

DCC SUPPORTS EMERGENCY PETITION TO PROTECT DENALI WOLVES

PETITION REQUESTS THAT BOARD OF GAME ESTABLISH A "NO TAKE" AREA AT NORTHEAST CORNER OF PARK

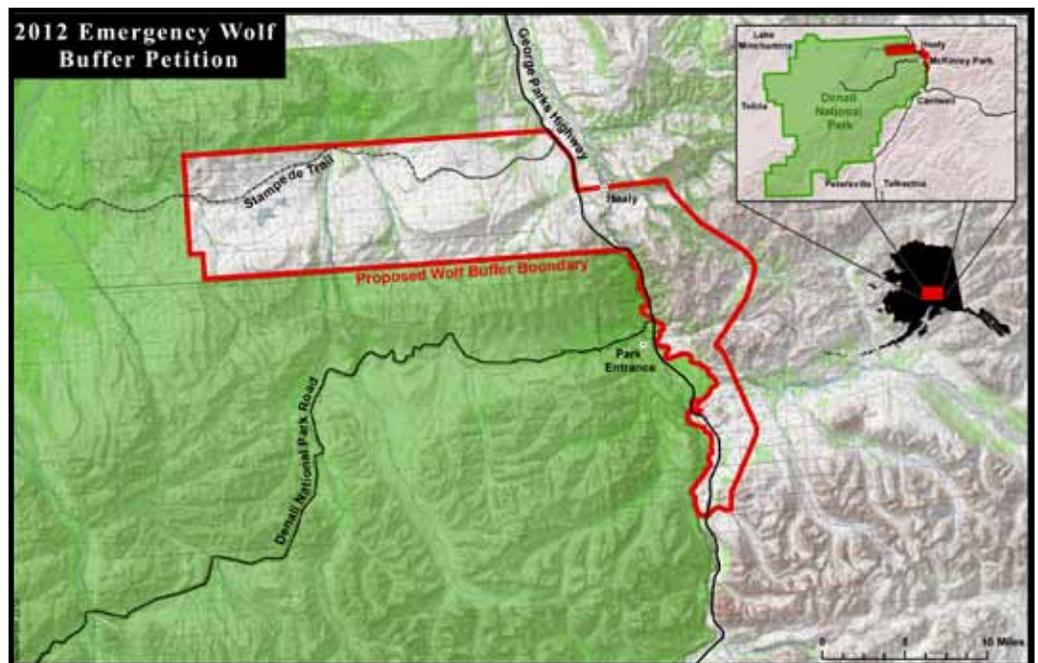
by Nancy Bale

The DCC Board voted unanimously at its February 2nd teleconference to support an Emergency Petition to establish a "no wolf take" area on state lands adjacent to Denali National Park, similar to one brought to the Alaska Board of Game in 2010, and in petitions filed over the past few years by the Alaska Wildlife Alliance and several individuals.

NPS fall 2014 wolf counts show no rebound from low numbers in the spring, a serious finding. Low numbers of wolves throughout the state Game Management Unit (GMU) 20C, which includes most of Denali National Park wolf habitat and state lands stretching north, are a recognized situation. No doubt there are a number of influences upon low numbers, among them weather and prey availability. However, the situation is now severe enough for the Board of Game to consider hunting and trapping closures, allowing time for the wolf population to recover to sustainable numbers in this area.

The petition urges the Board of Game to look beyond overall, GMU-wide wolf population health and focus on this specific area. Wolves tend to use the eastern Stampede lands preferentially in winter because of prey and habitat characteristics. Two active dens in the eastern areas of the national park are within a day's walk of state lands where predator hunting and trapping are legal. The unlimited trapping and the 10-wolf hunting bag limit on these state lands make it possible for an entire pack to be taken. Even the loss of one breeder can be quite damaging to pack integrity, according to a recent analysis by NPS.

The petition urges the Board of Game to look beyond overall, GMU-wide wolf population health and focus on this specific area. Wolves tend to use the eastern Stampede lands preferentially in winter because of prey and habitat characteristics. Two active dens in the eastern areas of the national park are within a day's walk of state lands where predator hunting and trapping are legal. The unlimited trapping and the 10-wolf hunting bag limit on these state lands make it possible for an entire pack to be taken. Even the loss of one breeder can be quite damaging to pack integrity, according to a recent analysis by NPS.



Map of the northeastern area of Denali National Park and Preserve, along with adjacent state lands. The proposed Emergency Closure is marked with a bold line on this map, prepared for a similar proposal in 2012. This area encompasses and enlarges upon areas previously closed by the state of Alaska to wolf hunting and trapping. Map by NPCA

Although the Board of Game has been historically unresponsive to calls for closures, we are hoping for a new spirit of compromise as we support this Emergency Petition at the BoG March 2015 meeting in Anchorage. Stay tuned to our website and member alerts for ways to raise your voice in support. 

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IN MEMORY: LINDA PAGANELLI

by Charlie Loeb

DCC lost a great friend and local activist with the untimely death of Linda Paganelli at the end of 2014. Linda had an all-too-brief but spectacular career as a conservation leader in the local community during the early years of the 2000s. After volunteering to help with community planning activities following the Designing for Community Workshop in 1999, she was positioned to undertake the newly-created role of Denali Watch coordinator for the Northern Alaska Environmental Center in 2001. Her appointment was timely, adding a tremendous amount of extra energy to local conservationists who were fighting the Kantishna railroad and Senator/Governor Frank Murkowski's various Stampede road projects while at the same time trying to influence National Park Service endeavors such as the Denali Backcountry Management Plan.

We loved working with Linda. She was unfailingly direct in her conversations with supporters and detractors, quick to simplify complex issues into their most basic choices, and reliably energetic at times when focused work was needed. Her dry wit lightened many a serious discussion. Linda was new to front-line conservation work, but that didn't stop her from courageously stepping in front of committees of the Alaska State Legislature to argue against bad policy, or from successfully picking apart the work of professional state and federal land managers in countless written comments and public testimonies. She was a key element in the organization of the first Stampede Summit, a Healy event that brought together a diverse group of constituents to consider just what the future of the Denali area could be.

Not only did Linda represent the voice of the local conservation community on many occasions, she also organized and prepared others to do the same. Although Linda was officially an employee of NAEC, the nature of her job meant that she worked closely with members of DCC and was an extraordinarily effective part of our team. It was a sad day when NAEC decided to discontinue the position. Linda went back to driving buses on the park road and ultimately worked her way into positions with the Denali Borough. We had always harbored a hope that she would return to work as an activist at some point in the future. The entire community benefited tremendously from her work, and we were personally inspired by her loyalty and compassion. Linda, you are terribly missed. 



Linda enjoyed a memento from DCC for her work to prevent an ill-considered railroad project from Healy to Kantishna.
DCC photo



Linda helped organize the first Stampede Summit in 2004, where key issues of concern to the future of the Healy area were explored.
DCC photo

THANK YOU MEMBERS AND DONORS

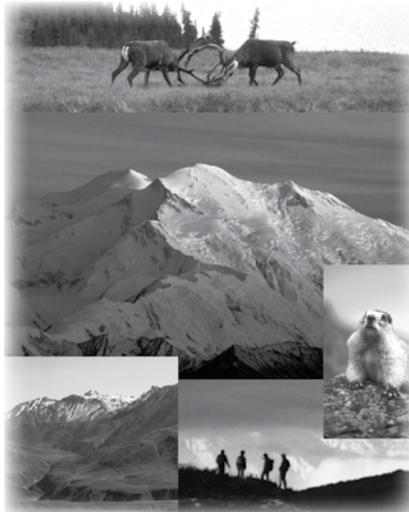
by Nancy Bale

As always, DCC is grateful for our members, who support the organization with their passion, knowledge, and financial contributions. If you're reading this, you are likely among those who made a tax-deductible donation in the past year. THANK YOU for your continued support. If you haven't received an official receipt of your donation, and you are starting to think about your taxes, please contact us. DCC's tax ID is 92-0060459, and if you have any questions or concerns, let us know. We look forward to working together in 2015. 

