A review process of park and refuge lands for wilderness suitability is at best confusing and unorganized while at worst bad public policy. That assessment of the review process conducted by federal agencies of park and refuge lands in Alaska for possible inclusion into the National Wilderness Preservation System was given by the Resource Development Council before the Alaska Land Use Council October 8 in Anchorage.

According to RDC, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the National Park Service have implemented two distinct processes in carrying out the requirements of Section 1317 of ANILCA, a provision mandating a secretarial review of park and refuge lands for wilderness suitability.

In its wilderness reviews for the nine parks, preserves and monuments under study this summer, the Park Service has merely summarized the status and nature of the lands and determined whether those lands met the criteria for wilderness as set in the wilderness act, said RDC's projects coordinator Mike Abbott. He said it shouldn't...

Allen stresses subsurface assessments

In a presentation before the Alaska Land Use Council, Bill Allen, former mayor of the Fairbanks North Star Borough, noted mineral interests have been given cursory consideration in most recent land planning efforts. He complained that planning teams frequently omit mineral specialists, including geologists, mining and petroleum engineers, but instead are dominated by land use and recreational planners, foresters and biologists.

"It is frequently only after the plans have been drafted and made available for public comment that mineral specialists have an opportunity to provide input," Allen said. "In the land use planning process, the mineral industry has been relegated to reacting to plans rather than being included in them."

Allen reminded members of the Council that Alaska lags far behind the southern states and the Soviet Union in the knowledge of its physical environment, particularly mineral resources.

"This is deplorable for a state so dependent on development of its natural resources for its continued economic survival," Allen charged.

Emphasizing that the state's income depends largely on resource-derived dollars, Allen warned that reducing efforts to inventory new mineral resource deposits due to falling oil revenues is much like "cutting off our nose to spite our face." He said the threat of declining revenues from oiling sources should cause Alaska to increase efforts to find new sources of wealth.

Allen proposed creation of a "Mineral Resource Fund" by the state legislature. A fixed percentage of revenues from the sale of oil, gas, coal, sand, gravel and other minerals would be deposited into this fund to pay for a systematic mineral assessment mapping program. Allen suggested that seed money for the program come from the Permanent Fund, perhaps a small portion of its interest earnings.

RDC's Minerals Division will study Allen's proposal and issue recommendations to the legislature.

The vast Cape Krusenstern National Monument is one of 13 national park areas in Alaska protecting the "crown jewels" of the land.
Message From The Executive Director

By Paula P. Easley

Flexibility is a real plus

"How does the Resource Development Council decide which projects to undertake and how do you allocate funds to those projects?"

This is one of those questions that takes an answer, after a deep breath, that begins with "Well..."

First of all, when beginning a new fiscal year, the Council's leaders can't begin to know all the issues that will surface and require our attention.

It would be great to know what actions Congress, a federal agency, the state legislature or administration, a project developer or environmental group were planning, but life isn't that simple.

Even with a well-structured work plan, we maintain flexibility to address those "unplanned-for issues" and many of you see that as one of the real pluses of this organization.

In determining whether to support or oppose an issue, a simple guiding principle is this: Is (whatever it is) in the overall best interest of Alaska?

With that principle in mind, the Council does not involve itself in supporting a venture that would put one developer or community against another. More accurately, it works to create the "climate" in which the development can take place — then let the bidders love it.

How do we allocate funds to projects? We don't, exactly. We do try to raise enough money each year to assure we're adequately funded in each of our program areas — education, land, regulations, legislation, infrastructure development, proprietary rights, taxation and international trade, and you do a wonderful job in providing those funds.

A unique aspect of RDC is that we often advocate on behalf of issues which are not funded by a specific constituency. We ask everyone to help fund all the issues, and our membership does that. Our conviction is that all Alaskans (members or not) share the benefits of our program activities, and it takes a broad constituency to make a project successful.

That's not to say it wouldn't be more desirable to anticipate a project's costs and go to select constituency to pay for it. Maybe someday we'll be that sophisticated, who knows? But such a system requires a large commitment of time, effort and, in the end, we try to keep that to a minimum. The less time we spend on administration, the more we can spend on projects.

A good example of recent actions that have lacked a vocal, demanding constituency is our months-long work on the park and refuge management plans and protecting the possessory rights of conservation system units and holders. It's safe to say very few inhabitants are members of RDC, and there probably aren't many existing members who joined RDC because of our dedication to these land use issues.

The fact is, many people don't give a dam about what is or isn't allowed in Alaska's parks.

