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Alaska wetlands ruling emerges

A new policy proposed by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency would allow Alaskan landowners to pursue wetland use permits without expensive compensatory mitigation requirements, providing that 99% of the state's historic wetlands remain intact. The Alaska Wetlands Coalition has actively worked with the White House to secure the policy, known as the 1% Alaska rule. The Coalition considers the policy essential if Alaska is to expand its resource industries and allow for community development.

However, environmental groups are mounting a massive campaign to derail the proposed ruling. In addition, the groups have already urged President-elect Bill Clinton to rescind the rule if it is promulgated. Opponents claim that the proposed policy will "spark unbridled oil and urban development" and lead to the "wholesale destruction of Alaskan wetlands."

Becky Gay, RDC's Executive Director, insists that such claims are patently false. She pointed out that applicable federal permits will be required on all projects that involve wetlands. The only change will be the elimination of the compensatory mitigation and avoidance requirements. The requirement that permit applicants minimize the impact of any wetlands use will remain in place, scaling down the potential footprint of any development.

Gay stressed that the national "no net loss" of wetlands policy is not flexible enough for Alaska, a state where over 70% of all non-mountainous lands are wetlands. If the policy is implemented without the proposed rule change, economic development across Alaska will be seriously impacted, Gay warned.

(Continued on page 6)
1992: A full plate

It’s hard to believe that another year is coming to a close. Having returned to RDC in August from my year as ANWR Coordinator for the Governor, I jumped right back into my usual pace, with the help of our great board of directors, executive committee and outstanding staff. Here are some highlights and accomplishments of 1992 for which the membership can be proud.

RDC has been working hard to open ANWR, a vital resource in the Coastal Plain of Alaska. Our efforts have been supported by the local community, the federal government, and the international community. We have made significant progress, including the publication of an environmental impact statement and the approval of the Alaska Public Utilities Board (AIDEA) for the project.

In addition, RDC has been working on the Alaska Wildlife Conservation Act (AWCA), which is designed to protect and conserve the unique wildlife resources of Alaska. The AWCA has been a key tool in our efforts to open ANWR.

We have also been working on the Alaska Endangered Species Act (AES), which is designed to protect and conserve the unique species in Alaska. The AES has been a key tool in our efforts to open ANWR.

Finally, RDC has been working on the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA), which is designed to protect and conserve the unique Native American resources of Alaska. The ANCSA has been a key tool in our efforts to open ANWR.

Thank you for your support of RDC and our efforts to open ANWR. We look forward to continuing our work in 1993.
Alaska wetlands ruling critical to development of natural resources

(Continued from page 1)

The "no net loss" policy was designed to protect remaining wetlands in the Lower 48 from significant losses. Over half of the wetlands outside Alaska have been developed.

Under the compensatory mitigation feature of the "no net loss" policy, a developer would be required to pay to make new wetlands elsewhere for every acre of wetlands developed. But the 1% rule would do away with such a requirement as long as 99% of the state's wetlands remain intact.

Gay maintains that compensatory mitigation makes no sense in Alaska where dry lands are much more scarce than wetland. She warned that compensatory mitigation would stifle development in Alaska, especially in rural areas where communities stand as "islands in a sea of wetlands."

"Wetlands are often the only choice for schools, hospitals, airports, utilities, transportation systems and homes in a state where only 10% of the towns are accessible by roads," Gay said.

Moreover, most of Alaska's wetlands are isolated and remote from rivers, streams, major lakes and estuaries and do not perform the same functions as wetlands elsewhere. And because of the huge expanses of undeveloped wetlands in Alaska, many of the concerns present in urban areas of the Lower 48, such as preservation of wildlife habitat, do not apply. Wildlife is not habitat-limited in Alaska.

Proponents of the new rule note that Alaska is also a special case because some 40% of the state's wetlands (68 million acres) are already protected in federal conservation units. Most of the state's high value wetlands are in these federal set-asides. Others are protected by strict federal, state and local laws.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service estimates that the state has lost only about one-tenth of one percent of its wetlands since 1867, when Alaska was purchased from Russia. The state has over 170 million acres of wetlands, more than double the total wetland acreage in the Lower 48 states combined.

At the current rate of development, it would take over 250 years to reach the 1% threshold.

