

ALASKA SUPREME COURT TO HEAR DCC'S APPEAL OF THE HEALY GAS EXPLORATION BEST INTEREST FINDING

OPENING BRIEF TO BE FILED BY FEBRUARY 27, 2013

by Charlie Loeb

DCC is moving forward with its appeal of the Best Interest Finding for the Healy Basin Gas Only Exploration License in the Alaska Supreme Court. After much reflection, the DCC board decided that the Superior Court had not given a serious look at our arguments. The written opinion revealed that the judge either did not understand or did not want to acknowledge the central point of our suit: that the Alaska Department of Natural Resources did not have a rational basis for its decision on the Best Interest Finding regarding either the size of the license area or the mitigation requirements for the exploration activity.

The Supreme Court essentially starts over in its consideration of the merits of the case, and the combined expertise of the Supreme Court justices is likely to provide a much more informed opinion. The case remains the best path to preventing gas development in important residential and habitat areas in the Denali Borough.

In the two years since the appeal was initially filed, evidence of serious environmental contamination and wildlife losses in gas fields has multiplied, as controversy has attracted more research and the problems are finally being rigorously documented. We will provide an overview of some of the new research findings in a future *DCC News*. For those areas in the Denali Borough where gas development does proceed, we're hoping for improved regulatory scrutiny as the state benefits from knowledge gleaned elsewhere. We can already see that process occurring, as the Alaska Oil and Gas Commission takes public comment on new regulations for hydraulic fracturing (see article in page 8).

Unfortunately, DCC must raise funds to support the appeal. So once again, we turn to our supporters to ask for your help. DCC needs to raise \$25,000 to cover the cost of the Supreme Court appeal. Please consider making a contribution to the Gas Legal Fund today. You can find an on-line donation link to the Fund on the DCC homepage at <http://www.denalicitizens.org>, or send a check to DCC at P.O. Box 78, Denali Park, AK 99755. ☞

CLAY WALKER ELECTED MAYOR OF DENALI BOROUGH

Six candidates entered the running to fill the mayoral seat, vacated this past fall when long-time Mayor Dave Talerico resigned. On February 19th, Clay Walker was elected mayor. A long-time McKinley Village-area resident and long-serving Denali Borough Assembly member, Clay had served as interim mayor after Talerico's resignation. DCC congratulates Clay and looks forward to working with the new mayor, the Borough Assembly and the Borough Planning Commission.



The six candidates running for Denali Borough Mayor are depicted in the photo above. They are, from left, Steve Jones, William Nemec, Clay Walker, Robert Kohlsdorf, William "Rusty" Lasell, and Tallon Shreeve.

photo by Cass Ray

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FROM THE DCC BOARD - WELCOME, DON STRIKER

by Nancy Bale

On Sunday, February 10, 2013, the DCC board arranged to meet in person with the new superintendent of Denali National Park and Preserve, Don Striker. Jenna and Simon Hamm graciously offered the Camp Denali office for this meeting, and Jenna was able to attend in person. We enjoyed late afternoon light, the snowy landscape and a close view of a lynx passing nearby. The purpose of our gathering was simply to welcome the new superintendent, introduce ourselves, learn more about him, and give him a brief overview of park issues from a DCC perspective.

Striker's prior superintendency covered three NPS units in West Virginia:

New River Gorge National River and the nearby Bluestone National Scenic River and the Gauley River National Recreation Area. According to the NPS press release introducing him, those three parks "annually see more than one million visitors, and include four visitor centers and more than 100 access points. Prior to working in West Virginia, Striker served as a special assistant to the Comptroller of the National Park Service, as superintendent of Mount Rushmore National Memorial (South Dakota), as superintendent of Fort Clatsop National Memorial (Oregon), and comptroller at Yellowstone National Park." Denali, at 6 million acres (with 2 million designated Wilderness), will be the largest park he has supervised to date. The Alaska-specific legal and policy framework, the tough financial situation of all federal agencies, and the multiple issues and stakeholders at Denali await our new superintendent. Striker's education in finance (a graduate of the Wharton School of Business) should be quite helpful in the months ahead.

