Key congressional staff tour Alaska wetlands, meet with local officials from Sitka to Nome

By Ken Freeman, RDC Projects Coordinator

Thirteen key policy-makers, charged with formulating federal wetlands policy, traveled from Sitka to Prudhoe Bay recently to learn first hand of Alaska's unique wetlands circumstances. The tour, which included meetings with local community and state government officials, representatives from Native corporations, and business leaders, was coordinated by the Alaska Wetlands Coalition (AWC).

The AWC was formed in 1989 in response to a Memorandum of Agreement between the EPA and the Corp of Engineers that mandated a policy of "No Net Loss" of wetlands. The Coalition's work is directed at securing recognition in federal policy of Alaska's unique circumstances and excellent conservation record. Representing a diverse statewide membership, the AWC works to

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Proposed wetlands exemption gone

In the wake of a Clinton administration decision to abandon a plan that would have exempt one percent of Alaska's wetlands from strict compensatory mitigation requirements, the EPA and the Corps of Engineers will initiate meetings with various interests in Alaska to consider alternative permitting procedures aimed at addressing Alaska's concerns with federal wetlands policy.

Now that the proposed one percent exemption for Alaska is off the table, the Alaska Wetlands Coalition is formulating a new proposal for federal policy-makers to consider as they look for a fair and flexible approach to regulating development on Alaska's wetlands.

Similar to former President George Bush's "no net loss" wetlands policy, the new Clinton policy restricts existing wetlands from being developed unless a developer first mitigates the proposed loss by restoring an equal amount of degraded or damaged wetlands, or by creating new wet-

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The White House Interagency Task Force on federal wetlands recently released its recommendations last month. The proposed one percent Alaska rule was abandoned, although a 53 million acre exemption for “prior converted cropland” in the Lower 48 was continued. This document asserts that the Corps and EPA will, within the next nine months, initiate meetings with a variety of groups to “consider other environmentally appropri- ate means to assure regulatory flexibility and the feasibility of alternative permitting procedures in Alaska.”

The wetlands debate is now fully engaged in Congress and the Administration’s guidelines are reflected in legislation which may improve the flexibility and contribution to wetlands protection, if Alaskans are given a chance to make possible by those companies. Pat Boinski of ARCO, Tony Kinderkencht and Cindy Bailey of BPX, and Gary Schlutz of DNR Landis Division also helped make thepermastout educational.

Thanks to Mayor Tom Fink and Paula Easley of the Municipality of Anchorage and Priscilla Wohlf the Department of Environmental Conservation for the tour of Anchorage, Potter’s Marsh, and Tugmakan Arm. In Girdwood, Lenny Daniels, Director of Planning for Belvu, Inc. discussed design analysis of the new hotel and tram project, wetlands avoidance and minimization efforts and permitting time, and gave an overview of the backcountry.

In Nome, Mayor John Handeland lived up to his reputation as a great field guide, bus driver, and general entertainer while wetlands avoidance and minimization efforts and permitting time, and gave a quick tour of the new luxury hotel under construction. In Nome, Mayor John Handeland lived up to his reputation as a great field guide, bus driver, and general entertainer while wetlands avoidance and minimization efforts and permitting time, and gave a quick tour of the new luxury hotel under construction. In Nome, Mayor John Handeland lived up to his reputation as a great field guide, bus driver, and general entertainer while wetlands avoidance and minimization efforts and permitting time, and gave a quick tour of the new luxury hotel under construction. In Nome, Mayor John Handeland lived up to his reputation as a great field guide, bus driver, and general entertainer while wetlands avoidance and minimization efforts and permitting time, and gave a quick tour of the new luxury hotel under construction. In Nome, Mayor John Handeland lived up to his reputation as a great field guide, bus driver, and general entertainer while wetlands avoidance and minimization efforts and permitting time, and gave a quick tour of the new luxury hotel under construction. In Nome, Mayor John Handeland lived up to his reputation as a great field guide, bus driver, and general entertainer while wetlands avoidance and minimization efforts and permitting time, and gave a quick tour of the new luxury hotel under construction. In Nome, Mayor John Handeland lived up to his reputation as a great field guide, bus driver, and general entertainer while wetlands avoidance and minimization efforts and permitting time, and gave a quick tour of the new luxury hotel under construction. In Nome, Mayor John Handeland lived up to his reputation as a great field guide, bus driver, and general entertainer while wetlands avoidance and minimization efforts and permitting time, and gave a quick tour of the new luxury hotel under construction. In Nome, Mayor John Handeland lived up to his reputation as a great field guide, bus driver, and general entertainer while wetlands avoidance and minimization efforts and permitting time, and gave a quick tour of the new luxury hotel under construction. In Nome, Mayor John Handeland lived up to his reputation as a great field guide, bus driver, and general entertainer while wetlands avoidance and minimization efforts and permitting time, and gave a quick tour of the new luxury hotel under construction.