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CLIMATE CHANGE IS AFFECTING ECOSYSTEMS AT BOTH POLES

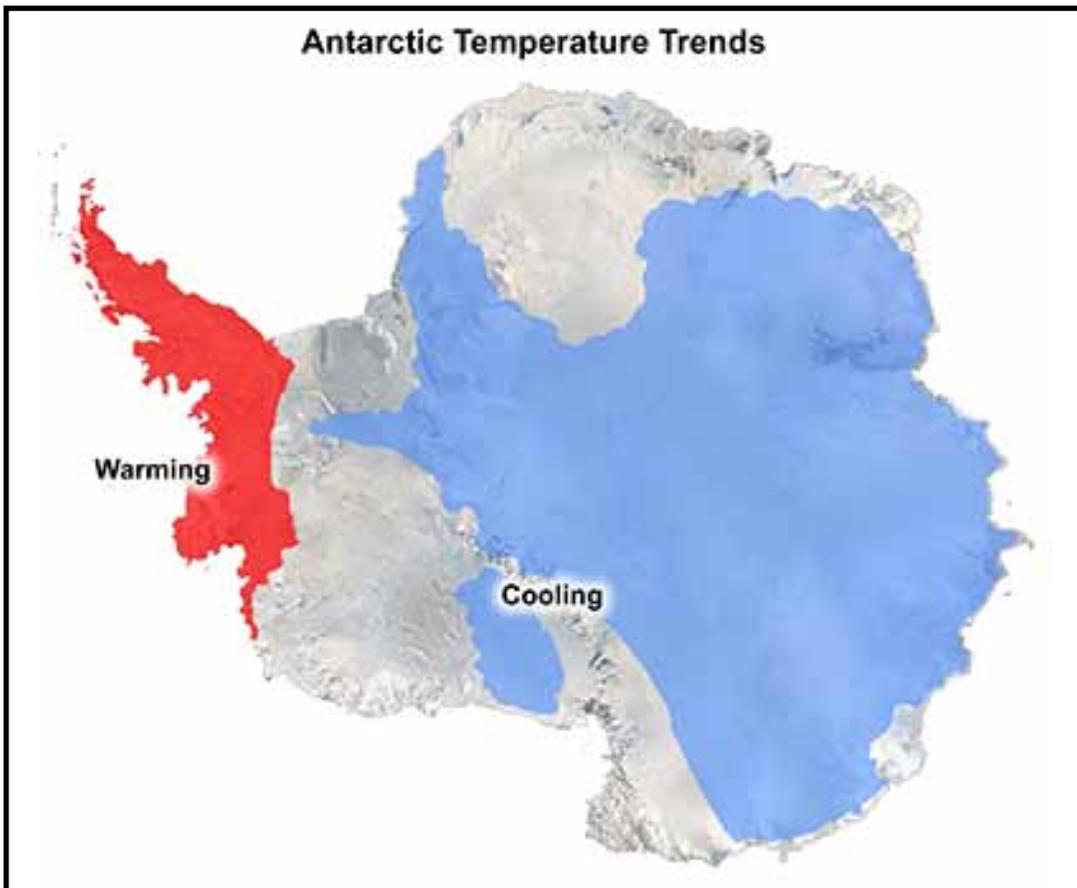
by Nan Eagleson

I recently had the opportunity to again be part of a crew on an expedition to the Falkland Islands, South Georgia and the Antarctic Peninsula. This article is part of a program I presented on climate change to the clients and crew on the ship.

Changes in the Antarctic Peninsula

Climate change impacts the Antarctic Peninsula in many ways. Most of these changes are due to warming temperatures, although parts of the continent are cooling due to the growth of the ozone hole. Glacial retreat in the Antarctic Peninsula is extreme. Of 244 glaciers, 87% have dramatically retreated over the last 50 years. Particularly on the peninsula, the edges of Antarctica are warming because the Antarctic Circumpolar Current carries warming water around the continent. It is the only current in the world that is not bounded by coasts. There is tremendous loss in ice extent and icebergs breaking off along the edges of major ice shelves. Ice shelves basically hold back ice sheets (on land) and when ice shelves break up ice sheet loss increases, leading to sea level rise. Added fresh water from melting ice changes the salinity of the water, and warmer water is less nutrient-rich.

Penguin and seal populations, which are not ice-dependent, are doing relatively well. These species, such as Gentoo penguins, prefer open water and opportunistically and rapidly colonize new habitats, new ground exposed by ice retreat. Their diet is less specialized and they will reestablish a nest if the original is disturbed. In contrast, Adelie penguins are ice-dependent and suffer greatly while Gentoos flourish. In many places Adelie populations have declined 78% since 1975. Numbers of Chinstrap penguins have decreased by 50% in some places and behavioral changes are seen. Antarctica is seeing more heavy snow storms. Increased snowfall is associated with increased water and air temperatures; as the air warms, it is able to hold more moisture evaporating from the surface of the water. When the moisture is convected up into the atmosphere, it cools, condenses into ice, and falls as snow. More moisture in the air means more snow. These snow storms prevent penguins from breeding. With warming water and air temperatures, there is more rain and this is lethal to baby penguins with



Map by nature.org

only a down coat for their first year of life. Seal populations are affected, just like penguins. Ice-dependent seal species such as Weddell seals are particularly vulnerable. Many of these penguins and seals feed on krill, a shrimp-like crustacean that recently is being heavily harvested by huge factory fishing ships. Less ice means these ships can get into new places. Fur seals and Elephant seals have increased since human-caused near extinction by the whalers and sealers in the late 1800s and 1900s, but are now declining in the 21st century, likely related to the decline in krill populations.

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CLIMATE CHANGE AFFECTING BOTH POLES *continued from previous page*

The irony of visiting this remarkable place is the trip burned approximately 150 metric tons of fuel during this voyage. To offset this carbon footprint would take quite a creative solution and these types of trips are harder and harder to justify for the sake of tourism. Like the tourists traveling the world to see polar bears in Kaktovik, AK, or bears and wolves in Denali, this is their chance to see them before they are gone.

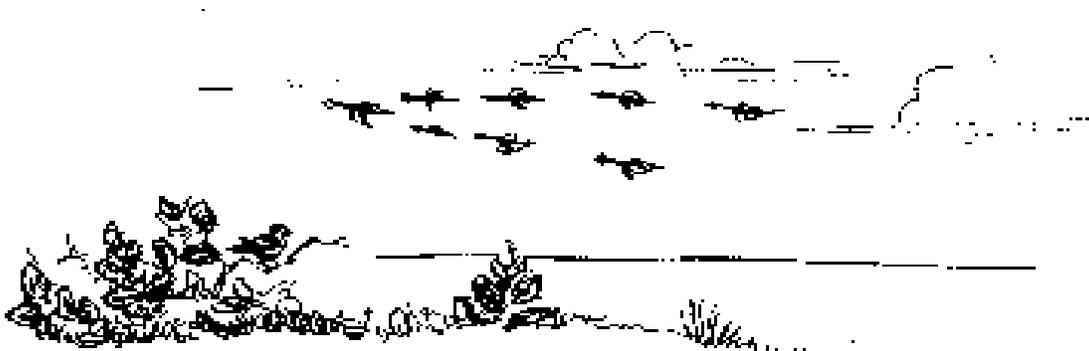
Impacts of climate change in the Arctic

We know animals reliant on ice, such as seals and polar bears, are losing habitat in the Arctic. Polar bear populations in the South Beaufort Sea of Alaska have fallen 40% in 10 years, down to 900 bears in 2010. Sea ice is a critical piece of the polar bear habitat, necessary for seal hunting; the Arctic could be free of sea ice in a matter of decades. Due to rising temperatures, forests are able to grow further north, taking over areas that were formerly tundra and thus shrinking the tundra habitat. The "Arctic" can be defined by tree-line. The effects of diminishing ice on the village of Kivalina, in Alaska's north-west Arctic region, were the subject of a recent visit by Secretary of the Interior Sally Jewell.