At the time of our meeting, Don Striker had been in Denali for a couple of weeks already, having amended his original plan of driving up the entire Alcan highway to taking the ferry up the inside passage and driving from Haines. He had moved into the superintendent's quarters at Denali and was spending most of his time absorbing the tremendous amount of information necessary to take on this assignment. Although new to Alaska, he expressed a great deal of enthusiasm for the complex job of Denali superintendent, and praised his staff and associates. His wife and daughter remain on the east coast until the end of the school year, when his daughter will graduate from high school. He has two sons, one in college, the other fresh out of army boot camp.

As DCC board members Charlie Loeb, Brian Napier, Nan Eagleson, Erica Watson, Barbara Brease and former board member Jenna Hamm introduced themselves, I was again impressed by the diverse and passionate set of individuals who have chosen to serve this organization, and the great fund of knowledge and local experience they provide. By way of introduction to DCC's concerns, Charlie handed the new superintendent six issue briefs that summarized our positions on a variety of subjects, including the proposed Stampede State Recreation Area, Wilderness designations in the park additions, wildlife management at Denali's borders and management of vehicles along the park road. We also gave him a few representative copies of *DCC News*. Barbara Brease alluded to the increase in infrastructure at Denali over the past several years and urged Striker instead to recognize the value of this great wilderness park, as is. He expressed sympathy with this concern regarding NPS' "rush to cut ribbons."

We did not have the time to engage in any detail on park issues at this meeting, and spent the time getting to know one another. The DCC board plans on having longer, more detailed meetings with the superintendent as his schedule permits. Meanwhile, welcome to Denali, Superintendent Striker !



New Denali superintendent meets with the DCC board. Pictured in the photo are, from left, Nan Eagleson, Don Striker, Jenna Hamm and Charlie Loeb. *DCC photo*

Nancy Bale

THANK YOU, MEMBERS & DONORS

To all our member-donors:

We are proud and delighted to see your names on this page. Our fall donation drive was a success, thanks to you! Please contact us any time at mail@denalicitizens.org.

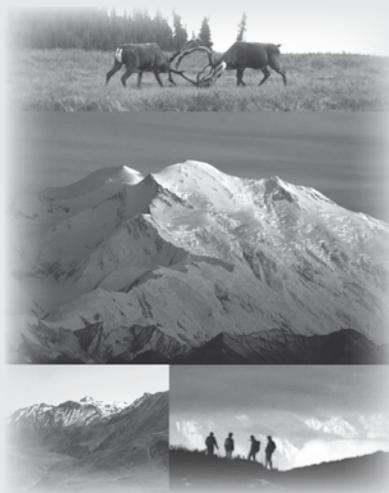


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PLOW A SECTION OF THE DENALI PARK ROAD IN WINTER?

EA EXPLORES SEVERAL ALTERNATIVES - COMMENTS DUE ON MARCH 16TH

by Charlie Loeb

The National Park Service has released an Environmental Assessment (EA) that examines options for keeping the Denali park road open to Mountain Vista Rest Area (mile 12) during some or all winter months. Presently, after the conclusion of the summer season NPS allows snowfall to close the road at the Park Headquarters gate at mile 3, and the road becomes a surface for skiing, skijoring, mushing, snowshoeing, and hiking until March, when NPS starts removing snow to prepare the road for the next season. Maintenance personnel do pack snow on one lane to mile 7 to allow for maintenance of aufeis, which otherwise tends to flow over the road and create hazardous conditions for park users as well as spring snow removal equipment.



NPS photo

The Alternatives

The EA considers 3 action alternatives and a no action alternative (Alternative 1).

The preferred alternative (Alternative 4) takes a gradual approach, opening the road for use to Mountain Vista Rest Area (mile 12) in mid-February for 3-5 years while evaluating the use, cost, and possible options for ongoing funding. This alternative explicitly states that no new infrastructure would be added to support this use during the trial period. The Mountain Vista Rest Area has views of Mount McKinley on clear days.

Alternative 3 is a slightly larger commitment, moving up the opening of the road to Mountain Vista to mid-January, potentially with a trial period as in Alternative 4 and possibly accompanied by the installation of some communication equipment for emergencies.

