



Sierra Borealis

alaska report

SIERRA CLUB ALASKA CHAPTER
DECEMBER 2013



A December anniversary: 35 years since Jimmy Carter's monumental Alaskan land withdrawals

On December 1, 1978, President Jimmy Carter established 15 national monuments in Alaska covering 56 million acres of public lands which Congress was then considering for addition to the national park and wilderness systems. He and Secretary of the Interior Cecil Andrus also withdrew temporarily under the Federal Land Policy and Management Act another 40 million acres the lawmakers were reviewing for possible addition to the national wildlife refuge system.

Carter felt compelled to act because, in that same month, Congress's previous withdrawals of most of these same federal lands for study and potential addition to the national

conservation systems were due to expire. The withdrawals had been made in sections 17(2) and 17(d-1) of the 1971 Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act.



photo: R. Peter Henschell

Gates of the Arctic, now a national park, was one of President Carter's 1978 national monuments

As the December 1978 deadline approached, House and Senate principals and Secretary Andrus gathered behind closed doors to try for a compromise between the House-passed Udall-Anderson bill, HR 39, and the Senate Committee's pro-development substitute heavily influenced by the late Ted Stevens (R-AK)--and which was awaiting a Senate vote. They reached a deal, which environmentalists found unacceptable, but it was fortunately blocked at the last minute by outgoing Senator Mike Gravel (D-AK), who threatened to filibuster it.

Preserving the options of Congress

Anticipating a move by opponents, President Carter was prepared well ahead of the deadline to set aside the monuments and potential refuge lands. He had the monument proclamations and refuge withdrawals ready on his desk. The President also had the strong support of several representatives and senators of both parties, including the sponsors of the House-passed bill-- the late Rep. Morris K. Udall (D-AZ), the late Rep. John Anderson (R-IL), the late Rep. John F. Seiberling, (D-OH), the late Rep. (and soon

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http://www.loc.gov/pictures/resource/cph.3b52090/



be senator) Paul Tsongas (D-MA) -- who urged him to preserve the opportunity for Congress to complete work on the competing bills.

The anniversary of the Carter withdrawals sets the stage for an upcoming celebration for ANILCA, which is approaching its own 35th anniversary. On December 2, 1980, President Jimmy Carter, flanked by Udall, Seiber-

ling, Tsongas, Andrus, and other key members of Congress, signed the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA) in the East Room of the White House in a ceremony also attended by members of the Alaska Coalition of conservationists, including Sierra Club. The joyous occasion was only slightly marred by sour remarks by Senator Stevens, who vowed that the fight was not over.

ANILCA gave President Carter's 1978 monuments and refuge withdrawals, all executive actions, statutory protection, along with the approximately 27 million acres of pre-ANILCA wildlife refuges and two large national monuments established by previous presidential executive actions. This meant that any changes to the Act would now require legislation signed by the President.

Since 1980, thanks to the support of ANILCA by citizens throughout the nation, the Act has survived major attacks on its integrity, such as bills to open the *de facto* wilderness coastal plain of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge to oil and gas leasing. And regular attempts by the Alaska congressional delegation to revoke or water down other important provisions of the Act have been rebuffed.

Here are the 15 national monuments President Carter proclaimed, with their final designations and agency jurisdictions. All were subsequently accepted by Congress. All are national park system units except as noted:

- Admiralty Island National Monument, Forest Service
- Aniakchak National Monument
- Becharof National Wildlife Refuge, US Fish and Wildlife Service
- Bering Land Bridge National Preserve
- Cape Krusenstern National Monument
- Denali National Park and Preserve
- Gates of the Arctic National Park and Preserve
- Kenai Fjords National Park
- Kobuk Valley National Park
- Lake Clark National Park and Preserve
- Misty Fjords National Monument, Forest Service
- Noatak National Preserve
- Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve
- Yukon-Charley Rivers National Preserve
- Yukon Flats National Wildlife Refuge, Fish and Wildlife Service. ❖

-- the editorial team

Planning for Chugach National Forest is underway: *Be part of the effort*

How much do you love the Chugach National Forest? If you've ever passed from Anchorage into the Kenai Peninsula, to Prince William Sound, or to the Copper River Delta you've visited the Chugach—and very many Alaskans have. The proximity of the Chugach to the Anchorage area where the majority of Alaska residents live and their reliance on this forest for recreation explain why it's so important to have Alaskans involved in the forest's new management plan. We need involvement of citizens who care about long range preservation of the forest's wildness, so that ecosystem values are preserved, as diverse uses are addressed.