In Juneau, Planning Director Murray Walsh and field trip coordinator Jan Caufield arranged for a special lunch which included Assembly members Rod Swope, Al Clough and Rosalie Walker. Juneau Wetlands Committee members and a few locals. AWC Co-chair Rick Harris provided an excellent technical brief presented with a special welcome by Bob Loescher, both of Sealsaska Corporation. Dr. Paul Rusanowski, Director of the Division of Governmental Coordination for the State of Alaska, rounded out the day with an overview of Alaska’s wetlands and geology.

In Bethel, after breakfast with local city officials, AWC Co-Chair Bill Bliven and the staff of Bethel Native Corporation gave a first-rate tour of the townsite. Then, off we went down the river by boat to Napaskiak, where the group met with villagers, heard from City Administrator Joseph Steven and Mayor Peter Williams, Sr., and toured the village and school. Andrew Angapak of Napaskiak flew with a smaller group to Kethluk, with on-the-ground help by Phillip Guy. In the Arctic portion, the Prudhoe Bay tour was led by Mike Joyce of ARCO and Christ Hergulson of BPX and made possible by those companies. Pat Botolik of ARCO, Tony Kinderkencht and Cindy Bailey of BPX, and Gary Schlutz of DNR Landis Division also helped make thepermastout educational.

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There is a great debate underway on whether America should continue to develop natural resources on public lands. For nearly 200 years, these resources have been the basis of America’s growth, prosperity and social order. Americans have developed the ability to change their resources to benefit to all citizens. From this effort, a nation without equal was built.

Times are changing, however, as political forces are moving to discourage the development of natural resources on public lands, and in many cases, private lands, in Alaska, a state which has over 88 percent of its land in public ownership, and whose economy is almost entirely based on resource development, the tides of change sweeping the nation will have a profound effect.

Clearly the future depends on the proper and wise use of all resources. So this is our dilemma: How do we distinguish between proper use, the misuse or the failure to develop and use resources? If not resource development, what mix will realistically sustain Alaska’s economy, its communities and citizens? Who lies beyond resource development?

In a world of resource conflicts, RDC will highlight these and other issues when its 14th Annual Conference, “Alaska’s Economy in Transition: Exploring Common Ground” opens Thursday, November 18 at the Hotel Captain Cook in Anchorage. From the regulated to the regulator, the preservationist to the resource provider, the consumer to the retailer, this provocative and timely forum addresses all perspectives in a spirit of forward-thinking and common ground to the challenges ahead.

Featuring nearly 40 dynamic speakers from across Alaska and the Lower 48, the conference is RDC’s largest. The two-day program includes the added bonus of morning and evening workshops for conference delegates. The workshops vary from wetlands permitting to tips for local business success to using the competition from giant national retailers. A work-shope offering advice to those conducting legislative business in Juneau will also be offered.

The conference includes a number of balanced panel presentations covering all perspectives on a wide range of subjects, including the retail boom in urban Alaska, the Mental Health Lands Trust dilemma and Environmental Impact Permits and ANSCA Lands. Access to federal lands, ANWR, Tongass re-form, Wilderness and tourism issues will be addressed in the context of ANILCA by a panel of state, federal and industrial officials. In addition, a special panel of national and state media representatives will present different perspectives on resource development, the environment and the economy. Specific topics addressed by the media panels include the coming bust in the Pacific Northwest, the new politics of the environment and a look beyond resource development. Twenty keynote luncheon presentations are planned, including a major legislative forum featuring the leaders of the House and Senate, along with the majority and minority leaders of both houses and the chairman of the resource committees. These key legislators will focus on the most pressing issues of the 1994 legislative session.

In the other keynote luncheon, a high-level Clinton administration official has been invited to address Washington’s agenda for Alaska.

