More than fifty years ago, Emil Usibelli began mining coal in Healy, Alaska with a small bulldozer and one truck. Over the last three generations, a lot has changed—both in Alaska and at Usibelli Coal Mine. But one thing hasn’t changed—our commitment to innovation.

That’s what made Emil Usibelli believe he could mine coal from the surface, rather than from underground, like everyone else did in those days.

It’s what inspired Emil’s son Joe to start a land-reclamation program in 1971, years before the government required it.

It’s why Joe decided to purchase a 2,000 ton dragline in 1977 to increase production, even though a proposed hydroelectric project and the new oil pipeline were supposed to make coal obsolete.

And in 1989, it was what motivated Emil’s grandson, Joe Usibelli Jr., to initiate the partnership for the Healy Clean Coal Project, which recently began building what may well be the cleanest coal-burning electrical plant in the world.

Innovation has always been a part of how we do things at Usibelli Coal Mine. We continue that tradition.

If timber harvesting is truly incompatible with other uses in the Tongass, then why does tourism continue to grow and why are fish and wildlife populations so healthy? Logging has been occurring in the Tongass for over 40 years and at much higher levels than today.

"When we passed the Tongass Timber Reform Act, Congress agreed that, as long as the demand for timber existed, the industry should be provided sufficient volume from the timber base proposed for logging to maintain the amount of direct timber employment that was underway in 1990," Murkowski said.

"I believe that all parties involved in the 1990 reforms, which placed an additional 1.1 million acres off limits to logging and set up buffer strips along streams to protect fisheries, among other changes, agreed that a key part of the compromise was maintaining the then-exist-
Water quality standards: A good faith effort

After six years trying to complete a so-called triennial review for Alaska's water quality regulations, Governor Knowles and Commissioner Gene Burden tried something a little different last month. After an exhaustive administrative review of the regulations and in order to move away from the rhetoric of opposition, a threatened lawsuit, and other obstacles to resolution, a friendly "hostage-taking" took place at the Governor's office in Juneau.

Taking two representatives of each "side," specifically RDC and the Alaska Oil and Gas Association along with Clean Water Alliance and Sierra Club, a full complement of DEC staff, Governor Knowles and Commissioner Burden stuck us in his conference room for six hours to get beyond the impasse which has been frustrating all sides. The Commissioner briefed us on what the Knowles administration actions would be, the reasons for those actions and asked for honesty between us with a hopeful agreement on moving forward.

None of us were totally pleased, but I believe all were pretty surprised that the Governor could get us moving in the same direction. It was a good faith effort and with a little perseverance, the water quality standards will work. They need to give certainty to the regulated community, be technologically achievable and economically feasible and not be challenged in court.

The adoption draft for revisions to Alaska's water quality regulations is now at the Department of Law for review. The actions taken are:

- **Anti-degradation:** The administration determined the absence of such a regulation was a deficiency, as the original standards did not include this aspect. Since it was added in the final administrative review, this regulation was not subject to the same extensive public scrutiny, but is identical to federal law. Action: State adopted additional anti-degradation provisions which specifically protect "standing national resource waters."

- **Treatment works:** Under review, DEC determined that treatment works in natural water bodies (sewage basins, tailings impoundments, etc.) are permitted under solid waste and domestic water programs and were therefore redundant if included in the water quality regulations. Action: Repealed.

- **Petroleum hydrocarbons:** Much of the debate surrounding oil or diesel limits in wastewater discharges is focused on measurement methodology and analysis found in "Note 8" of the current regulation. DEC is amending the regulation to clarify required measurements. Action: DEC repealed the current Note 8, instead adopting August 1993 version of Note 8. DEC will further research need for a numerical particulate standard by July 1996.

- **Human health risk:** The array of variables used to determine a risk level were debated, reflecting concerns about the importance of "Alaskanizing" specific values. The present Alaska standard of 10 is retained using federal values, in direct response to federal law. Action: DEC retained current level and will initiate rulemaking to determine Alaska-specific values.

- **Sediment:** Most of the discussion on sediment was whether settleable solids or total suspended solids (TSS) should be the standard. Since there is no criteria for TSS in EPA, a significant factor supporting DEC's regulation is that testing for settleable solids uses simple field equipment and procedures. Action: DEC retained the existing regulation, clarifying settleable solids as the regulated parameter, agreeing to study and report on the need for a TSS standard by July 1996.

- **Mixing zones:** Mixing zones are designated areas of a waterbody in which wastewater enters and mixes with a receiving water, diluting the discharge within the zone, but meeting water quality standards at and beyond the zone boundaries. DEC noted the current regulations provide better controls by setting stricter standards and addressing fresh water rivers and streams. Action: DEC will prepare interim guidance and initiate rule-making and complete guidance by April. DEC retained authority to grant or deny mixing zones based on factual data presented.