You may remember the last round of planning for the Chugach finished in 2002. We now have another chance to make sure the Chugach becomes the Forest Service's shining example of new management for the 21st century. Working under new planning regulation, the Forest Service must look at the entire ecosystem as a whole and evaluate how to manage healthy populations of diverse plants and wildlife while preparing for and addressing the effects of climate change. (see *Sierra Borealis*, Sept 2013.)

Under the new agency planning rules, this planning process has three phases: assessment, plan development and revision, and monitoring. We're currently in the assessment phase, in which forest resources and issues are evaluated to determine what changes are needed from the previous plan. The Forest Service has already held a number of public meetings throughout Southcentral Alaska – in 2012 and in 2013 -- to hear from the public about what issues are most important. Now the Service will examine the best available information on the current forest conditions and how the forest is used. Over the next two years, it will revise the 2002 management plan and then set up a monitoring process.

The most recent public meeting took place on November 20 at Forest Service headquarters in downtown Anchorage. Just before the meeting, Sierra Club hosted a party at our Anchorage office for about 35 people, who then went together over to the Forest Service office

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photo: Betsy Beardisley

I the Chugach National Forest

--from page 2 for their public hearing. It was a free-flow process with breakout groups, but in a packed room of more than 80 people it seemed over half were supportive of conservation goals to prioritize recreation, wilderness recommendation, and climate change in the planning process.

Many thanks to all who attended the party and the meeting. It is important for us to stay involved during each step of the plan, especially if we want to preserve the forest's wild areas from development and to ensure meaningful management approaches to identify and address the effects of climate change. In a coastal forest like the Chugach, there are a lot of ways climate change will affect the forest, including sea level rise, glacier and snow and ice melt, habitat composition changes, and ocean acidification.

The Nellie Juan-College Fjord Wilderness Study Area

It's hard to believe that Congress has never designated a single acre of the Wild Chugach as wilderness. Instead, coal and hard rock mining, oil and gas development, road building, logging, and industrial-scale tourism operations are having an impact on the wild lands and wildlife habitat. The planning process is a unique opportunity to urge a wilderness recommendation for the vast portion—2.1 million acres-- of the Chugach that has been set aside by Congressional mandate as a Wilderness Study Area. That means it must be managed in such a way to maintain its wilderness qualities until Congress makes up its mind whether to designate it as wilderness. An agency recommendation for wilderness can be very influential with members of Congress. We would like the revised Forest Plan to recommend all of the Nellie Juan-College Fjord WSA as wilderness. The 2002 plan left out considerable portions from wilderness recommendation. *It is time for the Forest Service to do better.* That way the wild Chugach Forest can continue to nurture Alaskans for generations to come.

Back ground on the Chugach

The Chugach National Forest is the world's northernmost temperate rainforest. The Chugach, south of Anchorage, covers much of the Kenai Peninsula, Prince William Sound, and the Copper River Delta area. It is our nation's second-largest forest, second only to the Tongass. Of its 5.5 million acres, 98 percent of the forest is roadless with just 90 miles of roads, mostly in the Kenai Peninsula, and the forest is almost entirely rugged mountain ranges, tidewater glaciers, steep fjords, forested islands, salmon runs, and more.

There are more than 7 million visitors to the Chugach each year, and their activities pump many millions of dollars into Alaska's economy. From kayaking to fishing to hiking to skiing, there are endless ways to experience the Chugach.

The Chugach supports some of the richest salmon runs, including the prized Copper River red salmon, and is home to black bear, gray wolves, Kenai wolverines, lynx, sea lions, orcas, and more than five million shorebirds.

This long-term process of forest planning has just



photo: Lindsey Hajduk

begun; there is now an opportunity before *December 13th*, to let the Forest Service know what you want. ❖

➔ WHAT YOU CAN DO:

before December 13th **Email the Forest Service at:**
chugachplanrevision@fs.fed.us

Please express your concern for preserving the important wild places and vital salmon habitat on the Chugach.

