

# DISPATCH

## Alaska Conservation Foundation



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## Alaska's Clean Energy Campaign

*Creating 20th Century solutions for climate and energy* By Matt Rafferty, ACF Program Officer

Alaska is at an energy crossroads. The intensifying impacts of climate change, mounting threats of coal development, and unparalleled opportunities for renewable energy and energy planning are all critical factors in the future of Alaska. With the assistance of ACF, the Alaska Clean Energy Campaign (ACEC) is emerging to address these pressing issues with a unified, coordinated approach. Driven by the reality of climate change, where Alaska is ground zero for impacts, the overarching goal of this effort is for Alaskans to choose low-carbon alternatives based on renewable energy and energy efficiency while rejecting coal as an option, both for combustion within the state and export to foreign markets.

The concept of "clean coal" is a myth. This dirty source of energy releases more greenhouse gas pollution than any other fossil fuel and causes immensely destructive impacts when taken from the Earth via huge strip mines. When burned for power, coal becomes the number one

human-produced source of mercury contamination in the United States, which causes neurological dysfunction, developmental disorders, and damage to the central nervous system. As *Big Coal: The Dirty Secret Behind America's Energy Future* author Jeff Goodell stated at a recent ACF speaking

engagement, "In our high-tech world, why are we still burning rocks to generate electricity?"

Because Alaska possesses about one-eighth of total global coal reserves and half of all US reserves, it is a prime

*(continued on pg. 2)*



Steam escapes from the ice cauldron of Mt. Spurr, a potential geothermal energy source from the Pacific Ring of Fire.

*Photo by James Copen, Alaska Volcano Observatory*

**INSIDE:**

Read about ACF's role in **Alaska's Clean Energy Campaign** and its two "prongs," the **Alaska Coal Working Group** and the **Renewable Energy Working Group**. Share Executive Director Nick Hardigg's insights on a **common vision for conservation in Alaska**. Learn about the **Alaska Climate Change Working Group** and its goals for dealing with the effects of global warming. Get the scoop on an **award-winning business plan** drafted by an ACF intern, and stay up to date on **Tongass protection** and the **Sportsman's Alliance for Alaska!**

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Cover photos, top: Aspen leaf in snow, by Stacy Studebaker; bottom, left to right: Sitka black-tailed deer, by Stacy Studebaker; Climbers on ridge, Pika Glacier, Alaska Range, by [www.AlaskaStock.com](http://www.AlaskaStock.com); Polar bear and three cubs, by Susanne Miller, USFWS

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## Clean Energy Campaign *continued...*

target for coal extraction and international export. In response, ACF has fostered the creation of the Alaska Coal Working Group to oppose new coal development. This “no” prong of the ACEC is bringing together more than 25 groups from across Alaska and the nation to confront coal mining, coal combustion, and coal for export to developing nations that lack sufficient environmental safeguards (see “Alaska Coal Working Group,” page 5).

Renewable energy and energy efficiency are the best choices for the future—for people *and* the environment. As with coal, Alaska has an unparalleled abundance of renewable resources. Located on the Pacific Ring of Fire<sup>1</sup>, Alaska can reap the geothermal energy potential from more than 40 active volcanoes, which stretch from Cook Inlet near Anchorage to the far reaches of the Aleutian Chain. The largest tidal fluctuations in America occur in Alaska, making it prime for emerging tidal energy technologies. These opportunities—combined with top-class wind resources, more coastline than the entire Lower 48 available for wave power, and great prospects for biomass<sup>2</sup>—make Alaska a global epicenter for renewable energy potential.

<sup>1</sup>A tectonic band encircling the Pacific Ocean that contains more than half of the world's active volcanoes above sea level.

<sup>2</sup>Organic material made from sources such as sawdust, garbage, fish byproducts, or animal waste. It can be burned to release its inherent energy, or can be converted to other usable forms of energy like methane gas, ethanol, or biodiesel.



Coal strip-mine area on Black Mesa in Northern Arizona, where slurry pipeline breaks have caused flooding and contamination to lands and stream beds. Strip mines proposed in Alaska would carry the same devastating risks. Photo by Waheleh Johns, Field Organizer, Black Mesa Water Coalition

In conjunction, ACF is helping foster the Alaska Renewable Energy Working Group. This “yes” prong of the ACEC is a growing group of conservation, business, and tribal interests providing energy solutions that can make Alaska into a national model of how best to generate power and transport, manage resources, and expand the base of support for conservation (see “Renewable Energy Working Group,” page 6).

*According to many climate scientists, average annual temperatures in Alaska have risen 3 to 5 degrees over the past 40 years, while average winter temperatures have increased 7 to 10 degrees.*

The reality of climate change drives the work of the Alaska Clean Energy Campaign. Alaska is disproportionately impacted by climate change, the effects of which are apparent, expanding, and

inducing costly havoc. According to many climate scientists, average annual temperatures in Alaska have risen 3 to 5 degrees over the past 40 years and average winter temperatures have increased 7 to 10 degrees. As a result, coastal villages are eroding into the ocean, ancient permafrost is rapidly melting, vital salmon populations are at

risk, and forests are being destroyed by insect infestation and disease.