Regardless of this, RDC's leaders believe the management decisions for these lands are of huge importance to the state's economic future.

Another example is our recent and planned efforts on behalf of Alaska's growing agriculture industry. There isn't a large agricultural constituency in RDC, but the ones that are active believe strongly that the industry can and should make significant economic contributions to the state. To be successful, the industry needs major statewide support from organizations, communities, individuals and companies that represent. Some goes for the wood products industry and others.

There comes a time when our members have the final say about what we do. It's when they write the check for their membership renewal.

Resource Development Council, Inc.

The Resource Development Council (RDC) is Alaska's leading funded nonprofit economic development organization working to develop Alaska's natural resources in an orderly manner and to create a broad-based, diversified economy while protecting and enhancing the environment.

RDC invites members and the general public to its weekly breakfast meeting featuring local and nationally-known speakers on economic and resource development issues. The meetings are held on Thursdays at 7:30 a.m. in the Northern Lights Inn. Reservations are requested by calling 276-0700.

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Notable Quotes

"In just a few years...you could lose a good portion of your timber market if you do not keep pace with Canadian and Siberian advances in harvesting, veneering and pulping. The only way that Alaska can stay ahead, or forge ahead, of the rest of the world in...industries or business areas I have mentioned is to become a center for the science and technology basic to those industries or areas." — John W. Landis, Senior Vice President, Stone and Weber Engineering Corporation.

"If an oldtime prospector were to return today, he'd be amazed..." — Gunnar Knapp, Assistant Professor of Economics, Institute of Social and Economic Research, University of Alaska Anchorage.

"All employment in Alaska is generated either directly or indirectly by basic industries or by federal spending. There would be no support or state and local government employment without the demand and the revenues generated by basic industries and federal spending. We can call these basic industries, along with federal spending, 'primary sources' of employment." — Gunnar Knapp, Assistant Professor of Economics, Institute of Social and Economic Research, University of Alaska Anchorage.
Wilderness... (Continued from page 1) surprise anyone that the Park Service has decided that virtually every acre in each of these parks is suitable for a wilderness designation. Of 42 million acres in nine parks, Congress included 27 million acres in the National Wilderness System, leaving 15 million acres for wilderness review. Only one tenth of one percent of the non-wilderness, federally-owned, lands or .00066 of the nine parks were found unsuitable for wilderness designation. Abbott noted that the criteria for a wilderness suitability determination makes clear that areas with extensive, ongoing mining operations are not suitable. Yet the Park Service has recommended wilderness designation for the Kantishna Hills mining district in Denali National Park and Preserve, despite extensive mining since the turn of the century.

"I don’t know if any portion of any Alaska park which has received so much Park Service scrutiny as Kantishna and yet thousands of acres of ‘lunar landscape’ are considered suitable for inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System, our so-called ‘crown jewels’,” Abbott said. Environmentalists have accused miners of turning the Kantishna area into a lunar landscape. On the other side of the coin, the Park Service has found Ruth Glacier unsuitable for wilderness designation, despite its dramatic natural structures which meet every criterion for wilderness. The federal agency claims unsuitability because the area may someday become the site of a visitor facility. However, nowhere in the wilderness act does nature decide suitability. The Council testimony pointed out.

"We have not been able to give other areas of the parks the kind of scrutiny we gave Kantishna and Ruth Glacier,” Abbott said. "We can only wonder whether the Park Service has made such one-sided determinations throughout the system.

The Council also warned the Park Service intends to manage all those lands found suitable as if they were in fact congressionally designated wilderness. The Council offered the Park Service a suggestion: Those lands found suitable as if they were in fact congressionally designated wilderness are to be treated as if they were in fact wilderness.

A multi-agency resource team working with the Resource Development Council’s Lands and Renewable Resources Division has identified seven specific actions to advance a competitive agriculture industry in Alaska next year. Consensus on the priorities was reached after a series of meetings between Council resource specialists and top administrators from four government agencies. The Council’s Executive Committee unanimously endorsed the priorities on October 9.

Burton Clifford, Director of the Soil Conservation Service, announced the seven key priorities before the Council’s weekly breakfast forum in Anchorage. They are:

1. Development of a production credit program;
2. Restructuring the farm debt;
3. Splitting of agricultural tracts and provide for farmers to divide land on tracts;
4. Development of a “Grown in Alaska” marketing campaign;
5. Creation of commodity associations;
6. Encourage use of Alaska-grown products by state agencies; and
7. Request that the governor appoint a person with agricultural interests to the University of Alaska Board of Regents.