Alternative 2 is a much larger project. It would involve keeping the road open to Mountain Vista all winter, providing emergency communication equipment and possibly a warming hut at the rest area, and reconstructing parts of the Spring Trail which connects the park's sled dog kennel to treeline at mile 7. This alternative also calls for grooming trails on unused loops of Riley Creek Campground for use by beginning skiers and skijorers as a substitute for the park road. There are a few additional details in the full alternative write-ups (see link at the end of this article).

The park road is currently considered backcountry in the winter

This issue was last considered in the 2006 Backcountry Management Plan, when the current management practice

for the winter park road was formalized. The park road past Headquarters is treated as backcountry during the months when it is covered in snow, and even carries a backcountry zoning designation (Backcountry Hiker). There has long been tension between the desire of those who utilize the road for winter outdoor activities (skiing, skijoring, mushing, etc.) and those who would like to drive farther into the park during winter months, whether to start trips or activities or just to sightsee from a vehicle.

Non-motorized recreationists particularly value the park road early in the season, when it can be used for skiing or mushing while other backcountry locations have insufficient snow cover. The EA states that it is local businesses and governments which have indicated an interest in bringing visitors on trips out the park road during winter, and the "Purpose and Need" speaks entirely to motorized sightseeing and mountain viewing as the reasons for keeping the road open. Commercial tours would be authorized via Commercial Use Authorizations.

DCC has concerns about impacts to wilderness and wilderness recreation

DCC is particularly concerned with protecting outdoor and wilderness recreation and the wilderness character of the backcountry that surrounds the park road. We're also concerned about the EA's prioritization of motorized sightseeing. We would like to hear from our members: what do you think? Would one of the alternatives support your use of the park, or diminish it? In what ways?

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DCC WELCOMES OUR NEWEST BOARD MEMBER, BRIAN NAPIER

We are delighted to welcome our newest board member, Brian Napier. Brian was recently elected by the DCC board to replace Jared Zimmerman, who had resigned from the board when he took a position on the Denali Borough Assembly.

Brian speaks for himself in this excerpt from his biography on our website. "I was born and raised in Richmond, Virginia. The woods of my youth were the formative wild places where my imagination was allowed to wander freely. Like many people, I observed these same woods turn into subdivisions and shopping malls. I attended the University of Tennessee, where I received a Bachelor's Degree in Environmental Studies and Geology. My academic education was bolstered by my experiences scrambling around the Southern Appalachians and involvement in the campus environmental group. I was whisked away from the humid southern mountains to Alaska in 2003 as a Student Conservation Association intern at Denali National Park. I continued to return to the Denali area seasonally until my partner Molly and I decided to make Denali our home in 2008. I currently work year-round as a Dispatcher in the Alaska Region Communication Center, located in Denali National Park. I have joined the DCC Board of Directors because of my love of the people and the landscape that I call home." Read Brian's full biography on our website, under *About DCC*. ☞



photo courtesy of Brian Napier

DCC SUPPORTS REVISIONS IN NEON SITE PERMIT



DCC joined Friends of Stampede in preferring a boardwalk-style access path (shown at the Toolik Field Station, above) over the use of Geoblock.

photo by NEON, Inc.

It has been a couple of years since the National Ecological Observatory Network proposed a monitoring station on Alaska public land in open tundra about a half mile from the Stampede Road, mile 5.7. Local citizens, aware of the high importance of this land as wildlife habitat and for dispersed public recreation, held several meetings with NEON personnel and state natural resource managers to discuss areas of concern. Because the site was planned to be temporary, locals desired that it leave a minimal footprint. In addition, initial proposals to provide overhead power or bring a power line corridor through the Panguingue Creek subdivision were strongly opposed. In response to these concerns, NEON made a few changes, and some were incorporated into a permit request to the state of Alaska for a 10-year lease and public easement. In our comments on the permit, DCC reflected the concerns of the Friends of Stampede, who supported a buried utility line traveling up the Stampede Road and then buried to the site, minimally damaging boardwalk material, and complete reclamation with adequate monitoring. See DCC's comments on our website. ☞

DENALI ROAD PLOWING - *continued from previous page*

Please write us at mail@denalicitizens.org, or talk to any board member by March 6th.. The deadline for comments on the EA is March 16, 2013, and NPS prefers to receive them via the website at <http://parkplanning.nps.gov>, where you can also download a complete copy of the EA. ☞

Comments may also be faxed to (907) 683-9612, or mailed to the address below:

Superintendent, Denali National Park and Preserve

ATTN: Winter Road Plowing EA

P.O. Box 9

Denali Park, AK 99755

For questions about the EA, contact Paula Homan, Project Planning Lead, at 907-683-6223 or paula_homan@nps.