Recent climate models now indicate that the Arctic Ocean could be nearly ice-free at the end of summer by 2012, decades earlier than prior models indicated. The US Geological Survey predicts that polar bears will be extinct in Alaska in 50 years. NASA Climate Scientist H. Jay Zwally, who hauled coal as a teenager, said it best in a recent news article: “The Arctic is often cited as the canary in the coal mine for climate warming. Now as a sign of climate warming, the canary has died. It is time to start getting out of the coal mines.”<sup>3</sup>

ACF, in partnership with conservation organizations and other groups across the state, has been actively

<sup>3</sup>Seth Borenstein, Associated Press Science Writer, “Researchers say summer sea ice could soon vanish” (December 12, 2007).



Simulation of a proposed wind farm on Alaska's Fire Island, just three miles off the coast of Anchorage.  
*Photo courtesy of Chugach Electric Association*

involved in Alaska Climate Working Group's efforts to address mitigation, adaptation, and leadership aspects of climate change (see “Pursuing a proactive climate change agenda for Alaska,” page 4). This collaborative endeavor is working to create an Alaska that is not the model of climactic devastation, but instead a global example for developing and implementing the solutions needed to mitigate and adapt to climate change.

Through grantmaking, fundraising, convening, and providing strategic input and support, ACF plays an instrumental role in the Alaska Clean Energy Campaign—as well as supporting members of each working group. The “yes” and “no” prongs of the ACEC and their connection to climate change are explained in greater depth throughout this issue of the *Dispatch*. Please read on about the work taking place on the ground in Alaska and ACF's role in these critical efforts.

## Alaska conservationists: E-merging from the shadows

by Nick Hardigg, ACF Executive Director

People are often surprised to learn that there are more than 200 conservation groups in Alaska. While there is diversity regarding policy position and priorities, there is considerable common ground regarding the need for a balanced and broadly supportable approach to protecting our environment.

The common typecasting of the entire conservation effort as “environmental extremism” is detrimental to our cause, and patently untrue. Conservation means a better future for all, current and future generations. It is in our common best interest to live sustainably.

The Alaska Conservation Alliance (ACA), a grantee of ACF, is doing outstanding work to help the conservation community embrace a common vision for Alaska's future. They have recently spearheaded an effort to develop a “Common Vision” statement for the conservation community, called the “**Four E's**” of conservation:

**a sound ENVIRONMENT, clean ENERGY, a healthy ECONOMY, and an ETHICAL government**

This effort is noteworthy in several aspects. It shows the high level of agreement that exists in many issues and goals within the conservation community. It indicates the broad recognition that a sound economy and effective government must be incorporated into any strategy for a healthy future. And last, it illustrates how coordination of groups and issues is increasing, thanks to the efforts of both ACA and ACF.

To date, more than 20 conservation groups have signed on to our Common Vision in Alaska. This will help inform the public and media sources and inspire all to take another look at conservation. We share a common vision for a healthy future that cares about people—all people.

The document is available on both the ACF and ACA websites ([www.akcf.org](http://www.akcf.org) and [www.akvoice.org](http://www.akvoice.org), respectively).



Nick bike commutes year-round in active support of the Four E's of conservation.



# Pursuing a proactive climate change agenda for Alaska

by Kate Troll, Executive Director, Alaska Conservation Alliance

Alaska is recognized as ground zero for the impacts of global warming. Our job is to make it become ground zero for solutions. To drive strategy on this issue and enact change at the national, state, and local levels, in 2006 the Alaska Conservation Alliance (ACA) convened the Alaska Climate Change Working Group, a collaborative effort of fifteen-plus Alaskan conservation organizations.

The initial effort grew from a need to effectively participate in the proceedings of the Climate Impact Assessment Commission, established by the Alaska Legislature. The commission was charged with documenting the impacts of climate change in Alaska and making recommendations for the state on how to address them. During the course of the year, member groups coalesced around the priority of ensuring a strong turnout and favorable media coverage at each hearing. Their goal was to bring about a legitimate assessment and appropriate actions to address climate change impacts. Members engaged communities most affected by climate change, including Native villages, and facilitated their participation in the hearings. The commission will release its report during the spring of 2008.

At the same time, ACA focused on raising climate change to a priority-level issue on Governor Palin's radar. As a result of several meetings with members of the Palin Administration, the Governor included a provision in the Alaska Gasline Inducement Act requiring



National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration scientists study sea ice north of Barrow. Recent climate models indicate that this area—and the remainder of the Arctic Ocean—could be nearly devoid of sea ice at the end of summer by 2012.

Photo by Jeremy Potter, NOAA

applicants to state how they would reduce greenhouse gas emissions in their proposals to build and operate the natural gas pipeline. Following this initial step of climate change recognition, Climate Working Group members pursued more direct action by the Governor.

