Proposal would link ANWR with two Canadian parks, foreclose oil development

Clinton administration plan draws sharp opposition

A Clinton administration plan to merge the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge with adjacent parks in Canada to create a World Heritage Park would almost certainly preclude oil and gas development along the refuge's coastal plain, an area considered to be the most promising onshore prospect in North America for a gigantic oil strike.

The recent proposal to "twins" ANWR with parks in Canada developed out of an August 1994 Interior Department memo. The plan has been the subject of several discussions between Interior and the White House office on environmental policy.

The international preserve concept has been endorsed by Canada for years. The concept was raised again this summer during a meeting between Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt and Canadian Deputy Prime Minister Sheila Copps. The Canadians are fearful oil development in ANWR might change the migration routes of the Porcupine Caribou Herd. A World Heritage Park would place the 19-million acre refuge under international auspices, providing the strictest protection for caribou habitat and most likely eliminating any prospects for future oil and gas development.

"It is extremely disturbing to me that your Administration would take these

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Congressional staff, administrative officials get close up view of Alaska wetlands

Along with Alaska Wetlands Coalition (AWC) members, RDC board members and staff are just back from touring wetlands throughout Alaska with Congressional staff, EPA and Corps representatives. A big thank you is due to all the individuals who took the time to come on a long journey far north to see for themselves how different Alaska is from the Lower 48 and who hopefully will help educate others in the future. The tour group had diverse experiences in communities ranging from Barrow to Cordova, Juneau to Nome.

Reflections and visions from a Past President by Robert W. Fleming

A founding father tracks RDC's evolution over past 20 years

Editor’s Note: In conjunction with RDC’s 20th Anniversary in 1995, the Resource Review will publish on a monthly basis opinion articles from past presidents. They share a wealth of experience and hold unique insights to past, present and future resource development issues. The Resource Review is proud to feature their reflections and future visions. Robert Fleming served as co-founder of RDC, along with President from 1977 to 1978.

It could be said that the Organization for the Management of Alaska’s Resources was formed basically as a protest group to oppose any plan which would transport Prudhoe Bay natural gas to the Lower 48 states in a pipeline routed through Canada. It followed that we must advocate an alternative all-American route through Alaska to tide-land, then by tanker to a U.S. terminal. Everyone in the rear section of an airport shuttle bus in San Francisco got the message one day in 1975 when Bob Penney and I met by accident and immediately conducted impromptu, un-restrained and highly vocal first meeting.

Enthusiasm and sense of purpose carried over when OMAR became Resource Development Council for Alaska, Inc., and the scope of our concerns and efforts broadened. We became an advocacy organization for the sensible use of Alaska’s natural resources.

In that role we began a program of research, building a body of information to enable our own RDC communications to bring to truth to the “uninformed.” I believe our information highway worked in both directions.

As RDC expanded and matured, it developed an especially knowledgeable and able staff, which took on a greater variety of complicated issues. The staff moved far ahead of me in grasping new problems and issues which I knew nothing about. The kaleidoscope that emerged from vastly different resource related Alaska enterprises spoke technical languages beyond my realm and which the staff could translate to comprehensibility. Education. Maybe “awareness” is a better term for those of us reaching for the ultimate goal of consensus to achieve the much discussed balance between development and more enlightened protection of the environment. To expect 100 percent consensus is unrealistic; someone once noted “A wise man can change his mind, a fool never can.”

My personal contribution to OMAR and RDC was small compared to that of others, but I am still glad to have played a part. To see the organization up and running after 20 years, assuming a critical role in Alaska’s planning for the future, strikes me as an advocacy for that elusive balance, is satisfying to this one member of the original group advocating a natural gas line which, by the way, hasn’t been built.

As for Bob and Dolly Fleming, we are doing well on our rural, ten-acre spread a few miles north of Poulsbo, Washington where we have been busy trying to keep promises and covenants with aging parents. Personally, I never expected to live anywhere except Alaska, but for now, this is our reality.

We look forward to and greatly enjoy our occasional contacts with Alaska friends and keeping track of RDC. If you find yourself in our neighborhood, we’re in the phone book.

Barrow tour...

We were lucked out with a beautiful day. The tour group drove through a sea of wetlands exposing the realities of rural Alaska and drives home the point that “no net loss” is not practical here.

The uncertainty caused by the no net loss policy is made worse by a glaring inability to measure net gain. Any solution which fails to correctly measure success (net gain) seems hopeless in practice.

Wetlands created by natural causes (earthquakes, landslides), mitigation projects are accounted for nowhere. Even compensatory mitigation is under-accounted for since the Corps does not recognize it in their statistics if another agency, such as U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) requests it.

Whether or not Congress gets around to reauthorizing the Clean Water Act, which will provide a forum for wetlands debate, a trip to the state which contains over one-half of the nation’s wetlands inventory is a least a step in the right direction to make the policy debate more meaningful and fair.

We thank every Alaskan who helped make the field trip a success. In particular, I’d like to thank Mayor Jamie Parsons, Assembly member Al Clough and staff (City of Borough of Juneau); Bob Loescher, Rick Harris and staff of Sealaska Corporation (Juneau); Mayor Marcy Maydew, council member Scott Novak, City Manager Scott Jankie and staff (City of Cordova); Mayor John Havelock (City of Nome); Mayor George Ahmaagak and staff (North Slope Borough) and Mayor Don Long, City Council members Vers Williams and Lucy Brown and staff (City of Barrow).

