided that they not only need the Seward's current dock facility for exports, but they also intend to open an additional export facility to accommodate the increased demand. With recent floods crippling Australia's coal exports, Alaska intends to fill the void in Asian markets. There are currently three new coal mine proposals and plans for two new coal export facilities in Alaska.

With this increased volume have come additional strains on the community. We hear increased complaints regarding excessive noise and additional waiting at RR crossings along with the usual coal dust reports. Our scenic tourist destination and fishing community is becoming a coal town before our very eyes.

Background: With construction of the Seward coal export facility in 1984, the export of Alaska's low-rank coal began. There were high hopes of exporting enough coal to keep the facility at capacity and eventually replacing it with a larger export facility closer to the mine on Cook Inlet. Under the first operator the facility never generated enough sales to be profitable.

The original operator, Suneel, Inc. a subsidiary of Hyundai of Korea, had an extensive dust prevention system to keep coal dust emissions below 87 tons annually, as required by their Federal Air Permit. With sprinklers on the stockpiles and a baghouse ventilation system for the train unloading operation they did manage to keep the dust down. Before the Alaska Railroad took over, the outdoor plumbing for the sprinklers and spraybars froze and ruptured. Instead of replacing these necessary dust prevention devices, the Railroad petitioned the Environmental Protection Agency to redefine the facility from coal "processing" to coal "storage", which negated the need for the air permit that limited fugitive dust.

Within days of the Railroad and Aurora Energy's resumption of coal exports -- without pollution controls, Seward was covered with coal dust. Oversight transferred to the Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation. The state's fugitive dust regulation only requires that "reasonable precautions" be taken to prevent coal dust escapement.

So, we have spent the last four years debating what is and isn't reasonable and have made little improvement in containing coal dust. Estimates are that over 500 tons of coal dust blows from the two huge stockpiles annually. How can this be reasonable? The ADEC has focused on reducing dust from the coal during transport and ignored chronic and cumulative windblown dust from the stockpiles. Finally the EPA has begun re-evaluating the redefinition decision that removed limits on the dust emissions.

Although Seward now has the only operating coal export facility on the West coast, there are two new proposed coal export facilities in Washington State and one on Vancouver Island in

National Park Service proposes weakening protection for parks

The Alaska Region of the National Park Service is preparing an environmental assessment of a proposed rule change that would allow Alaska Natives to gather antlers, horns, and bones found in the field in the nine parks and preserves established by ANILCA that are open to subsistence hunting, trapping, fishing, and gathering by qualified local rural residents, both Natives and non-Natives. The EA is due out for public comment in early fall.

The proposal would not apply to the five pre-ANILCA national parks long closed to subsistence: Katmai, Glacier Bay, old Mt. McKinley NP core of Denali, Sitka, and Klondike, or to Kenai Fjords, the only new ANILCA-designated park closed to subsistence.

The proposed new rule is the Service's response to Native organizations' wanting to increase the supply of antlers, horns and bones for an expanded cottage industry. Under current subsistence regulations covering units open to subsistence, Alaska Natives can sell or barter handicraft items made from antlers, horns, and bones if these are from animals they have bagged in subsistence hunts on national park system lands.

Under current regulations, antlers, horns, and bones encountered in the field found lying on the ground cannot be legally gathered by anyone as they are an important source of calcium for park wildlife, and an asset valued by park visitors who may observe these natural objects in the field. If this rule change is adopted for the Alaska units, it could lead to requests for the same privilege from Native Americans in other states.

"Traditional" gathering of plants and minerals?

Meanwhile, in a related effort on the national level, the Service is currently considering allowing "traditional gathering" of plants and minerals in national parks by federally recognized tribes. What plants and minerals would be extracted is undisclosed at this point. Presumably, the five Alaska parks closed to subsistence would not be subject to the proposed gathering.