DCC BOARD SETS 2013 PRIORITIES AT ANNUAL RETREAT

by Charlie Loeb

It is a new year at Denali, bringing with it a lot of “newness.” Denali National Park and Preserve has a new superintendent (see separate article), and the Denali Borough has a new mayor. There will be many other new faces as long-time park employees like Claire Curtis, Jane Bryant, and Ingrid Nixon follow Paul Anderson, Joe Van Horn, and others as they retire or move to other parks. In a time of transition, what role is DCC to play?

While not the central topic at DCC’s annual board retreat in early December, the knowledge of these transitions did weigh on our minds as we discussed our accomplishments over the past year and our plans for the year to come. The board tends to set a very ambitious program at every retreat, and we were pleased with how many of our goals for 2012 had been accomplished. There were some very notable achievements such as the efforts to keep motorized hunting out of the Yanert valley, protect local habitat and recreation areas in the Yukon Tanana Area Plan, and get a cleaner solution for the restart of the Healy 2 power plant. We also met many of our mobilization goals for attendance at Stampede Summit 3, turnout at the Healy Gas court case, public comment on the Denali Park Road Vehicle Management Plan, and visibility during hearings on the Stampede State Recreation Area. For these latter three, however, the final results did not reflect our objectives. Why not?

Having an impact

“Why not” was a central concern for the board as we looked ahead to 2013. What do we need to do better or differently to have more of an impact? Board members agreed that at the very least we have an important role to play in distributing information. Our newsletter, website, Facebook page, e-mail alert system, and events have been vital in getting word out to people who care about Denali, and the newsletter in particular receives many positive comments.

Even if we just share information well, we are making a difference, but there are times when we want the information to translate into action. Here we are hampered by our static membership and readership – we aren’t growing our base or our organizational capacity to address the increased complexity and number of issues that we face. In part we have been hindered by the loss of our community organizer position, as Julia Potter moved out of the community and funds were insufficient to replace her. This is a problem we resolved to remedy, although it may take a year to do so.



Annual Retreat: DCC Board gathers around the table at Nan Eagleson's home for food and conversation. From left, Nan Eagleson, Erica Watson, Claire Pywell (gas permitting intern), Barb Brease, J. J. Neville, Hannah Ragland, Jared Zimmerman, Nancy Bale and Charlie Loeb. *DCC photo*

Strategies for building our influence

In the end, we settled on four basic strategies in addition to the long-term goal of replacing the community organizer. First, we want to better engage our local base with more attention to social media, events, and regular contact with members. Second, we will seek to involve more people in DCC as volunteers, so that it is not just the board members carrying the whole load for the organization. Third, we will actively leverage resources outside the area by connecting with other conservation groups working on similar issues in Alaska, or who can provide some supportive infrastructure.

Finally, we will continue to do what we do best: taking principled stands on issues that are important to our mission, and providing information and inspiration about why Denali’s wilderness, wildlife, and way of life are so important to us and to the world.

Goals for 2013

So among our goals of 2013 are to continue seeking permanent protection for the wildlife habitat and recreational opportunities in the Wolf Townships, to continue excluding gas and other industrial-scale energy development from places where people live and which are important for wildlife and recreation, to continue supporting NPS efforts to protect the wilderness qualities of the park backcountry, to continue working with the Denali Borough on land use planning that will protect and enhance the quality of life in the Denali Borough, and to continue urging caution on expanding traffic or infrastructure on the park road.

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DCC BOARD RETREAT *continued from previous page*

Core values

Thus, while our organizational strategies may shift in emphasis, the mission and the end goals remain the same. This is not surprising. The board discussed the organization's "core values" – the most important values that define who we are and how we do our work. While we have a lot of values, there were three that popped to the surface as defining for the organization.

First is **strong commitment** – we do not waver in our mission or purpose over time, and remain committed to keeping alive important goals for the park and community, even those that are not active issues.

Second, DCC has a great belief in **integrity**, the integrity of the information we provide and the actions we take.