For making our stay in Barrow especially interesting and enjoyable, we thank Representative Eileen MacLean; Ron Brower and David Hoffman of U.S. Geological Inupiat Corporation; Fran Tate at Pebbi’s North of the Border; Terry Latham, Top of the World Hotel/Tundra Tours and Jeri Cleveland, President of the Rotary Club of (Continued to page 7)
ANWR “twinning” concept meets strong opposition in Alaska

(Continued from page 1) steps without consulting the State of Alaska, said Governor Wally Hickel in a recent letter to President Bill Clinton. “The promise of Alaska statehood encompassed many sovereign rights, including the right to manage fish and wildlife resources wherever they occur,” Hickel said. “The state already has in place an effective management regime for caribou and other wildlife resources in the refuge, and it appears that regime could be displaced if World Heritage Site status were established.”

President Clinton opposes drilling in the refuge, but there has not been widespread support in Congress to permanently lock up the refuge’s potential energy reserves. The most recent proposal, as well as an earlier one to designate the coastal plain a polar bear reserve, would essentially accomplish the same results as a Wilderness designation — a ban on energy exploration and development. “The failure to consult the Inupiat Eskimo people who live on the North Slope and adjacent to ANWR on this de facto wilderness proposal is very sad,” said John Mcclellan, a Vice President of Arctic Slope Regional Corporation. “Oil production at Prudhoe Bay has created jobs, a local economy and a tax base for the 8,000 Eskimo residents of the North Slopes,” McClellan said. “Opening the Coastal Plain of ANWR could extend North Slope production for decades. This would permit the indigenous native people of the Arctic to maintain schools, hospitals, homes and other benefits that have come from carefully regulated oil production.” Deputy U.S. Energy Secretary Bill White says there is no connection between Interior’s proposal for adjoining ANWR with Canadian parks and the Clinton administration’s support for lifting the export ban on North Slope oil. While the issues are not connected, neither has the administration changed its position against drilling on the Coastal Plain, White said. “The administration found there is not a significant environmental impact resulting from a relaxation of the ban on Alaska oil exports,” White reported. “Some environmental groups fear this may signify a change in administration policy on ANWR. It does not signify a change.”

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thoughts from the president

Barrow rolls out red carpet for RDC board

Barrow rolls out red carpet for RDC board. RDC board members and staff join up with Alaska Wetlands Coalition members on the shores of the Arctic Ocean at Barrow. Also pictured are North Slope Borough officials.

Barrow Senior Vice President Elizabeth Rachov and President Dave Parish enjoy a comfortable afternoon on the beach at Point Barrow.”

RDC and AWC group examine a traditional skin boat near Point Barrow.

RDC Senior Vice President Elizabeth Rachov and President Dave Parish enjoy a comfortable afternoon on the beach at Point Barrow, the northernmost point of North America. Many modern structures with state-of-the-art construction mix with the old in Barrow, a modern village of nearly 4,000 residents. Pictured at left is the Barrow High School. (Photos by Carl Portman)
From Barrow to Juneau, Congressional staff see Alaska wetlands up close

After viewing coastal and forested wetlands in Juneau and meeting with local and state government officials, Congressional staff and EPA officials taking part in the Alaska Wetlands Coalition recent trip pose in front of Mendenhall Glacier. From left to right are John Goodin, EPA, Peter Heberth, a forest management consultant, Ken Freeman, RDC, Mike Joyce, ARCO Alaska, Carol Spils, Senator Frank Murkowski's office, Jennifer Loporsco, BP Exploration (Alaska), Inc., Jeff More, House Public Works and Transportation Committee, Carol Rushin, EPA, Rick Harris, Southeast Corporation, Craig Garrit, Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee and Elizabeth Birnbaum, House Natural Resources Committee and aide to Congressman George Miller.

Alaska Wetlands Coalition tour delegates look over forested wetlands in Juneau. Local officials pointed out that the National Wetlands Inventory mapping system has classified many areas in and around Juneau as wetlands, although some of those lands are dry. They recommended federal regulators give more attention to extensive local planning and mapping efforts, which are more accurate than the satellite-based NWI system. At right, Mary Weger, Army Corps of Engineers, Karen Cowart, Alaska Visitors Association, John Goodin, Mike Joyce, Ted Ricketts, EPA, Carol Rushin, Elizabeth Birnbaum, Ken Freeman, Carol Spils and Jeff More tour BP's Endicot oil production operations on the North Slope.

Tour participants stand on top of an early Prudhoe Bay exploration site which was reclaimed as a demonstration of what could be done using modern reclamation techniques. (Photos by Carl Porterman)

Federal regulators and Congressional staff look over a test site at Prudhoe Bay where environmental research is continuing to evaluate ways to restore plant cover and encourage natural recovery of disturbed sites. Jay McElrady of the University of Alaska makes the presentation to the group.

Carol Spils and Karen Cowart discuss wetland regulatory issues on the shores of the Beaufort Sea at Endicot.

The Cordova tour included a visit to the Million Dollar Bridge over the Copper River and a presentation on the Cordova Highway issue by city manager Scott Jenke, city council member Scott Novak and Public Works Director George Keeney. Above, tour participants walk across the newly-collapsed bridge spanning the Copper River.