Worldwide action is needed to counteract global climate change

The 5th Assessment by the IPCC (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change) just came out in October 2014. This is an international group of over 120 scientists from around the world, and their assessment is sobering. We have been aware that anthropogenic greenhouse gases such as CO₂, methane, nitrous oxide and others have risen dramatically because of our use of fossil fuels. However, we have squandered the past 30 years with our failure to responsibly protect this earth. There are all sorts of recommendations for adaptation and mitigation. But what absolutely needs to happen is to break the power of the fossil fuel industry. Drought, wildfires, storms, floods and climate change are happening, but the real disaster is our Big Energy-owned politicians' inaction. The bottom line of the IPCC Report is "rapid carbon emission cuts are vital to stop the most severe impacts of Climate Change." This likely can't be done by the free market, but there are a few hopeful signs. The US and China, the world's 2 biggest polluters, are finally negotiating emissions reductions. These goals are collectively agreed to and voluntary only. The US, all along, has not been willing to sign a legally binding document since the 1st Conference in Stockholm on Climate in 1974. We haven't done much. The Kyoto Protocol goes away in 2020. But now that the IPCC 5th Assessment Report very clearly says we have about 10 years, not 30 or 40 or 50, to act, to avoid the most catastrophic consequences of climate change, maybe the negotiators will be more motivated.

The planet earth is an oasis for all of life as we know it. We need politicians, corporations and individuals that are more concerned about people and the planet than profit and power. More and more, climate change is realized as a social justice issue. Many books are coming out with a new understanding of the deep changes we need to make to put our nation on a just and livable path. The advancing climate crisis cannot be addressed as long as we remain fixated on endless growth and consumption, corporate profits, increasing incomes of the well-to-do, while neglecting those just getting by and watching the middle class fall down a rat hole. More people like Bill McKibben, founder of 350.org, are dedicating their lives to solving the largest challenge of our time. I am pleased that DCC, with all the many local issues to focus on, is also willing to reflect on how to make a difference in an increasingly complex world. The cause at the broadest level is the need to care for our planet and must extend to all the life that evolved here with us. 🌱

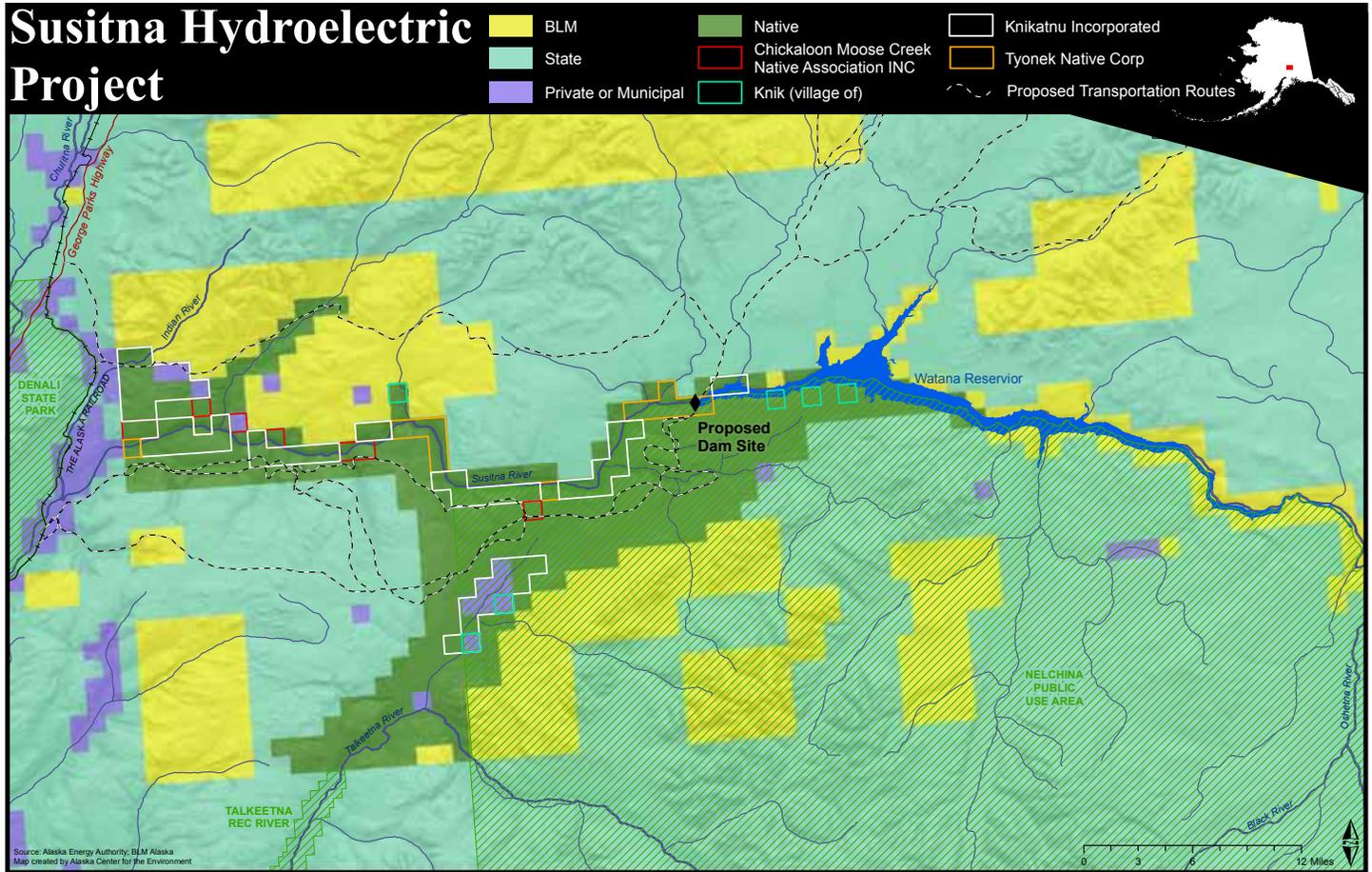


Alaska Native Knowledge Network

A REPORT FROM THE SUSITNA RIVER COALITION

by Samuel Snyder

The Susitna River Coalition worked hard during 2014 to increase public awareness concerning the threats of the Susitna dam, both to the state’s budget and the Susitna fishery. SRC hosted screenings of the award winning film, DamNation (damnationfilm.com) and helped maintain a constant media presence in order to spread the word about Susitna and elevate public understanding about the impacts of the dam to the Susitna River and its fisheries. This work paid off and in December, just before the Holidays, wild salmon lovers got an early Christmas. Alaska’s new governor cut proposed funding (www.adn.com/article/20141215/skipping-scalpel-walker-takes-ax-alaska-capital-budget) for the controversial hydroelectric project on one of the state’s most productive salmon rivers.