Third and most strong, we value **personal knowledge and connection** to the uniqueness and specialness of Denali and its communities. DCC is made up of people who are connected to this place from the past or in the present, and who believe that their experience and understanding have value in making decisions about the future.

It is this last value that speaks most urgently to the role of DCC in this time of transition. Through our members' personal connection to this place, we are best suited to remember what really matters here, to point out the subtle qualities that make the park and community unique and special and to remind everyone about unfinished business that needs tending if we are to retain those qualities.

Our members - an essential part of DCC's work

This is not the role just of the DCC board, but of all our members. We hope you will find time this year to speak out on issues of importance to you, volunteer some time for DCC, write an article for *DCC News*, bring a friend to a public meeting, or otherwise contribute to preserving the wilderness, wildlife, and way of life of Denali.

In addition, we'd like to thank the community members who joined us during the retreat. Thank you to Wally and Jerri Cole, Jenna Hamm, Craig Brandt, Tom Walker, Susan and David Braun, and Bob Shelton. We'd also like to thank the Director of the Northern Alaska Environmental Center, Dave Arnold, and his wife, for attending and offering to partner with us in areas of mutual concern. 

DCC BOARD DEVELOPS PRIORITY ISSUE PAPERS

Over the years, DCC has advanced its mission in part by developing close working relationships with the National Park Service, the Denali Borough and the State of Alaska. We've encouraged public involvement with decisions by these agencies and we've provided access to high-quality information and education on our website, on Facebook, through online alerts and in the *DCC News*. We're hopeful that our members will use this information to raise their voices with planners and government entities to encourage a better future for the Denali region.

The latest addition to DCC's educational effort is a set of six issue papers. The DCC Board spent over two months developing and word-smithing these papers. They cover the entire range of topics that we at DCC judge to be important for the future of the Denali region. Naturally, we cannot give top priority to every issue at any one time. However, we're hoping that they'll provide an accurate look at where DCC stands in the ongoing landscape of planning and regulation. We invite our members to read the papers and make suggestions. You'll find them at <http://www.denalicitizens.org/issues/>. 



DCC ISSUE PAPER TOPICS

- ≈ Wildlife Habitat
- ≈ The Denali Park Road
- ≈ Denali Wilderness & Backcountry

- ≈ Rural Communities & Lifestyle
- ≈ Natural Gas & Resource Development
- ≈ Stampede & the Wolf Townships

STATE SEEKS COMMENT ON PROPOSED FRACKING REGS

NEW REGULATIONS COULD BE APPLIED TO GAS EXPLORATION EFFORTS NEAR HEALY

by Hannah Ragland

The Alaska Oil and Gas Conservation Commission (AOGCC) has recently moved to adopt regulations that would require a permit to perform hydraulic fracturing (commonly known as “fracking”). As part of a permit application, companies would be required to submit a variety of information to the state before and after fracking - including water well sampling, well integrity information, and some information on local geology and aquifers. The permit would also include disclosure of chemicals included in fracturing fluids, similar in many ways to new regulations that have appeared recently in a number of other states. A notorious loophole in federal law currently requires no disclosure of fracking fluid ingredients, many of which have been identified as harmful to humans.

The fracking process involves high-pressure injection of large volumes of water, sand, and a variety of chemicals into a well to extract gas that is “locked up” in geologic formations. The process is used commonly in unconventional gas exploration and production wells, including coalbed methane and shale gas. Fracking has been used more and more in conventional oil and gas exploration and production nation-wide, including in Alaska. AOGCC Commissioner Cathy Foerster has suggested that fracking has been used in about one in every four wells in Alaska. As gas exploration moves closer and closer to communities in Alaska (and underneath them, as in the case of the Healy Basin exploration license), DCC supports state efforts to regulate fracking and will request that AOGCC consider the strongest possible protections for human and environmental health and safety.



Drilling a gas well

photo property of Friends of Mat-Su

Will disclosure requirements in the draft regulations protect water wells?