The Resource Development Council is now working to gain support of the program. The seven steps are currently being drafted as a “white paper” for submission to Governor Bill Walker. The report will also be targeted to key legislators.
ASCC Convention panel focuses on economy

Billions of dollars in construction projects in the early 1980s helped Alaska avoid a traditional boom-bust cycle, but recent cutbacks resulting from falling oil revenues are the key source behind the state’s recent economic slowdown, according to five economic experts participating in a panel discussion at the Alaska State Chamber of Commerce Convention in Anchorage earlier this month.

The growth of support industries, such as private construction, wholesale and retail trade services and finance, has diversified Alaska employment and led to a decrease in the influence of the federal government over the past 20 years, pointed out Gunnar Knapp of the Institute of Social and Economic Research. Knapp noted the federal government employed about 30 percent of Alaska’s work force in 1961 compared to one-sixth of all employment today.

“State and local government employment and support employment have grown more rapidly than total employment,” he said. “Employment in both of these sectors was more than five times as great in 1983 as 1961.”

Support industry employment has jumped from 20,000 to 138,000, Knapp noted because Alaskans are buying more goods and services locally and the available services in the state have expanded.

“All employment in Alaska is generated either directly or indirectly by basic industries or by federal spending,” Knapp stressed. “There would be no need for local government employment without the demand and the revenues generated by basic industries and federal spending.”

Bob Richards, Chairman of Alaska Pacific Bancorporation, said shrinking construction budgets are one of three negative factors causing Alaska’s economic slowdown. The others are the contractionary behavior of the general population and overbuilding of residential and commercial units.

Richards also named three positive factors that are acting to balance out the negative factors. They are higher oil prices, the Alaska visitor industry which has maintained a long-term commitment to the state.

Richards indicated a “grudging alliance between the private and public sector” is the key to opening Alaska to the rest of the world. “The private sector is capable of doing the job, but it will continue to be an on-going battle.”

Timber harvest down

Southeast Alaska’s fledging timber industry has seen a 50 percent drop in its annual harvest due to weak worldwide markets, according to a report on Alaska timber use.

The regional forest supervisor for the U.S. Forest Service in Southeast Alaska, the nation’s largest, has only 1.7 million acres dedicated for timber. And not all of that timber is harvestable, said Joe Henri.

The original 17 million board foot offering was based on an annual harvest potential of 47.6 million board foot. Private foresters have pegged the potential yield over 60 million board foot annually.

Negotiations concerning the Chugach appeals have come to a climax with a mid-October deadline set for acceptance of a Forest Service compromise. If agreement is reached, the federal agency will begin implementation of the plan.

RDC, an intervenor in the Chugach administrative appeal process, contends that the biological evidence shows wilderness values of the forest can still be maintained with far greater commercial activity than allowed under the plan. RDC would like to see more developed recreation and timber development in the forest.

In questioning following Barton’s presentation, the regional forester was asked why Canadian lumber imports have made such a big mark on the American market.

Barton responded by putting some of the blame on the strength of the U.S. dollar. He also pointed out that Alaska imports virtually all of its annual consumption of wood products.

RDC board member Joe Henri noted the Jones Act also was responsible.

“The Canadians can put lumber on a foreign ship and sail it to the U.S. East Coast cheaper then Weyerhaeuser can ship it from west to east,” Henri said. “The maritime unions as well as American shipbuilders are very much in favor of the Jones Act, but it has worked handicaps on Alaska and not just in Alaska.”

The Jones Act requires American ships shipped between American ports to be transported in American vessels with American crews, a subsidy borne almost entirely by Alaska.

Workshop set on water, resource development-policies

The Resource Development Council has joined with the Alaska Section of the American Water Resources Association (AWRA) to present a one-day workshop entitled “Water Policies and Resource Development in Alaska.”

The workshop will be held November 9 at the University of Alaska – Anchorage and will present panels on water availability, water rights, water quality issues and water and energy policies.

On November 14-15, AWRA will sponsor a more technical conference at Chena Hot Springs concentrating on placer mining and water quality standards as well as negotiating flows for hydropower developments.

To register for the Chena Hot Springs conference, contact Sharon Oien in Fairbanks at 276-7800 or Perry Wright in Anchorage at 345-6278. For additional information on the one-day Anchorage workshop, call Lynn Gabriel at 276-0700 or Steve Bredfeldt at 561-1733.