Here are specific requests you can make in your written comments—referring mainly to the Wilderness Study Area:

1. Forest Service recommendation for wilderness for all of the WSA would fix its flawed 2002 Wilderness Recommendation, which excluded important parts of the WSA from the wilderness recommendation.
2. Particularly glaring omissions were Knight Island, Glacier Island, Nellie Juan Lake, and the upper Columbia Glacier basin; these are all notable for their wilderness character and should be recommended as wilderness as part of the current Forest Plan Revision.
3. The Forest Service should fulfill its obligation to manage this area protectively as wilderness until Congress acts on the WSA.
4. Wilderness character in western Prince William Sound is highly valued by residents and businesses, yet increasing population and other pressures threaten the area's natural resources.
5. Recommending Wild river status would be valuable for the world-class salmon rivers of the Kenai Peninsula, including the Twentymile River complex, Snow and Resurrection Rivers. ❖

--Lindsey Hajduk

Alaskans energize on plans to herald 50th Anniversary of Wilderness

Plans are being laid for wilderness anniversary celebrations during 2014 in major Alaska cities:

From Fairbanks, Frank

Keim reports that organizing work is proceeding for wilderness-focused classes next spring at Osher Life Long Learning Institute at the University of Alaska Fairbanks. In April, four classes will be taught by Roger Kaye, Fran Mauer, Bill Brody and Frank Keim.

An Audubon presentation by Roger Kaye and Fran Mauer is planned in March at the Noel Wien Community Library, and further presentations at Beaver Sports, Gulliver's Books, etc. are also on the horizon. This is a part of a much larger program which will culminate in Earth Week with a celebration event at UAF. Slight variations of these events will probably be repeated in autumn of 2014.

For more news on Fairbanks events, contact Andy Keller at 907-455-7083, or amkeller@alaska.edu.

In Anchorage the enthusiastic group of agency and conservation group representatives who are meeting regularly to organize events to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Wilderness Act plan a Wilderness Forum to be held at Anchorage's Loussac Library theater. Two panels are planned for this special anniversary forum, to take place on Tuesday, April 15th, 2014. First there will be an artist panel with participants highlighting the benefits of using art to inspire people to care about wild places, followed by a 20 minute discussion. A second panel will share perspectives on the value of wilderness from different viewpoints, possibly including



from federal agencies, youth, economists, subsistence hunters, Alaska Native peoples, faith community, biologists, climate change specialists, recreation industry. This

should be an exciting and thought-provoking event.

Got ideas for the 50th in Alaska? Call Lindsey Hajduk at Sierra Club's Anchorage office at 907-276-4088 and volunteer! Give a hand to wilderness. ❖

Court Upholds Shell's Oil Spill Plans Despite Serious Questions

The U.S. District Court in Alaska ruled that the Bureau of Safety and Environmental Enforcement complied with the law when it approved Shell Oil's plans for preventing and cleaning up an oil spill in the Chukchi and Beaufort seas. The decision, issued in August, stems from a lawsuit filed by a coalition of conservation organizations including the Sierra Club, represented by Earthjustice.

The ruling doesn't change the fact that, as Shell's misadventures last year showed, the Arctic Ocean is no place for rosy-eyed optimism. In fact, until and unless clean-up technology has been proven effective, reliable, and benign in the Arctic, it's no place to drill at all. It is time for the Administration to reassess whether to allow offshore drilling in this pristine environment in the first place.

The ruling upholds spill plans based on Shell Oil's assumption that it will clean up 95 percent of any spilled oil before it contacts the shoreline—a level of success that has never before been achieved. Even in the Gulf of Mexico, with easy access to substantial response resources, skimming recovery efforts during the Deepwater Horizon disaster recovered just 3 percent of the total amount of oil released.



© Dale DeArmond

The ruling also validates the government's decision not to follow either the National Environmental Policy Act or the Endangered Species Act before it approved the plans.

"The Arctic's unpredictable ice, turbulent storms, and relentless currents make oil spill containment and clean-up impossible and response plans like the one the court upheld little more than works of fiction," said Irene Alexakos, Sierra Club member in Alaska. "The U.S. is not acting as a global leader on climate change by letting oil companies into the worst place on Earth to drill and pump more carbon into the atmosphere.

"Shell can't even keep its drilling ships from running aground. The idea that they have a viable plan to contain a spill doesn't pass the laugh test, so it's hard to see how the plan meets legal standards. Companies should not be allowed to get away with obviously false claims about safety."

The Sierra Club and other conservation organizations brought this case seeking to ensure that industry and regulators meet the law's requirements to ask tough questions and reach defensible positions before companies are allowed to drill—and to ensure that operators are prepared to mount an effective cleanup in the event of a spill. The court's decision is a setback, but we will continue to push for responsible planning and stringent enforcement of legal protections.