The proposed Alaska fracking regulations have disclosure requirements that are arguably stronger than in many other states, although questions remain whether the disclosure that is proposed would be adequate to allow citizens to protect their water supply. Some news articles have pointed out that there is no language in the proposed Alaska regulations that would allow “proprietary secrets” (i.e. the secret recipe for parts of the fracking fluid) to be withheld as confidential, a loophole found in many other state regulations. It is likely that oil and gas companies will lobby the state to add language that would protect their secrets, as has been the case in many other states. Foerster has said that language on proprietary secrets was left out purposefully, but pointed out that oil and gas companies could make their case for allowing secret information during the public comment period. Existing state regulations seem to contradict this, as current AOGCC permitting allows for confidential and proprietary information to be withheld for up to two years.

Notification requirements may be inadequate

According to the proposed regulations, companies would need to ensure that, prior to fracking, landowners within ¼ mile “have been provided a complete copy of the application for hydraulic fracturing.” This application “for sundry approvals” (Form 10-403) is supposed to include a variety of information, including a list of the “principal fluids” (an undefined term) and inert substances used in fracking. This is a good idea, but appears to contradict other statutes related to AOGCC permitting. Alaska Statutes (AS 31.05.035) related to confidentiality in AOGCC exploration permitting state that “portions of an application for a permit to drill an exploratory or stratigraphic test well that the commission determines contain proprietary engineering or geotechnical information shall be kept confidential for 24 months following the 30-day filing period unless the owner of the well gives written permission to release the application and reports and information at an earlier date.”

It appears possible that information could be withheld from property owners and it remains unclear what notification, if any, residents outside the ¼ mile radius would get.

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FRACKING REGULATIONS PROPOSED, UP FOR COMMENT

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Another form (10-404) is required after fracking operations occur. At some point before Form 10-404 is submitted to the state (after fracking is completed), the operator is required to post some of the fracking fluid information on an online database called FracFocus. The limitations of this online reporting tool have surfaced recently (largely related to incomplete disclosure), and should be considered carefully.

Water well monitoring requirements are insufficient

The proposed regulations require that all water wells within ¼ mile of a drilling site be tested for specific contaminants before and after fracking operations. This testing would require monitoring for many possible contaminants, but it would not necessarily include monitoring for chemical compounds identified in the fracking fluid. Testing of water wells includes establishing baseline conditions, and then would only be required once, within 90 to 120 days after fracking operations are finished. This could be problematic, as drinking water contamination after fracking could foreseeably take longer than this, depending on the source of contamination, geologic formations, and aquifer characteristics. Considering the poor understanding of drinking water aquifers in much of the state, including within the Healy Basin, DCC would like to ensure that disclosure will not be subject to confidentiality periods, and that the time period of post-drilling testing be lengthened.



Photo depicts surface storage of waste water at a drilling site in a lined pit. The regulations under consideration by AOGCC do not currently cover disposal and containment of waste water. *photo property of Friends of Mat-Su*

Comments on these proposed regulations are due April 1, 2013, hearing on April 4, 2013

DCC will be submitting comments to support parts of AOGCC's proposed fracking regulations, and encourage stronger citizen protections in areas where the regulations are weaker. We feel that it is reasonable to require that all citizens who share an aquifer that a gas well will transect receive notification, not just within ¼ mile. All concerned citizens, not just those who live within a quarter mile of a gas well, should have access to the fracking information, without confidentiality periods. Additional information should be included as part of this disclosure process, including better identification of drinking water aquifers that a gas well would transect.

Also, the state has proposed no changes to regulate fracking fluid disposal, which is often done through underground injection. Fluids left over at the end of the fracking process are often stored onsite, then reinjected into the same well or a nearby well, a process that is governed by other parts of Alaska Statutes and Administrative Codes. DCC feels monitoring the full cycle, and eventual fate, of fracking fluids is an important part of protecting human and environmental health and safety.

Comments are due on these regulations by 4:30 p.m. on April 1st, with a hearing in Anchorage scheduled for 9 a.m. to noon on April 4th. Oral or written comments will be accepted at the hearing as well. If you are a landowner within the area of the license (see our website for a map), you should submit comments. Interested in attending the hearing? Stay tuned to DCC's website, <http://www.denalicitizens.org>, or contact Hannah Ragland (hbragland@hotmail.com) for more information and ways to get involved! ☞

Comments should be submitted to:

Alaska Oil & Gas Conservation Commission
333 West 7th Avenue, Suite 100
Anchorage, Alaska 99501

or FAX: 907-276-7542

or email: jody.colombie@alaska.gov



Alaska Native Knowledge Network

BRIEF NEWS AND VIEWS

DCC SPONSORS HEALY STUDENT FOR CIVICS AND CONSERVATION SUMMIT IN JUNEAU

Tri-Valley student Halbe Brown has been invited to attend an Alaska Youth for Environmental Action training in Juneau. DCC is happy to support Halbe's trip to Juneau with a \$300 scholarship to cover registration and travel costs. We have offered a scholarship for Denali Borough students to attend AYEAs Civics and Conservation Summit since 2005. During this week-long training, students from throughout the state will work together to learn how to read bills and participate in the state legislative process. Their focus is on environmental legislation, which in the past has included topics like local agriculture and wild salmon. Halbe has shown impressive dedication to scientific endeavors with an eight-year study of aquatic invertebrates in tributaries of the Nenana River. Look for an article by Halbe about his adventure upon his return from Juneau.



SUSITNA-WATANA HYDRO PROJECT IN "STUDY PLAN PHASE" OF LICENSING PROCESS

The proposed 700'-high Susitna-Watana dam is going through a comprehensive licensing process, overseen by the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC). The EIS/licensing determination is in the "study plan phase" of the process. FERC has required the project sponsor, the Alaska Energy Authority (AEA), to perform 58 individual studies in order to gather the necessary information that FERC will use to determine the necessity, benefits, impacts and site location of the dam before deciding to issue a license for the construction, operation and maintenance of the dam. At the beginning of the year FERC approved 45 of 58 study plans for the studies to be performed by AEA during this summer season. FERC determined that 13 of the study plans provided inadequate information. There was an administrative back-and-forth between FERC and AEA over the timeline for revisions. The outcome was for a proposed filing of the study plans determination to be complete by April 1st. FERC will make a determination on the adequacy of these study plans by April 1st, and then participating agencies will have until April 22nd to dispute the determination. In short FERC and other participating stakeholders are reviewing AEA plans to study the feasibility of the dam. FERC is making sure AEA is targeting the right information in the right way.

DCC SUPPORTS HUNTING RESTRICTIONS FOR DENALI PRESERVES IN COMPENDIUM

On January 15th, DCC submitted comments to the National Park Service supporting most of the proposed compendium revisions for Denali National Park. The Superintendent's Compendium, revised yearly, is a written compilation of designations, closures, permit requirements and other restrictions that can be instituted under each superintendent's discretionary authority. This year, the Denali Compendium banned several hunting practices that could be used in the Denali Preserves. These practices, recently adopted by the Alaska Board of Game, were deemed to be in opposition to the legislated purpose of the national parks, to wit, to preserve wildlife in its natural diversity. The prohibited practices included hunting of black bears and/or cubs in their dens by flashlight and the hunting of brown bears at bait stations. Additionally, the compendium proposed to prohibit the taking of wolves and coyotes between May 1 and August 9, to protect these animals while they raise offspring and when their pelts have little value. On other compendium topics, we supported the NPS closure of federal buildings and backcountry cabins to firearms and suggested that they be prohibited on park shuttle buses, or required to be unloaded and stowed on the bus. We accepted the compendium definition of the Cantwell Resident Zone, which continues to be located within a three-mile radius of the Cantwell Post Office. Folks within the resident zone are considered qualified subsistence users. We suggested that population changes and pressures could eventually prompt a revision of this zone.



Alaska Native Knowledge Network

BRIEF NEWS AND VIEWS

CITIZEN'S GUIDE TO GAS PERMITTING IN FINAL EDITS

Last summer DCC and the National Parks Conservation Association jointly hired an intern to develop a citizen's guide explaining the mechanics of natural gas licensing and permitting. We felt that citizens needed help navigating the gas licensing and permitting process, now that Alaska's gas licensing program could promote exploration and development close to growing communities. A clearly-written, easy-to-use guide could help give citizens the power to understand, confront and hopefully guide these activities. DCC members feel this need particularly, in view of the recently-granted gas exploration license around Healy and Denali National Park.

Our goal has been realized! Claire Pywell, our intern, recently completed the guide and it is in the process of editing and formatting for publication. Claire has assembled an impressive array of information, an exhaustive list of contacts and, with the assistance of a talented NPCA graphic designer, a visually interesting and information-packed document.