The conference will conclude with a segment featuring timely and relevant transitions within Alaska’s oil and gas, mining, timber, fishing and tourism industries. Sponsor packets are available through RDC now.

Invited Speakers

Hazel O’Leary, Secretary of Energy
John Knebel, President, American Mining Congress
Graham Fysh, Sr. Business Writer, Morning News Tribune, Tacoma, WA
John Fund, Sr. Editorial Writer, Wall Street Journal
Howard Weaver, Editor, Anchorage Daily News
John Tracy, News Director, KTUU, Anchorage
Senator Rick Halford, Senate President
Senator Jim Duncan, Senate Minority Leader
Senator Mike Miller, Chair, Senate Resources Committee
Rep. Ramona Barnes, House Leader
Rep. Gail Phillips, House Majority Leader
Rep. Fran Ulmer, House Minority Leader
Rep. Bill Williams, Chair, House Resources Committee
Roy Huhndorf, President, Cook Inlet Region, Inc.
Elizabeth LeBlanc, Plans Director, Calista Corp.
John Mery, Sr. Vice President, Deyon Ltd.
Scott Feierabend, Director, National Wildlife Federation
David Cline, National Audubon Society
Cliff Eames, Alaska Center for the Environment
Charlie Cole, Attorney General, State of Alaska

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RDC’s 14th Annual Conference

Alaska’s Economy in Transition: Exploring Common Ground

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Thoughts from the President

by James L. Cloud

Your future is at stake

In a world of resource conflicts and contradictions of human behavior, the Resource Development Council stands for the responsible use of natural resources to better the lives of people. This organization strives to bring some balance to the inevitable conflicts over competing uses of our country’s natural resources.

All we know the vital necessity for the availability of natural resources to create products, shelter, food and energy. People cannot survive without these resources. Yet there is perpetual disagreement among resource consumers over their uses. Access and availability of natural resources are the foundations to any social and economic system, organized or not. When access and availability is restricted, the gap between the “haves” and the “have nots” widens, leading to increased poverty, decreased wealth, and social and political unrest. One must only read the depressing accounts of the struggle that residents of Sarajevo have been through just to obtain vital resources to provide heat, shelter and food.

If our country is to prevent the kind of economic and civil collapse that has occurred in Eastern Europe, our leaders in Washington must work to keep natural resources available for people to use. We cannot continue to lock up our resources, driving up reliance on imports and exporting domestic manufacturing jobs. If America does not control the source of raw materials, it will find itself importing finished goods.

RDC has fought many battles through public educational efforts and advocacy. And we have many more battles to fight. Our staff reviews and comments on the scores of land use plans, environmental impact statements, and public comment requests concerning the restrictions being placed on natural resources and their access throughout the state. As talented as they are, our small staff cannot do this job without your help. Our good reputation for thoughtful advice and follow through helps us get our foot in the door, but the comments and support of our membership is very important to the effectiveness of our efforts.

RDC needs your help more than ever. The issues are complicated and of the utmost importance to the future of Alaska.

Virtually no sign of oil spill in Sound

Results of scientific studies conducted by scientists from leading universities, consulting companies and independent resource development experts has revealed that Prince William Sound has almost fully recovered from the 1989 Exxon Valdez oil spill. The results of the multi-year science program, sponsored by Exxon, sharply contradicts claims made by some that the spill persists and will be long lasting.

Some of the latest findings were reported by two leading scientists this summer at an Anchorage luncheon forum sponsored by the Resource Development Council and the Alaska Oil and Gas Association.

David Page, a Professor of Chemistry and Chairman of the Chemistry Department at Bowdoin College in Brunswick, Maine, and Edward Gilligan, Director of the Marine Research

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Sponsor packets are available through RDC now.
Proposed 1% rule for Alaska is gone

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lands. The one percent rule would have exempted Alaska from such compensatory mitigation requirements until one percent of the state's wetlands had been developed. Unlike the rest of the nation, 99.8 percent of the 170 million acres of wetlands in Alaska remain untouched. With 70 percent of the state's non-mountainous lands considered wetlands, federal policy would place a heavier burden on Alaskans than on the rest of the country.

Although disappointed with the Administration's decision to kill the proposed one percent rule, Becky Gay, Executive Director of the Resource Development Council, said the Alaskan Wetlands Coalition will work through Congress and with the Administration to achieve necessary regulatory flexibility so Alaskans can continue to expand their communities and build in a state that has an acute shortage of dry lands.