A color version of this map is available on the Susitna River Coalition website.

Photo courtesy of susitnarivercoalition.org

The Susitna River is Alaska’s 4th largest king salmon fishery. It is here on the Susitna that the state has been seeking to build America’s second tallest dam at the mid-point of the river, putting at risk the river, the fishery, and an economy of over 5,000 jobs valued at over \$200 million annually.

The news from the Governor's Office regarding the capital budget came on the heels of a report (susitnarivercoalition.org/economicreport) that Trout Unlimited and SRC released from longtime Alaska economist Gregg Erickson. The report underscored the economic costs and risks posed by the Susitna dam, concluding that the main project’s proponent, Alaska Energy Authority (AEA), grossly underestimates the cost and overestimates the benefits of the dam.

While already an exorbitant \$5.65 billion, AEA’s projected price tag for the Susitna dam project continues to balloon and yet fails to include \$880 million in required costs to move power from the dam to existing transmission lines. The estimate also excludes yet-to-be negotiated costs of leasing or purchasing the Alaska Native corporation lands on which much of the project would sit.

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SUSITNA RIVER COALITION REPORT

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Most importantly, perhaps, AEA has failed to account for the costs of fisheries mitigation, including possible fish passage around the proposed 735-foot tall dam. And, as we know from experiences in the Pacific Northwest, fisheries mitigation on dammed salmon rivers is difficult at best. In sum, Erickson argued, “the Susitna hydro project does not survive any plausible market test.” It also fails the fisheries test.

Erickson’s report comes as oil prices continue to slide, sending Alaska’s petroleum-dependent state budget toward a projected \$3.5 billion deficit (www.latimes.com/nation/la-na-alaska-oil-20141216-story.html). In a bid to drastically curb state spending, Gov. Walker introduced a capital budget that’s about half the size of what his predecessor, Sean Parnell, had proposed.

Following a slashed budget, Governor Walker also issued an executive order that all mega-projects, including the Susitna Dam, stop spending on all non-essential tasks.

With that announcement, the Alaska Energy Authority (AEA) requested the federal licensing process for Susitna Dam be put on hold, and AEA’s request was granted. With this news, the Save the Susitna campaign will continue to work hard to keep the state legislature from funding this project during this legislative session.

This news does not mean the Susitna dam is completely dead, but it is a huge step in the right direction and the campaign applauded the Walker administration for both fiscal and fisheries responsibility.

Since 2011, AEA has spent over \$193 million on studies to advance the dam. In the fall, those

studies also faced criticism (www.adn.com/article/20141009/states-angry-letter-defends-susitna-dam-salmon-science) most notably because AEA scientists and consultants could not tell the difference between Chinook and Coho juveniles. In their confusion, they called them ‘chinoho’! (Honestly, I’m not making this up.)

In the end, this project does not remotely pass the ‘straight face’ test when it comes to fisheries, energy needs, or economics. Walker’s budget is a welcome relief. For the next three months, we’ll be working hard to ensure that the state legislature does not fund the project and that they understand the best thing to do is to shut the project down and clean up the river. 



The view of the Susitna River from the Denali Highway

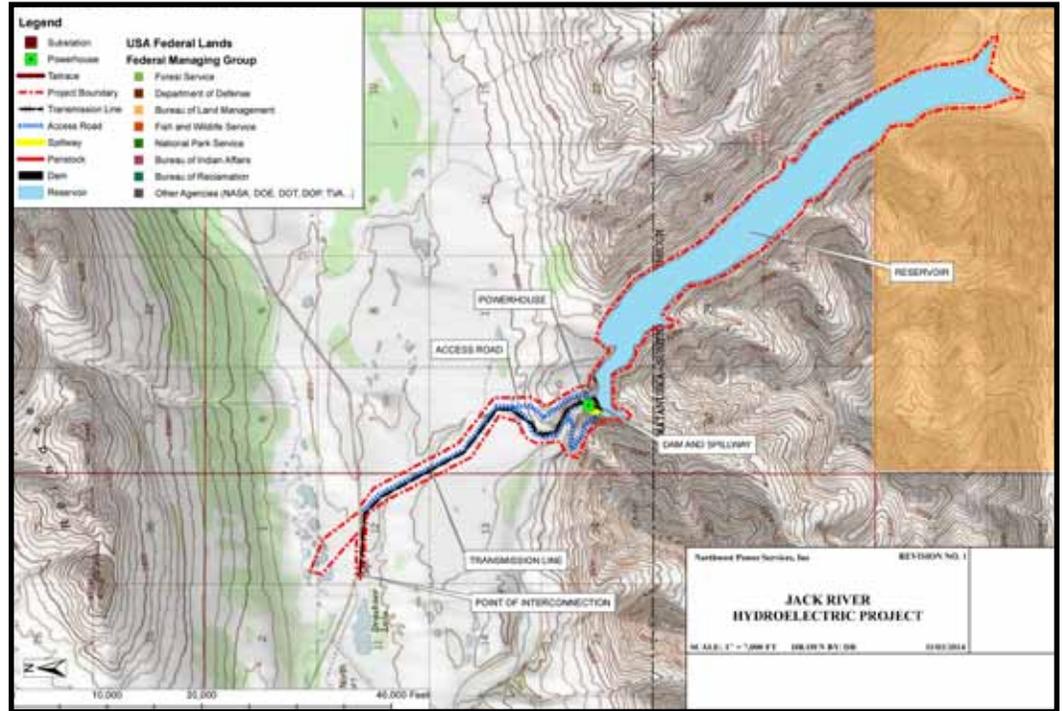
Photo courtesy of Eric Watson

THREE HYDROELECTRIC PROJECTS UNDER STUDY IN DENALI BOROUGH

by Hannah Ragland

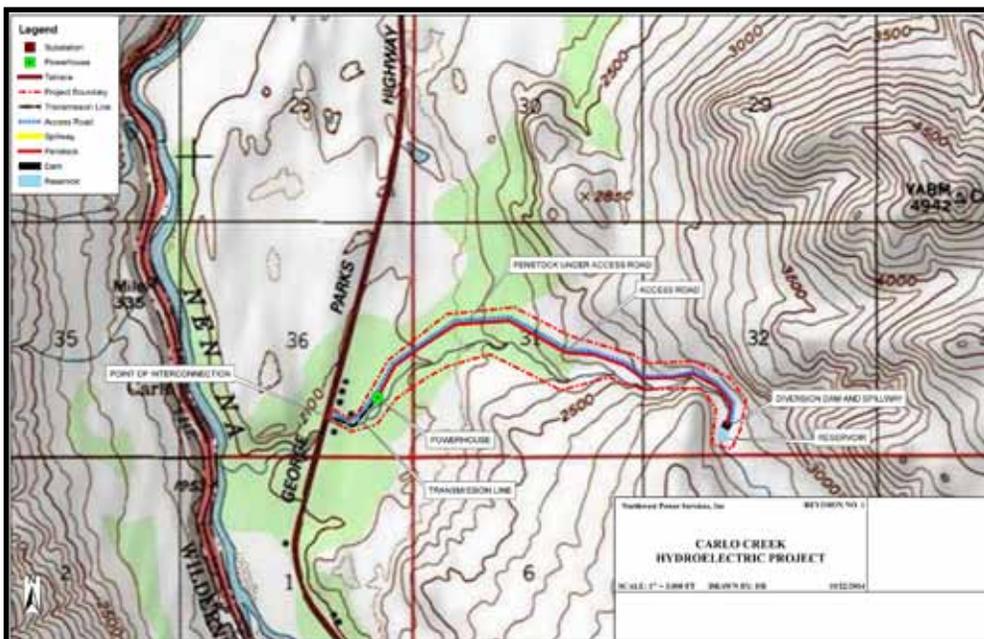
This past fall, three related corporations filed requests for preliminary permits with the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) to study the possibility of building three hydroelectric projects in the Denali Borough. They would be located on Bruskasna Creek, a popular fishing and boating destination off the upper Nenana River; the Jack River, one of the larger tributaries of the Nenana River, flowing northwest from the Talkeetna Mountains into the Nenana at Cantwell; and Carlo Creek, a steep creek flowing into the Nenana River from the Alaska Range, popular for hiking and close to several private parcels.