We plan to provide copies of the guide to the Denali Borough Assembly and Planning Commission. The guide will be downloadable from our website, and print copies may be available at a slight cost. Thank you, Claire, NPCA, and the Alaska Conservation Foundation, which funded her internship. Meanwhile, Claire has moved on to the position of Youth Leadership Coordinator at Alaska Youth for Environmental Action, and will be shepherding a number of Alaska high school youth to the annual Civics and Conservation Summit this March.

DCC News

Join Denali Citizens Council and receive a subscription to the *DCC News*, published six times a year.

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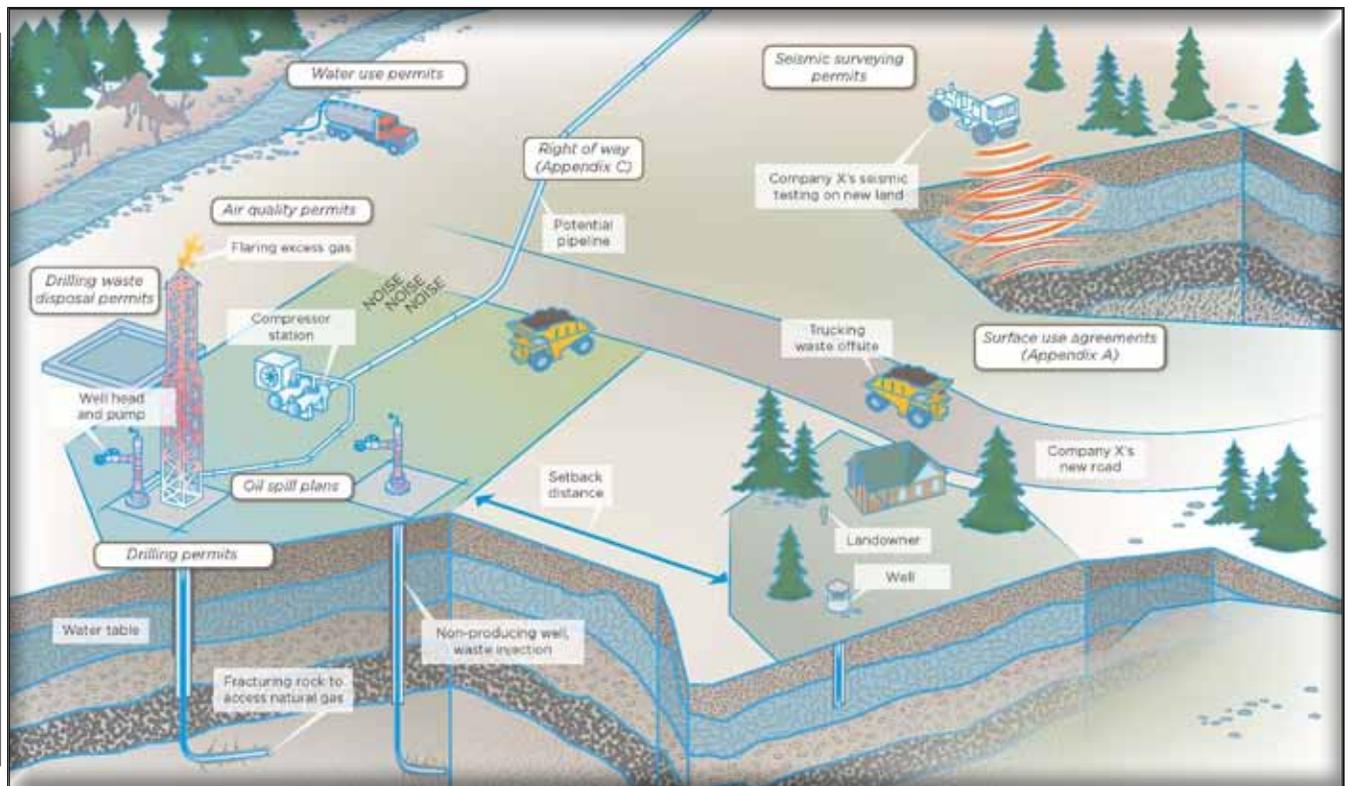
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This graphic depiction of the entire process of gas exploration & development is included in the citizen's guide.





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