Gay calls the Alaska Rule the "99% protection policy."

"The 1% rule means that 99% of Alaska's wetlands will not be affected. This rule recognizes that Alaska has obtained the highest performance standard in preserving its wetlands."

RDC conference examines federal environmental laws, impact on Alaskans

On November 20, the Resource Development Council concluded a very successful two-day conference focusing on "Needs of the '90s: Prosperity and the Environment." Participants were treated to a cross-section of distinguished speakers addressing such topics as the questionable scientific rationale for specific environmental laws, the risk assessments that supposedly justify those laws and the costs to America's industry, local government units (spelled taxpayers) and the individual consumer for what are now federal environmental mandates.

Mike Pompili, Assistant Health Commissioner for the City of Columbus, Ohio, shared the results of his community's study of the costs to comply to the proliferation of unfunded federal environmental mandates, a study that closely parallels the conclusions of a similar study recently completed by the Municipality of Anchorage. Dr. Sally Balunas presented scientific data that calls into question the "politically correct" conclusions that global warming and ozone depletion are truly at the emergency response point. This is the acid rain "call to arms" all over again that produced the Clean Air Act amendments that will cost the American consumer at least $7 billion per year in higher electric utility rates. Those amendments were promulgated irrespective of the conclusions of a $600 million federally-funded scientific study, the conclusions of which did not support that legislative action.

Alaska's Mental Health Trust Lands, state water quality standards and federal wetlands policy were also subjects of the conference. The presenters of these topics left little doubt that unresolved, these issues will severely curtail Alaska's opportunities to generate new wealth from the land or from the sea and thus will seriously erode the State's ability to meet its responsibilities.

RDC's 1992 conference provided the participants with hard numbers to what will truly be the cost in dollars and jobs of poorly researched and ill-conceived "knee-jerk" or "politically correct" solutions to what in hind sight may prove to be non-problems within our global environment.

A portion of the program was video-taped for airing on Prime Cable and C-Span to reach a larger audience. Anchoragedelevision news also covered the event, but it's unfortunate that Alaska's largest newspaper choose not to provide coverage to its readers so that they too would have the benefit of a more balanced exposure to these issues and the costs thereof.

I believe that our 13th Annual Conference was a great success and I would like to personally thank our cosponsors, general sponsors, underwriters and exhibitors. I especially want to thank RDC's staff for an exemplary performance.

Thoughts from the President

by Paul S. Glavinovich

On November 20, the Resource Development Council concluded a very successful two-day conference focusing on "Needs of the '90s: Prosperity and the Environment." Participants were treated to a cross-section of distinguished speakers addressing such topics as the questionable scientific rationale for specific environmental laws, the risk assessments that supposedly justify those laws and the costs to America's industry, local government units (spelled taxpayers) and the individual consumer for what are now federal environmental mandates.

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With over 70 percent of the state's non-mountainous lands considered wetlands, most Alaska communities are surrounded by wetlands. A flexible policy is imperative if these communities are to provide basic services - which Lower 48 residents take for granted.

Deadline for comments

Monday, December 21, 1992

Send to:

Mr. Gregory Peck
Chief, Wetlands & Aquatic Research
Wetlands Alaska Docket A-104F
Environmental Protection Agency
401 M Street, SW
Washington, D.C. 20460
or fax to 202-260-2356

RDC honors Tom Cook and Easy Gilbreth

Long-time RDC board members Tom Cook and Easy Gilbreth were honored at the recent RDC conference for their outstanding achievements in support of resource development in Alaska. Gilbreth, pictured at left with former RDC President Bill Schneider, served 11 years with the Alaska Oil and Gas Association before retiring in 1989. Shortly after, Gilbreth was appointed Executive Director of the Alaska Coalition for American Energy Security. At right, Cook receives a RDC "First Barrel of Oil" plaque from Schneider, while Allen Smith of the Wilderness Society applauds. Cook served as Chevron's Alaska Exploration Representative for 12 years. He participated in countless media interviews on ANWR and escorted dozens of people, ranging from reporters to U.S. Senators, to the Coastal Plain.

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Resource Development Council's 13th Annual Conference

Needs of the '90s

Prosperity and the Environment

Seasons Greetings
from the
RDC Board & Staff