As a major departure from existing federal law governing the national park system, "traditional gathering" would require congressional approval, and would probably be preceded by a draft legislative environmental impact statement if the Obama Administration adopts the proposal as part of its legislative proposals to Congress. ♦

-- Jack Hession

British Columbia. These communities are studying the situation in Seward in order to avoid similar challenges. Seward offers them a great learning example of how weak regulations and poor design and even worse site selection can lead to epic issues. At least the Seward coal export facility is good for something. ♦

-- Russ Maddox

EPA eyes Pebble and gets involved

Recognizing the importance of the unique and precious salmon fisheries of Southwest Alaska's Bristol Bay, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) decided last month to review the environmental consequences of large scale developments in the Bristol Bay watershed, such as the proposed Pebble Mine—a massive gold and copper open pit mine which, if permitted, would be the largest open pit mine in the world. "The Bristol Bay watershed is essential to the health, environment and economy of Alaska Gathering data and getting public review now, before development occurs, just makes sense," said Dennis McLerran, Regional Administrator for EPA. The EPA review will focus on Nushagak and Kvichak river drainages, world class salmon producing rivers that flow downstream from the proposed Pebble gold, copper, and molybdenum mine.

The EPA decision to review in this case is unusual because the Pebble Partnership has not yet submitted a permit application. EPA is responding to a petition from several Southwest Alaska tribes, Native corporations, and fishing organizations that oppose the Pebble project. The petitions had also asked that EPA take the additional step of blocking mining waste disposal into downstream waterways. Although the Pebble mine would be located on state land, the federal agency does have the power to stop such waste disposal under the Clean Water Act. Such a prohibition -- which would effectively block the mine development -- has rarely been used since the law was passed in 1972. The EPA declined to consider an outright veto at this time, but left open the possibility in the future.

The EPA intends to distribute its peer-reviewed scientific study for public comment in six to nine months. Stay tuned for further developments.

-- Pamela Brodie

Background on Pebble:

Pebble would be located on State lands in the headwaters of two of the largest salmon-spawning rivers feeding Bristol Bay, the world's greatest wild salmon producing region. The Nushagak-Mulchatna River system is home to the world's largest runs of Chinook, or king, salmon, and the Kvichak River in the Lake Iliamna watershed is historically the world's largest sockeye producer, according to the Alaska Department of Fish and Game. Renowned for sport fishing, this is the only designated Trophy Rainbow Trout region in Alaska. Several sport fishing and hunting lodges add significantly to the local economy. Villages such as Nondalton, Iliamna, and Newhalen depend on the Mulchatna caribou herd and on the salmon runs for subsistence. Even tiny quantities of copper are toxic to salmon survival.

The Pebble Partnership (the Canadian firm Northern Dynasty Minerals Ltd, plus Anglo American PLC and Rio Tinto Limited) hopes to build its vast mining operation in a mineral-rich caldera covering about 500 square miles. The Pebble prospect is estimated to contain around 26 million ounces of gold and 16 billion pounds of copper. The pit would be 2.5 miles long by 1.5 miles wide, and more than 1500 feet deep. ♦

FWS eyes a Vision for future of Refuge System

A U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service initiative called [serving the Future: Wildlife Refuges and the Next Generation](#) seeks to involve the public in creating a vision for what the [National Wildlife Refuge System](#) should become over the next ten years. All concerned citizens are invited to provide ideas for key conservation management priorities. After the Vision is finalized in July 2011, it will guide the way our Refuge System is managed for a long time. Since the vast majority of our entire 150 million acre National Wildlife Refuge System is in Alaska, this vision process is especially relevant for Alaskans

On February 24, Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar issued a vision draft document for the Refuge System. You have until **April 22, 2011 – Earth Day** -- to review and comment on the draft document to the Fish & Wildlife Service, (FWS) which manages the Refuge System.