The contacts for all three corporations are Brent Smith (907-414-8223) of Wasilla and Gordon Carlson (907-768-2591) of Cantwell. Carlson has promoted hydroelectric projects as a way for the village of Cantwell to obtain a sustainable source of revenue, because much (but not all) of the projects' infrastructure would rest on Ahtna lands. The FERC permits recently applied for (and already granted in the case of Jack River) authorize the project sponsors to conduct a variety of studies on the conditions and impacts of these projects. DCC intends to request meetings with project sponsors and affected citizens as studies move forward.



Map of proposed Jack River Hydroelectric Project. North is to the left on this map.

Map from Preliminary Permit Request



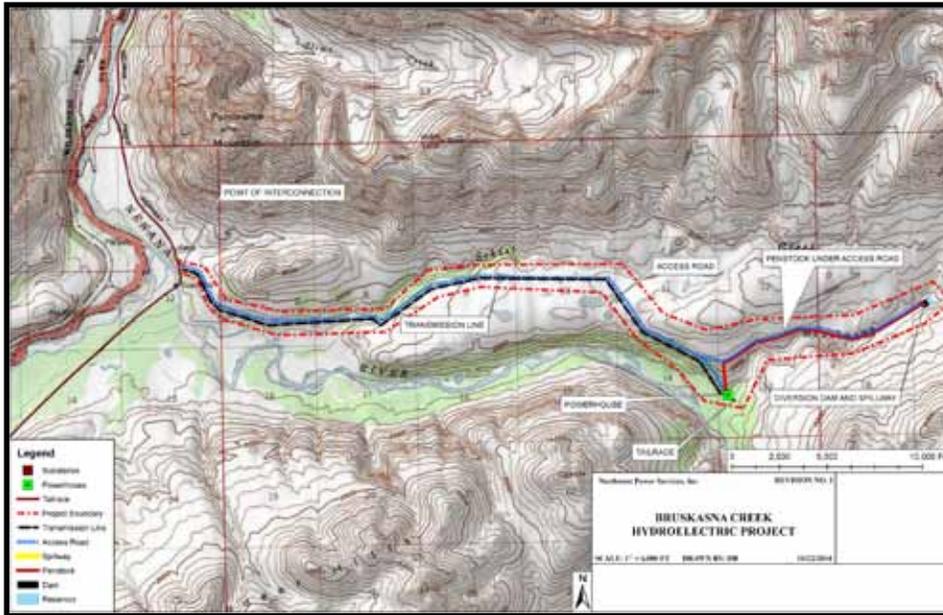
Map of proposed Carlo Creek Hydroelectric Project. The Preliminary Permit for this project would authorize studies covering environmental, engineering, social and economic factors. Studies are expected to last up to three years.

Map from Preliminary Permit request

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THREE HYDRO PROJECTS SEEK PERMITS

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Map of proposed Bruskasna Creek Hydroelectric Project. This project would involve the building of a 7 mile road from the first bridge on the Parks Highway north of Cantwell to the site along Bruskasna Creek, a tributary of the Nenana River.

Map from Preliminary Permit Request

To read DCC's comments on the Preliminary Permit applications for each of these projects, visit our website, <http://www.denalicitizens.org>.

TABLE COMPARING CARLO CREEK, JACK RIVER AND BRUSKASNA DAM PROPOSALS WITH SUSITNA-WATANA PROPOSAL

	Carlo Creek (P-14645)	Jack River (P-14646)	Bruskasna Creek (P-14652)	Susitna-Watana On Hold
Dam dimensions	50-foot-long, 10 foot-high diversion weir traversing Carlo Creek	750-foot-long, 250 foot-high with a 250-foot-high spillway built into the crest of the dam	50-foot-long, 10 foot-high diversion weir traversing Bruskasna Creek	2,700 foot-long, 700-800 foot-high earth embankment, roller compacted concrete or concrete faced rockfill dam
Reservoir size	Approximately 1 acre, 10-acre-feet of storage capacity	865 acres, 50,700 acre-feet of storage capacity	Approximately 1 acre, 10-acre-feet of storage capacity	20,000 acres, 2,400,000 acre-feet of storage capacity
Penstock Delivers water from reservoir to turbines	One 10,500-foot-long, 2.5-foot-diameter steel	Two 300-foot-long, 4-foot-diameter steel	One 13,500-foot-long, 30-inch-diameter steel	To be determined
Tailrace Delivers water from turbines to creek or river	10-foot-wide, 5-foot-deep, 10 foot-long concrete tailrace emptying into Carlo Creek	20-foot-wide, 20-foot-deep, 25-foot-long concrete tailrace emptying into the Jack River	10-foot-wide, 5-foot-deep, 10 foot-long concrete tailrace emptying into Bruskasna Creek	To be determined
Other facilities Powerhouses, transmission lines, access roads	1,500-foot-long, 15-kilovolt transmission line, approximately 12,000 feet of new access roads, 25' x 35' powerhouse	8,000 foot-long, 15-kilovolt transmission line, approximately 28,000 feet of new access roads, 75' x 125' powerhouse	34,000-foot-long, 15-kilovolt transmission line, approximately 46,000 feet of new access roads, 25' x 35' powerhouse	40-50 mile-long (211,200-264,000 feet), 230 kilovolt transmission line and road, powerhouse size to be determined
Purpose of generated power	Estimated annual generation of 6.3 gigawatt-hours	Estimated annual generation of 23.4 gigawatt-hours	Estimated annual generation of 5.2 gigawatt-hours	Estimated annual generation of 2,500,000 gigawatt-hours

ENGAGING DEBATE ON THE FUTURE OF COAL DRAWS LARGE CROWD

by Cass Ray

Many of the more than 75 people stepping out into the frigid night following the January 28 public forum on the future of coal mining and burning couldn't help but notice the telltale scent in the air--the strong, acrid odor of coal burning in stoves in homes all over Healy. But maybe many Healy residents are so accustomed to the smell of burning coal that they did not notice it that evening as they exited the community library at the school. If so, that reality offers a metaphor for much of the two-hour-long forum: as with so many important issues, when it comes to coal mining and burning, so much, even the facts, depends on who is asked.

The forum proved to be what probably was expected by most of those filling the library at Tri-Valley School: members of a Chickaloon-based environmental coalition reminded everyone of the potential hazards of continuing to mine and burn coal, while Healy residents praised and defended their community and the Usibelli coal mine's important role in it, and members of mining families defended their livelihood.