- **Action:** The bill is under study, but it is not expected to be finalized before August 1996.

The array of criteria which specifically protect "standing national resource waters." Upon examination of the data, DEC determined that the regulation was deficient. Instead of proceeding with a triennial review, DEC determined the absence of such a regulation was a deficiency, as the original standards did not include this aspect. Since it was added in the final administrative review, this regulation was not subject to the same extensive public scrutiny, but is identical to federal law. Action: State adopted additional anti-degradation provisions which specifically protect "standing national resource waters."

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RDC Board visits Usibelli Coal Mine, tours HCCP

Usibelli Coal Mine, founded in 1943 by Emil Usibelli, has a workforce of 120 employees and operates year-round. Over the years, mine production has grown to about 1.5 million tons of coal per year.

RDC board members gather in a 33-cubic yard bucket of the Ace-in-the-Hole Dragline at the Usibelli Coal Mine near Healy.

UCM began its reclamation program in 1971, six years before federal law required coal mines to institute reclamation programs. Reclamation involves re-contouring and re-vegetating land after an area has been mined. Since 1971, the mine has reclaimed over 4,000 acres. The ultimate goal is to reestablish a natural landscape and a natural succession of vegetative cover.

With Congress back in session, the seventh inning stretch has brought the battle for a re-development victory back into full swing. The score is close, but within two short innings, and a keen defense strategy, victory can be ours. Alaskans have a special interest in the promised spec-tacle about to take place on the field — a provision being crafted in the federal budget that will open the "1 002 Area" of ANWR to oil development.

As the opposition mounts its effort to defeat exploration in the Arctic Oil Reserve (AOR), unsavory political tactics rise from the bench and, one by one, approach the plate. In earlier innings, U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) delivered a "bunt" to the public to revise downward the federal estimates with regard to oil reserves beneath the Coastal Plain/AZF. For those in the know, the squeeze play was viewed as a shameless, last minute ploy to drive home a run just prior to the start of Congressional hearings on ANWR. USGS was escorted from the field and sent to the showers.

Since 1971, the mine has reclaimed over 4,000 acres. The ultimate goal is to reestablish a natural landscape and a natural succession of vegetative cover. (Photo by C. Portman)

For those in the know, the squeeze play was viewed as a shameless, last minute ploy to drive home a run just prior to the start of Congressional hearings on ANWR. USGS was escorted from the field and sent to the showers.

Also earlier in the game, the U.S. Department of the Interior hit a walk. In earlier innings, U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) delivered a "bunt" to the public to revise downward the federal estimates with regard to oil reserves beneath the Coastal Plain/AZF. For those in the know, the squeeze play was viewed as a shameless, last minute ploy to drive home a run just prior to the start of Congressional hearings on ANWR. USGS was escorted from the field and sent to the showers.

U.S. Interior Secretary Mike Barkley and Senator Mike Miller joined the RDC tour. UCM supplies six Interior Alaska power plants with about 775,000 tons of coal while an additional 716,000 tons were shipped through the Port of Seward to the Republic of Korea.

Get off the bench and get in the game

Mitch Usibelli describes the mining process in the UCM pit. (Photo by Wes Nason)

RDC supports fisheries measures ...

Work is underway on the 50 mega-watt Healy Clean Coal Project power plant, which will use an innovative design integrating advanced coal combustion, heat recovery and emission control technologies. The combination of new technology and ultra-low sulfur UCM coal may result in emission levels of sulfur dioxide and nitrogen oxides that are lower than any other coal-based power plant in the world. H.C. Price is the general contractor. The plant will be owned by AIDEA and operated by GVEA.

(Continued from page 1)

Alaska’s shore-based seafood processing industry and coastal communities in which they operate. Failure to re-authorize this inshore allocation would disrupt the fishery and impact many people who depend on the fishery.

RDC also supported a license limitation program instead of Individual Transferable Quotas (ITQs) for crab and groundfish. Such a measure is considered an interim step while the NPFMC works on a Comprehensive Rationalization Plan for these fisheries. The measure will help prevent over-capitalization and allow Alaskans to build up a history of participation in these fisheries.

RDC also supported extension and expansion of the Community Development Quota (CDQ) program. The CDQ program allows the communities of western Alaska to participate in adjacent fisheries, derive economic benefit from the resources and to build a private economy where now none exists.