Shell has recently announced that it will attempt to drill for oil in the Alaskan Arctic again in 2014. (See article next page.) ❖

-- Irene Alexakos

Arctic Drilling: too risky-- Keep Shell out of America's Polar Bear Seas

Shell oil is at it again with its sights set on the Arctic Ocean. After its disastrous summer in 2012, Shell has just submitted a new exploration plan for 2014. At the same time, the Obama administration was also seeking public comment for oil (deadline on Dec. 3) for future oil and gas lease sales in the Chukchi Sea, in the



photo: USFWS

western Arctic Ocean—where Shell messed up last year and wants to do the same next year. Instead, we must urge the Obama administration to refuse Shell's exploration plan and offer no new lease sales in the entire Arctic Ocean.

America's Arctic is a place like no other. Its unique conditions—extreme weather, long periods of darkness and remoteness, make it both extremely harsh and fragile. Here sea ice meets the northern edge of the continent, and animals congregate in great numbers. In addition to polar bears, this bountiful zone is home to millions of migratory birds, walrus, beluga whales, and endangered bowhead whales.

As Shell found out in 2012, drilling in the Arctic Ocean comes with a distinctive set of risks. (See **Sierra Borealis**, Sept and Dec 2012). Those risks to the world far outweigh any potential gains to the company. Oil from the Arctic Ocean would be just a drop in the bucket of our nation's energy needs, but the impact of drilling in this region would be far reaching.

Shell's last unsuccessful attempt in 2012 to drill in the Arctic's Chukchi Sea demonstrated clearly just how unprepared and ill-equipped oil companies are to drill in the Arctic. There is nothing to lend credence to the idea that Shell, or any other company, can drill safely in the inhospitable conditions of the Arctic. History has shown that where there is drilling there are oil spills. Such spills in the Arctic would cause irreparable damage and be almost impossible to clean up. *Next year will mark 25 years since the Exxon-Valdez ran aground, and oil can still be found on Alaska beaches.*

But the risks extend beyond a devastating oil

spill that would jeopardize wildlife and Native subsistence communities. The Arctic acts as a refrigerator for the northern hemisphere. Tapping into and burning the oil from the Arctic Ocean will pump dangerous amounts of carbon pollution into the air, worsening climate change. It will also coat Arctic ice surfaces with black, heat-absorbing soot, further speeding the melting of ice that is already at record low levels, in an Arctic that is already warming twice as fast as the rest of the planet. The effects of the melting of Arctic ice can be seen in rising sea levels in coastal areas from New Orleans to Miami and in a sharp global increase in extreme weather events. The faster we lose Arctic ice the more difficult we make our climate challenges.

Whether or not the U.S. drills in the Arctic will have major impact on the global effort to address climate change. One of the best ways we can slow climate change is to limit the amount of fossil fuels we burn, and an effective way to do that is not to open up new areas to intensive drilling. Drilling in the Arctic Ocean could unlock twice as much carbon pollution as

The faster we lose Arctic ice the more difficult we make our climate challenges.

the nation will save over the next decade with President Obama's new vehicle fuel efficiency standards.

The president's climate plan and his recent executive order on climate preparedness have spelled out the administration's stated commitment to combating climate change. As part of the executive order the president called on federal agencies to reduce the sources of climate change. If the Administration is serious about addressing climate, halting leasing and drilling in the Arctic Ocean is the place to start. The Arctic's dirty fuels should be kept in the ground.

Cleaner energy and transportation options are here now. We don't need to continue investing in fuels of the past. ❖

-- Dan Ritzman



photo: lefteye.com

A place like no other

Forest Service to Reevaluate Big Thorne Timber Sale due to effects on wolves & deer

Book Review

Pilgrim's Wilderness by Tom Kizzia

On September 30, the Forest Service announced that it will require a more critical review on Southeast Alaska's Big Thorne timber project before the agency can move forward. Big Thorne is the largest proposed timber sale in the Tongass since the pulp mill days. The decision follows an administrative appeal filed by the Greater Southeast Alaska Conservation Community and requires the Forest Service to reexamine the impacts of such large-scale logging on Prince of Wales Island (POW) on the deer and Alexander Archipelago wolf populations.

This project would be the largest timber cutting project on the Tongass in 20 years, taking 6,200 acres of old growth (trees up to 800 years old, 100 feet tall, and 12 feet in diameter) from POW. That is -- 120 million board feet from an island that has already suffered extensive logging over the past six decades. An island that is home to endemic wildlife species found nowhere else in the world.