'Coal is in Alaska's Past, Not in Our Children's Future'

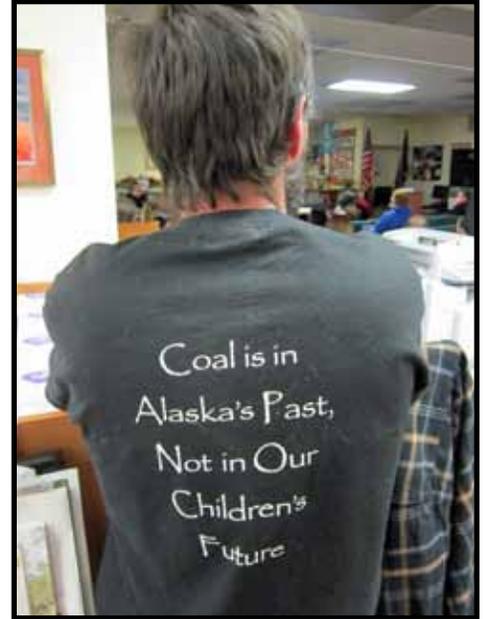
"Coal is in Alaska's past, not in our children's future," argued the t-shirt sported by Kirby Spangler, the president of Castle Mountain Coalition's board of directors who videoed the forum. "Thank you very, very much for providing coal for our state," a local resident, drawing some of the most sustained applause of the evening, told Joe Usibelli, Jr., the third-generation president of the Healy coal mine that bears his family's name. She noted the state constitution encourages energy production and commented, "We don't want to live in the Stone Age." A woman who lives near the mine's property line told Usibelli, "It just feels like it doesn't impact us." A wife and mother of Usibelli employees who has lived near the mine for 27 years reported the mine "doesn't impact the comfort of my home" and said the mine "is what makes this place a special place."

While Jamey Duhamel, representing the Coalition, said Asian demand for coal, the chief product of the local company town, is decreasing significantly, Usibelli reported global consumption of coal is expected to increase "dramatically" in the next 25 years. The two Tri-Valley high school students helping present the pro-alternative energies side of the discussion noted that the nation's supply of coal eventually will run out, and alternative forms of energy should be pursued as a backup, and Duhamel called coal only a "finite" resource. But the two students helping present the pro-coal side cited the nation's abundant supply of coal, with no fewer than 34 of the 50 states boasting coal reserves, and Usibelli noted that leases already held by the local mine have a 500-year supply of coal.

Duhamel called coal a "volatile commodity," due in large part to the expense of building and opening new coal-fired power plants and to state and federal regulations. Usibelli asked whether all the coal needed throughout the world in the coming years should be produced in the United States, for example in Healy, where the industry is closely regulated by those state and federal regulations, or should it be produced in other countries, where its emissions and other concerns are not regulated? "We should be a solution for the rest of the world," said Usibelli. Those regulations affect every aspect of the mine's operation, he said, calling mining one of the most regulated industries. Offering an example of the careful regulatory scrutiny to which the mine is subjected, he noted that one violation for his mine involved a cap left off a Windex container. Still, Lorali Simon, Usibelli's vice president for external affairs, likened the state and federal regulations governing the mine to a "constantly moving target," saying it is next to impossible to always adhere to all those regulations.

'Social License to Operate'

The phrase "social license to operate" refers to whether a community supports a coal mine or coal-fired power plant in its neighborhood, Duhamel said. She noted, "People in total are turning their backs on coal." A "social license to operate" involves "being a good person, being a good company," countered Usibelli. That the mine is the most philanthropic company



Kirby Spangler
Photo courtesy of Cass Ray

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ENGAGING DEBATE ON THE FUTURE OF COAL

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in the area should go some distance toward providing it that “social license to operate,” said a local resident. The two pro-coal students noted the mine employs more than 100 employees, and Usibelli said the mine looks forward to providing coal to Healy’s second power plant, which already has hired 30 new employees, but the two pro-alternative energies students countered that using alternative energies would create three times as many jobs as does the use of fossil fuels. (DCC joined other environmental groups in seeing that the renewal of permits for the reopening of that second Healy power plant received proper regulatory attention.)

Despite start-up costs that can prove significant, noted Duhamel, such alternative energies as wind, geothermal, tidal, and hydroelectric may prove less expensive than coal in the long term, as, in contrast to coal, their operating costs remain constant. Usibelli countered that, among other issues, hydroelectric plants are being demolished and as for nuclear energy, “Nobody supports that.” When Duhamel asked what would happen to the town if the mine “pulled out,” a Healy resident replied that even Prudhoe Bay and the Alaska pipeline eventually will shut down.

The moderated debate, exploring whether coal mining and coal-generated electricity offer a future for the planet, nation, state, and, most specifically, Healy, was hosted by Tri-Valley’s Contemporary Conflicts Class, taught by Daryl Frisbie. DCC has contributed toward the students’ trip to “Close Up” activities in Washington, D. C. Longtime residents of the Denali Borough noted the forum represented one of few opportunities ever to discuss publicly the various facets of their company town’s chief industry. The evening’s format included brief presentations by, in order, the two pro-alternative energies students, the two pro-coal students, Duhamel, and Usibelli, followed by questions and brief remarks from the audience. Usibelli Coal Mine, Inc. has a long history in the community; it was founded there 72 years ago by Joe Usibelli Jr.’s grandfather, Emil, who had come to this country from Italy, and remains the only producing coal mine in the state. The mine is only twelve miles north of Denali National Park and Preserve.

The Castle Mountain Coalition is a non-profit “working to promote and preserve ecological integrity, economic sustainability, and quality of life” within the Matanuska River watershed. The Coalition opposes Usibelli’s and two foreign companies’ proposed mining at Wishbone Hill, Jonesville, and Chickaloon, claiming the miners “want to turn 20,000 acres of the Matanuska Valley into the next Appalachia. We know what the negative impacts of coal mining are and we don’t want them in our community.” Duhamel, from Sutton, who noted she is a mother of four with a fifth well on the way (after four daughters, a boy, she reported), left a career as a social worker to focus on local coal mining issues. Perhaps attesting to the significance of the topic for the Denali Borough, the audience of more than 75 was nearly four times the number who reportedly turned out for the previous forum, which explored whether Healy should incorporate.

‘Healy wouldn’t exist without coal’

The flier announcing the forum noted one of its purposes was to help both students and other members of the community “become educated” on “civil decorum,” and the high school student who introduced the evening assured the audience that anyone behaving impolitely or otherwise inappropriately would be escorted from the room. But the evening’s sour notes proved few, with one sounded when Simon, the mine’s vice president for external affairs, told Duhamel and the other members of the Coalition that often they don’t know what they are talking about and that it was good to see them among others, such as Healy residents, who live near mining operations and work there and thus have familiarity and even expertise in such matters. Later a local resident invited Duhamel to spend more time in Healy and give residents a chance to share their thoughts on the effects of coal mining and burning on their community, and she agreed to do so.

Opening his portion of the program and noting the cold evening on which the large audience had gathered, Usibelli smiled and commented, “The reason that we’re warm right now is that we’re heated by coal.” Reflecting on his family’s four generations of close connection to the Healy community, Usibelli mentioned that bookshelves across the library looked familiar, as, decades ago, as a student at the school, he helped build them.



Joe Usibelli Jr.
Photo courtesy of Cass Ray

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ENGAGING DEBATE ON THE FUTURE OF COAL

continued from previous page

“Healy wouldn’t exist without coal,” said the two pro-coal students, and Usibelli agreed, “We do live in a coal-mining community, for 100 years now.” He noted his family’s mine is a “very locally-oriented business.” Thirty-six percent of Usibelli workers are second-, third-, or fourth-generation company employees, he noted, with 12 the average number of years of service. And “coal is vital to Alaska,” said Usibelli. The two pro-coal students had reported that almost 30 percent of interior Alaska’s electricity and 40 percent of the world’s electricity is generated by coal. Five hundred coal-powered power plants already operate throughout the United States, reported the pro-coal team. The local mine supplies 100 percent of Alaska’s demand for coal, with no imports needed, noted Usibelli.