"The Alaskan Wetlands Coalition has always preferred to work for a good law as opposed to an exemption to a bad law," said Gay. "There is a growing awareness within the Administration and Congress of Alaska's outstanding contribution to wetlands preservation and the unique needs of its rural communities."

Senator Ted Stevens warned that unless the strict mitigation requirements for Alaska are eased, further development and community expansion on state and Native lands will be severely hampered. The Clinton wetlands policy for Alaska, according to Stevens, breaks the statewide compact and reneges on the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act. Of the 105 million acres granted to Alaska Natives under ANCSA, some 70 percent or more may be wetlands.

Native leaders are concerned federal wetlands policy will prevent development opportunities, thus stripping the economic value from their lands.

Another 156 million acres of Alaska is blocked out in federal conservation system units which prohibit or severely restrict development. The wetlands policy not only applies to these federal and Native lands, but to state and private lands as well.

While Alaska has preserved over 99.8 percent of its wetlands, over half of the wetlands in the Lower 48 have been destroyed. Ironically, President Clinton announced an exemption for 53 million acres of wetlands in the Midwest. His policy includes an expedited process for farmers to use when appealing government denial of permit requests to develop additional wetlands.

Congressional participants in wetlands tour

Mr. Bobby Franklin, Office of Sen. David Pryor, D-AR
Mr. John Rayfield, Office of Rep. Herbert Bateman, R-VA
Mr. John Doyle, Office of Rep. Jimmy Hayes, D-VA
Ms. McLane Layton, Office of Sen. Don Nickles, R-OK
Mr. John Kerkes, Office of Rep. Doug Applegate, D-CA
Mr. Bryan Wilnecz, Office of Rep. Jack Fields, R-TX

Mr. Tom Melius, House Merchant Marine & Fisheries Comm.
Mr. Gabe Rozsa, House Public Works & Transportation Comm.
Mr. Peter Scher, Sen. Environment & Public Works
Mr. Jerry Reynoldson, Sen. Environment & Public Works
Mr. Steve Shimberg, Sen. Environment & Public Works
Mr. Bob Hickmott, Environmental Protection Agency

Field trip raises awareness of Alaska concerns

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change federal regulations, bring community perspective and balance to the debate, and shape the overall national policy decision in respect to Alaska.

Believing one of the best approaches to educating lawmakers in Washington about Alaska's unique circumstances is to see first-hand how an inflexible wetlands policy can adversely affect Alaska, the AWC has brought Congressional staff with jurisdiction over wetlands policy to Alaska over the past four summers to learn about the many problems and experiences the state faces concerning federal regulatory control.

This summer's August tour began in Southeast and included Sitka, Juneau, and the logging community of False Bay. Southeast Alaska affords delegates the opportunity to see the diversity of Alaska's wetlands, ranging from muskeg to forested wetlands.

The tour continued on to Western Alaska including the communities of Bethel and Napaskiak. A small contingent of delegates were able to visit the fishing village of Kwiktkluk. The Kuskokwim Delta has a tremendous, almost overwhelming amount of wetlands. Visiting this area clearly represents the conditions many villages must endure and the obstacles they face developing their surrounding wetlands.

The tour also included the Arctic coast and the oil facilities at Prudhoe Bay. The North Slope represents one of the most environmentally sound oil production infrastructures in the world. These facilities clearly represent how well humankind can work in concert with the environment and surrounding wildlife.

Tour delegates also took a look at how a large community in Alaska has worked to protect the environment when they visited Anchorage. The Municipality of Anchorage has gone to great lengths to protect its wetlands in and around the city. The Municipality is currently working on efforts to update delineation of Anchorage wetlands.

The final leg of the Coalition's tour was Nome where participants heard from a community whose economic stability and prosperity rests significantly on responsible mineral development. Native corporations in Nome and the city itself have been fighting an on-going battle with federal regulators, having their economic independence.

"These tours are crucial because they demonstrate first-hand how diverse and abundant Alaska's wetlands are compared to almost anywhere in the world," said Becky Gay, AWC Coordinator. "This summer's tour was about elevating Alaska's concerns on wetlands policy to date," Gay said.

For additional information regarding AWC's current efforts or to become a member, please call Ken Freeman, at 279-1783.