Wilderness and Wildlife Refuges

The draft vision contains several wilderness recommendations. On page 21 of the draft document, recommendation 2.26 calls for updating the Wilderness Stewardship Policy to address climate change. Recommendation 2.27 would require wilderness reviews for all national wildlife refuges within two years and would have refuges recommend wilderness designation of appropriate areas in the next round of comprehensive plans.

Of the Refuge System's 150 million acres, designated Wilderness Areas comprise 21 million acres. In addition, 21 refuges contain proposed wilderness; although there has been no new refuge wilderness designation in 20 years. New wilderness reviews on refuges may yield more recommended units. In thinking about wilderness stewardship and the potential to protect wild places in Refuges what are your ideas? What are the benefits of having areas on wildlife refuges designated as wilderness? Let the Fish and Wildlife Service know your thoughts for how the Refuge System might protect wilderness quality lands into the future. And, how can FWS help the public better appreciate the value of Wildlife Refuges?

➡ **What you can do:** Join the discussion about the Refuge System and the vision process at the website, <http://americaswildlife.org>. A partnership between the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the National Wildlife Refuge Association, this website is a forum where you can give voice to your vision for the Refuge System. Comment on the vision simply by posting your comments to the document pages; or download a PDF copy of the document and send your comments to the email account, comment@americaswildlife.org. Another option is to go to the website and give your "bold idea". This "bold ideas" feature is a fun, creative way to speak up and to vote on ideas posted by others. *Your voice matters!* ♦

-- Maribeth Oakes

(consultant for the National Wildlife Refuge Association and former DC director of the Sierra Club's public land team.)

Coal Candy: Seward Elementary School Field Trip

In February, third and fourth grade students from Seward Elementary School went on a field trip to complement their studies on energy. They visited Seward's new wind turbine at Alaska Vocational Technical Institute, the City of Seward's new back-up diesel generator, and the Alaska Railroad and Aurora Energy's coal export facility.

The Alaska Railroad and Aurora Energy Services, Inc. gave gift bags to the students on the field trip, and this is where the problems began. This "gift bag" included a piece of "coal candy" wrapped in cellophane, a lump of coal in a sandwich bag, a packet of "reclamation seeds", a postcard, and refrigerator magnets and lapel pins emblazoned with "I Love Alaska Clean Coal". It didn't take much effort to learn that the school had not screened these gifts before the Railroad and Aurora passed them out to our children.

It also didn't take much investigation to learn that the seed packet included invasive species, one of which, rangelander alfalfa, is such a big problem locally that volunteers have been pulling it for years in an attempt to keep it out of nearby Kenai Fjords National Park. (Even though rangelander alfalfa may be a useful agricultural crop, it quickly outpaces our native plants and takes over.)

The candy had no ingredients on its label, so

children with food allergies were challenged. A quick review of the Material Safety Data Sheet for coal confirmed what should be common knowledge. Coal is toxic if ingested, inhaled, or absorbed; it is hazardous because it is combustible, sometimes igniting spontaneously, and coal dust can be explosive.

After three weeks of being urged, the School District finally sent a memo home with the 75 students who went on the field trip, directing their parents to dispose of the coal and seeds in the garbage. The school district informed parents that all gifts would be screened in the future. Luckily no real harm has been reported. Without being given directions, my nine year old grand-daughter did want to burn the coal in the kitchen sink before her mother took it away. Without ingredients on the label she knew she couldn't eat the candy due to her food allergies.

This combination of items given out with zero instructions is sinister in my opinion. This is exactly why we teach our children never to take candy from strangers. It is abhorrent that the Railroad and Aurora would take such advantage of the teachers and students by passing out this bag of dirty tricks obviously designed to mislead children into believing coal is benign, not harmful. It's bad enough that we have to see and hear endless ads and commercials erroneously proclaiming coal's "clean-ness", but we should not tolerate them polluting our children's minds. ♦

-- Russ Maddox,

Alaska Chapter Executive Committee, Seward Resurrection Bay Conservation Alliance Board

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