Coal, said Usibelli, is “nothing more than biomass that’s been naturally aged by the earth.” Coal is “solar energy that’s been stored in trees,” added a local resident. When another resident asked Usibelli about possible health effects from emissions from burning coal in home stoves, he responded that “dirty” is a “subjective word,” and more than once he said there continues to be serious debate about whether coal should be considered a “dirty fuel.” Whether the mining and burning of coal are “harmful or dangerous” is, Usibelli said, “relative to how you use it.” Technology and those state and federal regulations have cleaned up the emissions associated with mining and burning coal, he said. As for safety, he added, “We take it very, very seriously,” calling mining “one of the safest industrial activities in the United States.” While the local mine suffered only one lost-time incident last year, he said, 70 percent of mines nationwide did not report a single one. “Our main mantra,” Usibelli said, “is safety.” Responding to a question about how Usibelli coal is extracted, he noted it is surface-mined, followed by re-filling, re-grading, and re-vegetating. He stressed the mine’s ongoing land reclamation efforts, adhering to state and federal regulations.

The two pro-coal students noted that coal is a relatively inexpensive form of energy—Duhamel agreed the price of coal has decreased significantly—and Usibelli added that the cost of producing electricity via coal is half that of using natural gas, and that replacing coal with alternative energies for interior Alaska would cost \$200 million a year. Local energy customers benefiting from the use of coal should expect to see lower electricity costs, he said. Alaska’s coal production also helps with the nation’s balance of exports and imports with other nations; in one figure cited by the two pro-coal students, Usibelli exported 801,000 tons of coal in 2009. Key foreign customers include Chile, South Korea, and Japan, noted Usibelli.

‘We’re going to deny them energy?’

Predicting coal will be the top source of energy for the planet in five years, Usibelli said, “Energy is a human right and a rapidly rising need.” Calling insufficient supplies of energy the “number one human and environmental crisis” faced by the world today, Usibelli said 3.5 billion human inhabitants of the planet do not have access to electricity. Many of the planet’s citizens, he said, are reduced to burning the dung of livestock for energy—“We’re going to deny them energy?” The expansion of electricity over the past century has meant, he said, a 98 percent decline in the number of climate-related deaths throughout the world. But among the “external costs” of mining and burning coal, Duhamel listed environmental and health concerns, property values (the value of private property near coal mines has suffered an average decline of 23 percent, she reported), and governmental subsidies (significant costs for health care and for maintaining modes of transportation damaged by moving coal mean “states wind up in the red,” she said).

Examples of viable alternative types of energy cited by the two pro-alternative energies students included nuclear, tidal power, geothermal, wind, solar, and hydroelectric, with the last three providing 66.8 percent of the renewable energy used in the United States. Duhamel noted that supplies of sustainable energy are by definition “infinite,” in contrast to coal supplies, which are “finite.”



Jamey Duhamel

Photo courtesy of Cass Ray

STAMPEDE STATE RECREATION AREA

LOCAL RESIDENTS VOICE MIXED FEELINGS

by Hannah Ragland

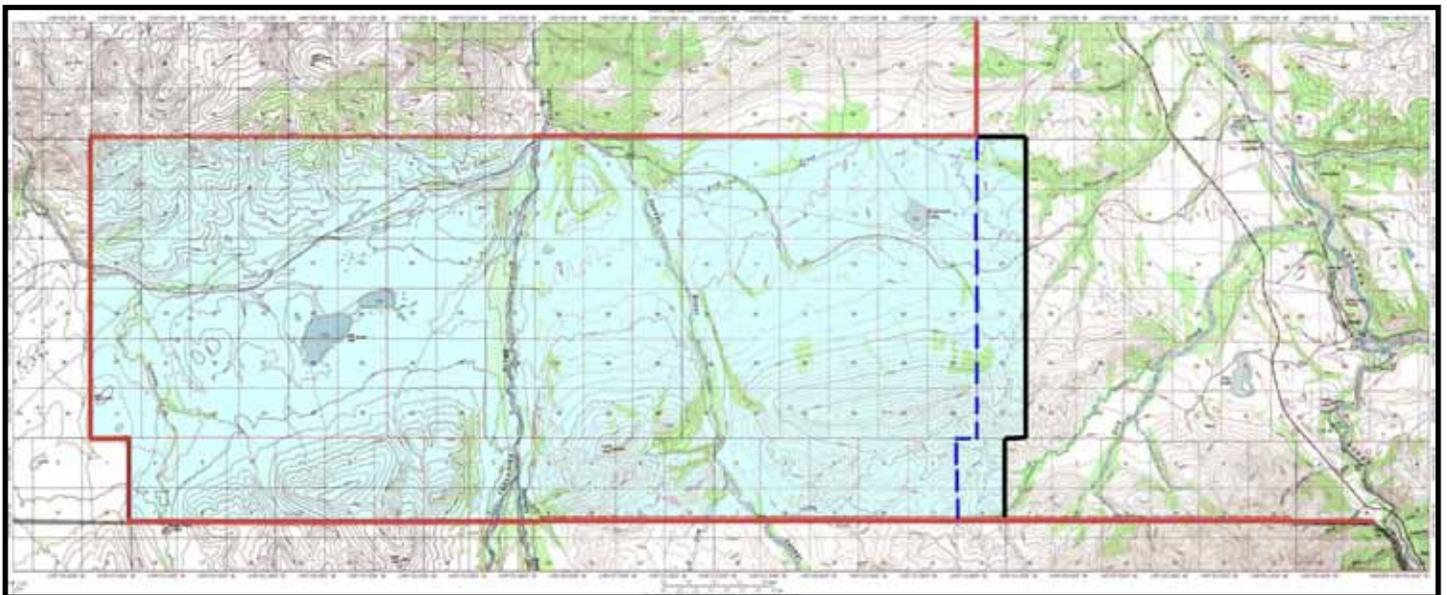
Since 2007, the Denali Borough Assembly has passed eight resolutions supporting the Stampede State Recreation Area (SRA), which they once again considered at their February 2015 meeting. Before the meeting, letters of support and opposition to the SRA flooded the Borough office. All individuals expressed that they valued the Stampede Trail corridor for various reasons. However, many of those expressing opposition believed that an SRA would close the Stampede Trail and were not aware of the previous Assembly resolutions or the hundreds of individuals and groups that have expressed support for the proposal over the years.



Alaska Native Knowledge Network

Representative Dave Talerico has cited concern over the state's fiscal situation, but also suggested that conflicts with present permit holders (such as Usibelli Coal Mine) may necessitate that the boundary of the SRA be moved west. Usibelli, currently licensed to explore for natural gas in the area, has expressed concern that an SRA designation would stifle potential resource development. At the February meeting, the Assembly amended the SRA resolution to request an eastern boundary that would be one mile west of the Panguingue Creek Subdivision but still include Eightmile Lake, and added oil and gas development and mining to the list of current uses the Assembly would support within the proposed SRA.

The Assembly planned and hosted a public work session on February 25 in Healy to discuss concerns and educate local residents about the Stampede SRA proposal. DCC encouraged all individuals who care about land along the Stampede Trail to attend. The question remains: will the community come together again to address the problems the area faces, or will the lack of management cause the Stampede Trail to be loved to death? 



Map shows extent of Stampede SRA proposal, as most recently presented in a bill to the Alaska Legislature. Broken lines show one possible change to the boundary discussed by the Borough Assembly at its recent meeting.