The administrative appeal included the expert declaration of Dave Person, a former Alaska Department of Fish & Game biologist with more than 22 years of experience studying Alexander Archipelago wolves on POW. Most of his studies occurred within the Big Thorne project area. Regional Forester Beth Pendleton cited Person's conclusion that "the Big Thorne timber sale, if implemented, represents the final straw that will break the back of a sustainable wolf-deer predator-prey ecological community on Prince of Wales Island..." Her letter states, "This is new information that I cannot ignore."

The response to the appeal requires significant review of the timber project before it can move forward, including cooperative engagement between the Tongass National Forest and the Interagency Wolf Task Force to evaluate whether Dr. Person's statement represents "significant new circumstances or

information relevant to" cumulative effects on wolves (including both direct mortality and habitat.

Many endemic species found on POW exist on only a small percentage of islands on the Tongass and nowhere else in the world. Such species include the Prince of Wales Island flying squirrel, the spruce grouse, the Haida

ermine, and potentially the Pacific marten, which was only recently discovered on nearby Dall Island.

While this is a good decision, an even better choice would be to drop the project permanently and refocus priorities away from logging. "If there's one government program that should stay shut permanently, it's the selling of our country's publicly owned forest to timber companies. We hope the Forest Service will come to its senses and drop it for good," said Irene Alexakos, long time Tongass resident and Alaska Chapter ExCom member in Haines. ❖

-- Irene Alexakos

This spellbinding true story of a family living in the Alaska Wilderness has become a national best seller, and with good reason. It is eloquently written by long-time Alaskan writer and journalist Tom Kizzia, with a story that would be unbelievable were it not true.

Robert Hale, born to a family of wealth and privilege in Texas, married the teenaged daughter of John Connally, who was later to become governor of Texas. Within a few weeks the pregnant girl was dead of a gunshot wound, under suspicious circumstances. In his thirties, after several more brief marriages, Hale married another teenaged girl and reinvented himself as "Papa Pilgrim," a fundamentalist Christian living "off the land" in remote mountains in New Mexico and perfecting his impressive talents for manipulation.

By the time he came to the attention of then Anchorage Daily News reporter Tom Kizzia, he and his wife and their fourteen (later fifteen) children had moved to a private inholding surrounded by Wrangell-St. Elias National Park, and he had gone to battle with the National Park Service by bulldozing a road through the national park to his home, without permission.

The "Pilgrims" cut a romantic figure, with their photogenic children on horseback, gathering their food by hunting and fishing, singing and playing country music in beautiful harmonies, with Papa looking like an old testament prophet with his long grey beard. They instantly became celebrities of the national inholders' movement fighting Park regulations throughout the West. Others on the Right were less enthralled with a seventeen member family that came to Alaska for the Permanent Fund Dividend checks the state hands out to each resident from oil revenues, and who supplemented their income with welfare and handouts from supporters. Papa had a knack for dividing people against each other to his own advantage, and soon the little village of McCarthy at the entrance to the park divided into the pro- and anti-Pilgrim factions. In time, even Pilgrim's supporters began to see signs of his dark side. There was the fact that the children, some now adults, had never attended school and could not read. And there were the bruises. Papa Pilgrim surfaced in the news again, now a fugitive from justice -- not for his tangles with the Park Service but accused by his own children of appalling physical and sexual abuse.

With family interviews and court testimony, Kizzia provides us not only a page-turning true life thriller of increasing horror, but also a moving story that provokes deep questions about personal freedom, the power of government, the power of religion, the criminal mind vs. mental illness, and the influence of upbringing on human

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Spruce grouse

EPA takes public input on carbon pollution standards

Alaskans speak up for clean air

The first week of November, I flew to Seattle for one of the most important EPA hearings of my lifetime. Seattle hosted one of eleven listening sessions held across the country to collect input from the public on the carbon pollution standards being proposed by the Environmental Protection Agency.

When I last lived in Washington DC, I attended congressional hearings on the American Clean Energy and Security Act of 2009 (ACES). ACES would have established an emissions trading plan, but it ultimately failed in the Senate. Since that failure from the Obama administration, some states began action on climate change on their own. This has provided political support for the administration, encouraging them to act without Congress, using the Clean Air act to reduce air and carbon pollution.

These EPA listening sessions were the first real national move forward. I arrived in Seattle joined by two other Alaskans, Christina Liakos, from Palmer, and Carson Chavana, from Anchorage. Christina, Carson, and I have been working with a local coalition, Alaskans First, to keep our state from becoming the newest leader in coal exports. With six proposed coal mines within an hour's drive of Anchorage, there is a lot at stake for Alaskans in achieving stronger national carbon pollution standards.