"RDC strongly believes Alaska’s home fleet and shore-based industry must have meaningful opportunities to utilize nearby resources to benefit local economies and families," said Becky Gay, in correspondence to Stevens. "It is good for the nation to encourage Alaska to share its wealth while allowing residents to build an economy which can feed its people in more ways than one."

In the fight of the re-authorization of the Magnuson Act, RDC encouraged Stevens to make sure commercial fisheries resources are utilized to benefit Alaskans, as well as other Americans. In particular, Western Alaska communities should have access to participate in the Bering Sea fisheries before a permanent allocation system is implemented.

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The Shrinking Timber Base

- **Regional Forests**: The Tongass National Forest is one of the largest national forests in the United States, covering approximately 320 million acres. Despite its size, the forest is facing significant challenges due to changes in timber sales and employment.

- **Employment Impact**: Employment on the Tongass has fallen by 42 percent since 1987, with the majority of the loss occurring after the US Forest Service withdrew timber sales to offset new land withdrawals. This includes job reductions and new job cuts in multiple industries.

- **Economic Dependence**: Southeast Alaska continues to depend heavily on timber, fishing, and tourism for economic stability.

- **Resource Management**: The US Forest Service has failed to fulfill the intent of the law to release enough timber to supply local mills and meet market demand. To remediate the situation, the government has proposed changes under the Tongass Timber Reform Act (TTTRA) in 1995, which has cleared the way for logging.

- **Revenue Impact**: The region's overall employment has declined and real payroll is down $40 million. Moreover, despite the balance set by Congress through TTTRA—which left approximately two-thirds of the commercial forested lands in the Tongass reserved for uses other than logging—new land withdrawals have reduced the timber base even further. In addition, timber sales scheduled on the land base designated for harvest have been routinely administratively appealed or litigated by environmentalists.

- **Community Impact**: "What is happening in Southeast Alaska is not unique," Murkowski said. "Through a combination of Clinton administration initiatives and environmental group litigation, we are seeing all forms of economic activity driven off our public lands."

- **Perception vs. Reality**: While employment in the region decreased by 35 percent, the region's forest products industry continues to supply the demand.

- **Historic Trend**: Despite the decline, Southeast Alaska remains a leading producer of timber, fish, and tourism. The region's economy is not compatible with extensive forest practices or intensive logging, which is essential for maintaining healthy wildlife populations, fisheries, and tourism.

**Perception versus Reality**

- **Logging Impact**: The end result of the reform package was a smaller timber base for loggers and rising costs to cut lower-quality trees in more remote areas.

- **Renewed Commitment**: In 1995, the US Forest Service withdrew an additional 650,000 acres for new Habitat Conservation Areas, further reducing the timber base. No other lands in the Tongass have been opened to logging to offset new land withdrawals and preserve the balance set by Congress through TTTRA.

**Changes under TTTRA**

- **Sustainable Yield**: The bill encourages selective logging and the preservation of the Tongass's natural beauty. The US Forest Service has scheduled 50 percent of the timber for selective cutting, which will allow for the recovery of the forest's health.

- **Environmental Impact**: Environmentalists have been critical of the bill, arguing that it does not meet the needs of the region's forest-dependent communities. Its emphasis is on the needs of people or timber-dependent communities. The bill may lead to reduced timber volumes over time.

**Tongass National Forest Perception versus Reality**

- **Economic Stability**: The region's economic stability depends heavily on timber, fishing, and tourism for economic stability.

- **Political Landscape**: While employment levels have increased by 7%, rural Southeast employment has decreased by 4.5% and other urban areas in the region have fallen by 4.1%. While employment in the region as a whole has remained nearly steady, total payroll for the region has fallen by 3.8% or $40 million.

**Tongass Land Management Plan (TLMP)**

- **TLMP Process**: The process is designed to modify the 1991 draft plan alternatives. The 1991 alternatives were the first revisions designed to implement the 1990 TTTRA. The Forest Service is modifying this draft to consider such matters as population viability, cave issues, and socio-economic management.

**Historic Level of Logging, Fish and Wildlife**

- **Logging Activity**: Despite claims to the contrary, facts show logging is occurring at levels well below what the forest can sustain. Logging could be increased substantially and still remain under sustained yields necessary to maintain the forest's health.

**Average Annual Harvest (1987-93)**: 402 mbf

- **Scheduled for Harvest (1995)**: 320 mbf

- **Capacity of Tongass Timber**: 470 mbf

- **Sustainable Yield (outside areas closed to logging)**: 874 mbf

**Of the 320 mbf of timber scheduled for harvesting in 1995, 129 mbf is tied up in legal action.** **Regional Forest of Southeast Alaska.**