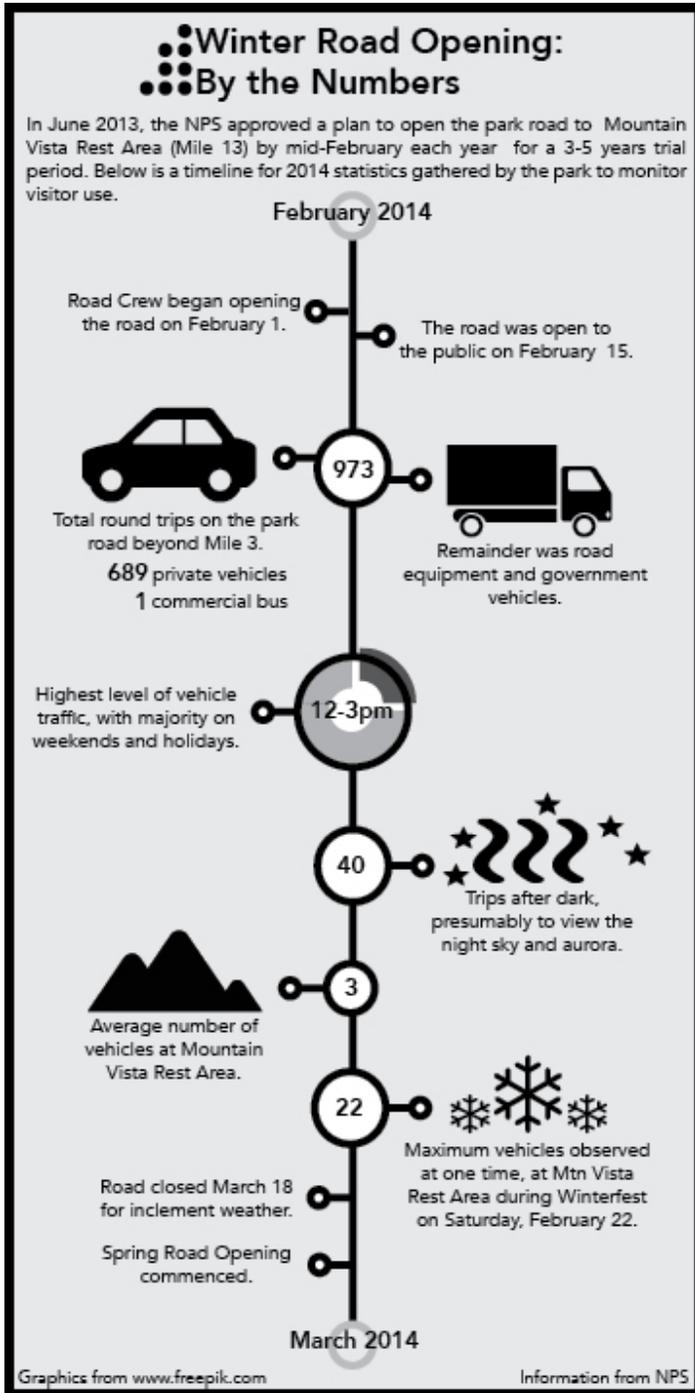
Map by DCC

BRIEF NEWS AND VIEWS

A LOOK AT THE NUMBERS: DENALI PARK ROAD WINTER OPENING

This is the second year that NPS will open the Denali park road to winter traffic, conditions permitting. The road opened to personal and commercial permitted vehicles on February 14 this year.

DCC is looking at new ways of representing and sharing information, and created this infographic containing last year's winter traffic numbers. Let us know what you think of this method of communication. We're invested in monitoring this year's road opening, and will do our best to keep our members informed. 



Denali Park sled dogs on the Park Road
Photo courtesy of Jen Raffaelli

BRIEF NEWS AND VIEWS

RECYCLING FACILITY OPEN AT CANTWELL TRANSFER STATION

The Native Village of Cantwell received a grant from the Indian General Assistance Program/Environmental Protection Agency (IGAP/EPA) to staff a recycling facility at the Cantwell Transfer Station. Partnered with the Denali Borough, the new facility is housed in the vacant building at the Transfer Station. Rena Nicklie of Cantwell is the full-time environmental coordinator for the project; the other position is part-time.

The hours of operation for recycling drop-off are the same as the Transfer Station: Mondays, 2-4 pm, Wednesdays, 4-9 pm, and Saturdays 11-6 pm (check the Borough's website for any changes). Unlike trash, dropping off recycling at the Transfer Station is free.

For now, they are able to accept mixed paper, aluminum, and plastics 1 and 2. The grant also provides some recycle tubs and can crushers for interested recyclers. Nicklie says that as the program grows, they hope to collect more items. "At this time," she says, "only a handful of participants are using the recycle system," which has been in operation since mid-January.

This program is filling an important gap in the services available to our community, as year-round public recycling facilities are a rarity in Alaska, let alone the Denali Borough. If you haven't already, start collecting your recyclables, and visit the Cantwell Transfer Station. Any questions about the program can be directed to Rena Nicklie at epa_cantwell@hotmail.com. 

DCC SPONSORS CANTWELL STUDENT TO ATTEND THE CIVICS AND CONSERVATION SUMMIT IN JUNEAU

Kiana Carlson of Cantwell was accepted and is planning to attend the Civics and Conservation Summit in Juneau, Alaska, which is sponsored by Alaska Youth for Environmental Action. At the Summit, youth from throughout the state of Alaska learn about the legislative process and meet with legislators to discuss bills that focus on environmental issues. DCC has sponsored her attendance with \$400, which will cover her registration and go towards airfare. The event will occur from March 8-13, 2015.



DCC NEWS

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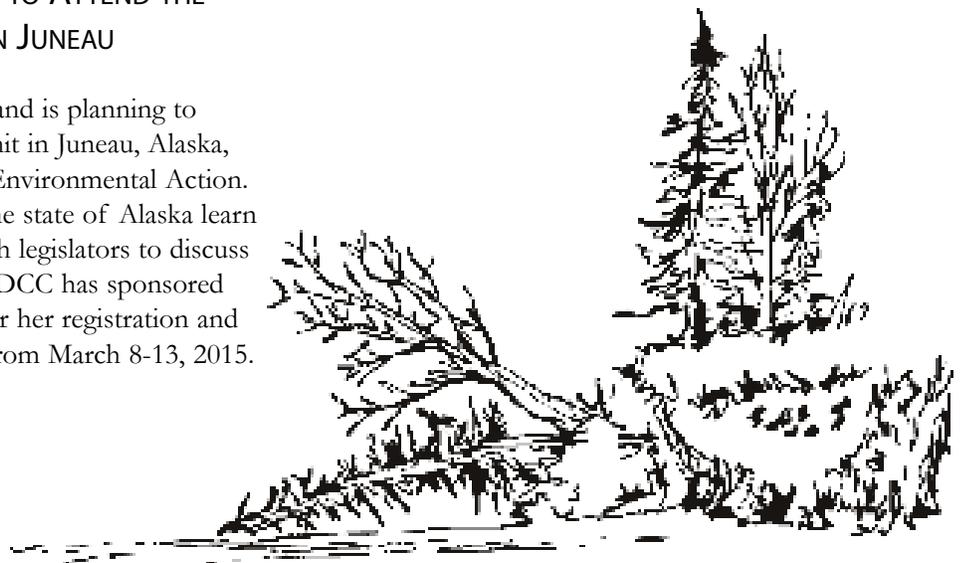
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Denali Citizens Council is a nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization. Our mission is to protect the natural integrity of Denali National Park and to promote a sustainable future for lands surrounding the Park. Please join by filling out this form and mailing it to the address below.

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