Coal and gas-fired power plants hurt our communities and our climate. They are one of the worst sources of climate pollution in the United States, and until now, they've been allowed to pollute without limits and thus without cost to the industry. With a free ride until now, the coal industry has its sights set for Alaska and has shown growing interest in developing Alaska's coal resources for export to overseas markets. Fortunately, if the required clean air protections are strong enough, then coal companies will no longer get a free pass to pollute. They won't be able to dump unlimited amounts of climate pollution into our air any more. In addition, these safeguards will protect families, such as those in Fairbanks, from dangerous air pollution like dirty soot and

Book Review: Pilgrim's Wilderness -- from page 6

nature. A shocking story that delves into the depths of human depravity ends as a triumph of courage and decency by children who seemed to have nothing to help them out of their father's nightmarish personal cult.

This book carries a special poignancy for long time Sierra Club activists in Alaska, California and Nevada (including myself), for Tom Kizzia interweaves the story of the Pilgrim family with something of his own story, as he dealt with the death by cancer of his own young wife, the much loved Sierra Club organizer Sally Kabisch. ❖

-- reviewed by Pamela Brodie



Photo: Laura Comer.

Christina Liakos, Alaskans First, sharing her personal story on Fairbanks air quality at the Seattle EPA hearing

the smog that triggers asthma attacks, and they would protect all Alaskan fish from toxic mercury.

At every stage – from mining, transportation, combustion, and disposal – coal development threatens human health, clean air and water in Alaska. Alaska has roughly half of the nation's coal reserves, nearly 1/8th of the world's reserves. Several corporations have already submitted proposals to strip mine through our salmon streams and forests.

With these facts in hand, in Seattle Christina, Carson, and I took seats in the front of the hearing room, nearest to EPA Region 10 Administrator, Dennis McLerran. The 180-person hearing room was at standing room only right at the beginning of the hearing. We each took to the stand testifying to protect our state's strong fishing economy, our way of life, and the Native Alaskan communities' right to survive. More than 210 individual citizens were there, calling on the EPA to put forward strong, just carbon standards for the number one source of climate change – power plants.

This event was one of many exciting opportunities that my new job as Sierra Club Beyond Coal campaign organizer gives me to help fight the damage that coal extraction does to our environment and to America's public health. ❖



WHAT YOU CAN DO:

Add your testimony calling for strong, just carbon regulations on existing power plants by emailing CarbonPollutionInput@EPA.gov.

Please send your email before the end of this year!

-- Laura Comer

State's war on wolves spreads to Denali National Park

Wolf viewing has drastically diminished in the park

Denali National Park and Preserve News Release

Release Date: November 26, 2013

Contact: Kris Fister, kris_fister@nps.gov, 907-683-9583

Wolf Viewing Declining in Denali National Park

DENALI PARK, Alaska: For a third consecutive year, National Park Service (NPS) researchers have found that visitors traveling in buses on the Denali Park Road have had significantly declining opportunities to see wolves. In a random sample of 80 bus trips this summer, wolves were seen on three occasions, or about 4 percent of the trips. By contrast, in the three previous years the percentages were 12 percent (2012), 21 percent (2011) and 44 percent (2010).

NPS biologists gather data on the wolf packs that range on the north side of the Alaska Range by radio tracking, and have documented the decrease in the number of wolves that den and roam in closer proximity to the road in the eastern half of the park, as well as a decline in the overall number of wolves in Denali north of the Alaska Range.

The decline of wolf numbers has not translated to larger numbers of viewed prey species, the research data shows. The proportion of bus trips where bears, moose, caribou and sheep were seen varies by year, but none show the steady decline found with wolves. "We are just beginning to learn about the factors, such as pack disruption, that play a role in magnifying the impacts of individual wolf losses on viewability," said Dr. Philip Hooge, Assistant Superintendent for Resources, Science, and Learning.

Spring counts of wolves in the packs north of the Alaska Range in the national park and preserve went from 66 in 2012 to 55 in 2013, which is the lowest level documented since counts began in 1986. Hooge said that while this low number has impacts on the visitor experience and may have ecosystem effects, the population remains viable.

(extract from press release.)

In its news release (see side bar) the National Park Service announces significant reduction in wolf viewing for Denali National Park visitors in the last three years and explains why most visitors to the park will be very lucky if they spot a wolf. Wolf hunters and trappers operating on state lands bordering the park are bagging park wolves that "...often leave the park to follow migrating prey species such as caribou." Within the park, prey species are not in decline, and natural mortality can't account for the dramatic decline in wolf numbers.

A partial breakthrough favoring park wolves was in effect during 2000-2010 when the State agreed to prohibit wolf hunting and trapping on some of its lands adjacent to the park, including acreage in the adjacent state lands known as the "wolf townships". Although a step forward, the buffer zone provided by the state lands was found to be insufficient. In 2010, pointing to NPS surveys indicating that additional state-owned wolf habitat was needed, park supporters and the NPS asked the State Board of Game to expand the buffer zone.

In response, the Game Board, dominated by zealous advocates of predator control for wolves and bears, revoked the existing buffer zone and put off any consideration of a new zone to 2016.

Responding to the Board's action, a coalition of wildlife organizations led by Earth Oasis, an Anchorage environmental group headed by retired University of Alaska professor Dr. Richard Steiner, is advocating an emergency closure of wolf hunting and trapping on the State's wolf habitat.

The coalition is also urging the State and the Interior Department to explore an exchange of interests in land. Under this scenario the NPS would acquire a permanent easement on the state-owned wolf habitat, including the wolf townships and land east of the park in the Nenana River Canyon area, where wolf hunting and trapping would be prohibited. In return, the State would acquire a permanent easement on other federal lands in which wolf hunting and trapping would presumably be permitted.

The coalition's proposal is an option worth considering, provided any easement granted the State would exempt Denali National Park and Preserve and other national conservation system units. Other options include a land exchange not including Denali National Park land, and an exchange using federal assets other than land. It is not in the national interest to allow state easements on CSU units for wolf hunting and trapping or any other use.

Protecting Denali wolves not a new issue

How to protect the park's wolves when they move outside the park is not a new issue. During the third (1970-74) term of former governor Bill Egan, the National Park Service approached the State with a proposed land exchange designed to add approximately three state-owned "wolf townships" adjacent to what was then Mt. McKinley National Park. But the Egan administration wanted in return park acreage with hard rock mining potential. While endorsing addition of the wolf townships, park supporters, including



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Sierra Club national outing 2104: Prince William Sound kayak trip

Prince William Sound is a wild, remote, and beautiful coastline of south central Alaska. Surrounded by the Chugach National Forest, this grand sheltered body of water has amazing sights from the largest: snow-capped mountains, menagerie of cloud formations, and forest-lined shores to the smallest: bald eagles, starfish and sea anemones. The Chugach is one of America's wildest national forests and yet has no (zero) designated wilderness. Within the Sound and the forest is the Nellie Juan-College Fjord Wilderness Study Area. This area, just over 2 million acres, was made a Study Area but has yet to receive Wilderness status.

Sierra Club outings offers a service trip to this remarkable area June 29 to July 5, 2014. (Trip #14010A)

As 2014 is the 50th anniversary of the Wilderness Act -- the Sierra Club and others in Alaska want to honor the big anniversary by seeking wilderness status for this huge wild area. The anniversary coincides with the new management planning process for the Chugach National Forest, which provides a timely opportunity to send comments favoring wilderness recommendations. (see article, pp 2-3.) As part of our service project with the agency, we will assist the Forest Service in assessing wilderness characteristics of the area to help them provide a realistic updated

analysis of wilderness character as they revise the Chugach land management plan.

Our Sierra Club kayak service trip will involve our paddling and camping along the coast of Herring Bay on



photo: Rebecca Dameron

Kayaking in Prince William Sound, 2013 Sierra Club trip

Knight Island. We will paddle along the coast to collect debris to be picked up later by Forest Service cleanup vessels, and we may work part of the time in our water's edge camp and rehab the site (an old work camp, or dump site).

Our group, plus kayaks and gear, will be transported from Whittier by water taxi to our first basecamp.

In addition to allowing us to carry out important clean-up efforts, paddling these waters in sea kayaks is the perfect way to explore the sweeping mingled land and seascapes of Prince William Sound. Our double kayaks are stable, quiet, and can go places other vessels cannot reach. The silent visitor may see wildlife that could include bald eagles, whales, seals, sea otters, and bears, to name a few. (<http://sierraclub.org/outings>) ❖

--Rebecca Dameron

Denali wolves -- from previous page

the Sierra Club, opposed the State's desire to acquire park land for the miners. Their opposition helped to head off the proposed swap.

As part of the Alaska National Interest Conservation Lands Act (ANILCA) of 1980, Mt. McKinley National Park was added to the wilderness system, expanded with new non-wilderness park and preserve areas, and renamed Denali National Park and Preserve. The wolf townships were now surrounded on three sides by park sanctuary lands.

⇒ WHAT YOU CAN DO:

Ask Secretary of the Interior Sally Jewell and Governor Sean Parnell to explore ways to restore the park's wolves to a "natural and healthy" state as required by ANILCA. You can also alert your senators and representative to the crisis for Denali wolves. A solution could require authorizing legislation.

Hon. Sally Jewell, Secretary,
Department of the Interior
1849 C St., NW,
Washington, DC 20240
Phone (202) 208-3100
E-mail: feedback@ios.doi.gov

Hon. Sean Parnell,
Governor, State of Alaska
P.O. Box 110001
Juneau, AK 99811-0001
Phone (907) 269-7450
Fax (907) 269-7461 ❖

-- Jack Hession

*(Rebecca Dameron, leader of the 2014 kayaking service trip in Prince William Sound, is very familiar with the area of the trip. She served as assistant leader of the similar and very popular 2013 trip—to which the 2014 venture is a natural successor. For a description of the 2013 national outing, on which three Forest Service staffers joined, See **Sierra Borealis**, Sept 2013.)*

White Water Blue, by Frank Keim

White Water Blue, subtitled *Paddling & Trekking Alaska's Wild Rivers*, is an account of nine river trips and four backpacking trips among the "scores of Alaska's rivers and creeks" the author has floated and hiked along during 51 years in Alaska.

A Fairbanks resident, along the way he taught school for 21 years in four Yupik Eskimo villages in the lower Yukon River region. As a naturalist, poet, and expert bird watcher, Keim describes the extensive variety of fauna and flora in the Brooks Range, with wildflowers and birds clearly his favorites. A typical example:

"Just after launching [on the Alatna, a wild river in Gates of the Arctic National Park Wilderness], a common loon flew "upside-down" overhead, plaintively yodeling at us. A pair of belted kingfishers hypered back and forth in their loud staccato voice. As a Pacific loon, its silver mane shining in the sun, dived for fish on the river, I pointed out the songs of yellow-rumped warblers and varied thrushes hidden in the white spruce on both sides of us. We also came across two mated red-necked grebes, probably on a foraging mission for their brood hiding on a small lake somewhere beyond the tall trees."

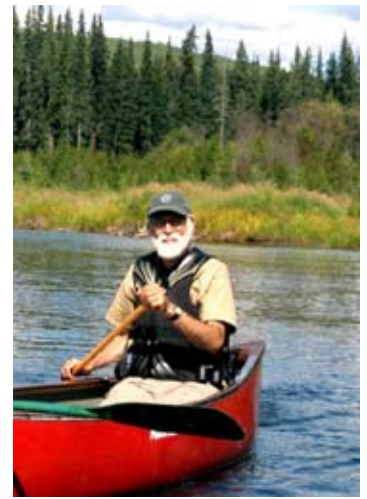
Danger and moments of high anxiety enliven his accounts of two trips on the upper Kobuk River, a designated Wild River, and of a raft trip down the lower Copper River.

"Gull bait," the first high-water raft run on the upper Kobuk in June of 1971, was a near-fatal close call. In "Slaying River Demons," he returns to the Kobuk in June of 2006 with inflatable canoes and skilled companions. He savors his success in nailing the Lower Kobuk Canyon where he came to grief on his first attempt:

"Somehow getting through the canyon in one piece made me feel better about the river itself, and about my original botched trip in 1971, as though the slate had suddenly been wiped clean, the demons slayed."

Also covered in this charming volume are the wolves, grizzlies, and Dall sheep observed during hikes in Gates and the Arctic National Wildlife Range; Brooks Range weather; observations on life in Alaska; conservation issues; putting up with mosquitoes and much more.

Paperback, \$24.95; the self-published book is available at <http://www.shopgulliversbooks.com> (and other stores). ❖



-- reviewed by Jack Hession

Sierra Borealis / alaska report

is the newsletter of the Alaska Chapter of the Sierra Club

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Find Sierra Borealis at www.alaska.sierraclub.org/ (click on newsletters)



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Please e-mail to us your own e-mail address. We will use it sparingly! Send your e-mail to chapter chair Pam Brodie pbrodie@gci.net. Include your name and mailing address or eight digit membership number for identification purposes.

Check the Alaska Chapter's website <http://alaska.sierraclub.org/> for environmental news, background on issues, action alerts and newsletters.

Many thanks, Pam