In September, Alaska signed on as an observer to the Western Climate Initiative, an effort of western US governors and Canadian ministers to meet emission reductions goals. ACA and others are working to ensure that after Alaskans observe the opportunities to be gained by working collaboratively as

a region on climate change challenges, the state will join as a full participant. In the meantime, Governor Palin has established a Climate Change sub-cabinet within her administration.

Most important, the climate initiative's Executive Order calls for recommendations "to reduce greenhouse gas emission from Alaska sources, including the expanded use of alternative fuels, energy conservation, energy efficiency, renewable energy, land use management, and transportation planning." This is significant, as it represents the first opportunity for Alaska to move beyond simply talking about solutions and toward *becoming* part of the solution.

Understanding that climate change has become the lens through which all other issues are viewed, the Alaska Climate Change Working Group is taking action on the local, state, and federal priorities that will lead Alaska toward becoming the "poster state" for solutions to climate change.

ACF has awarded \$143,950 in grants to the Alaska Conservation Alliance since January 2006.

*This is significant, as it represents the first opportunity for Alaskans to move beyond simply talking about solutions and toward becoming part of the solution.*

# Alaska Coal Working Group: *Highlighting the true costs of coal for our energy future*

By Bob Shavelson, Executive Director, Cook Inletkeeper

The United States has been labeled the “Saudi Arabia of Coal” due to its prolific coal reserves, and Alaska possesses roughly half the nation’s coal. With high energy prices and tight natural gas supplies, local utilities, foreign markets, and corporations in the Lower 48 are now rushing to develop Alaska’s vast, untapped coal reserves.

In just the past two years, over a half dozen coal mining and coal

*Despite expensive ad campaigns touting “clean coal,” coal is the dirtiest choice for Alaska’s energy future.*

combustion projects have emerged across the state.

Now, Alaska faces a stark choice: turn backward to coal—and the mercury, climate change, and habitat destruction that accompany its use—or move forward to develop Alaska’s

is now working with more than 20 Alaska organizations as part of the Alaska Coal Working Group to ensure that Alaska pursues a smart and sustainable energy future.

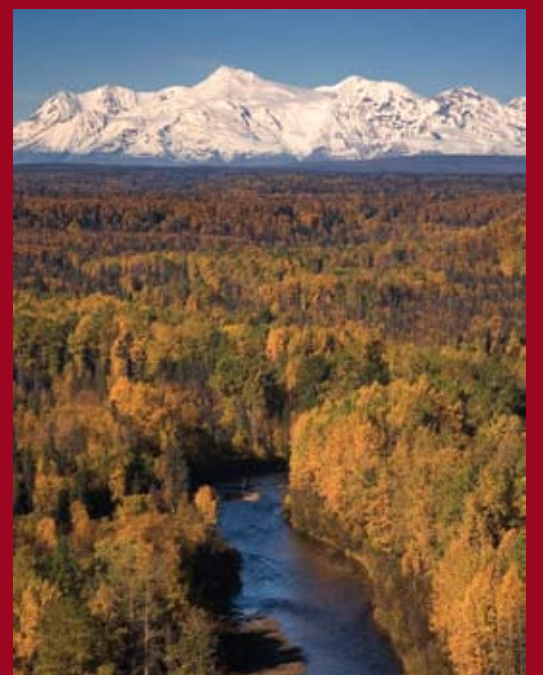
Alaska currently relies on coal for only about 10 percent of its electricity needs (compared to the Lower 48, where coal provides approximately 45-60 percent of electricity needs). However, with

local power supply contracts expiring soon, local energy cooperatives are pursuing coal-based energy in the face of high natural gas prices. Fortunately, Alaskans are beginning to wake up to the true costs of coal. For example, in November, local groups successfully pressed the Matanuska Electrical

Association to abandon its plans for a coal-fired power plant north of Anchorage after a strong public backlash.

While local coal-powered generation presents serious concerns, the greatest threats to Alaska center on its vast coal resources and its close proximity to shipping lanes for Asian markets. Alan Zarembo, award-winning reporter from the Los Angeles Times, has called coal the “crack cocaine of the developing world,” and while US coal consumption

has risen only slightly over the past decade, Asian coal consumption has nearly doubled. China is building roughly one new coal-fired power plant each week. In the enormous Beluga



Chuitna River, site of the proposed Chuitna Coal Project, a 20,000-acre complex including a surface coal mine, mine access road, coal transport conveyor, personnel housing, air strip facility, logistic center, and coal export terminal. The terminal would include a 10,000-foot trestle constructed into Cook Inlet.  
*Photo by Damion Brook Kintz*



Dragline excavator at a strip mine in northwestern New Mexico, much like those that are being proposed for Alaska. The coal seams are clearly visible.  
*Photo by Dean Cully,*  
<http://deancully.zenfolio.com/>

world-class renewable energy resources (including geothermal, tidal, and wind) for the secure power supplies and long-term jobs they will produce. The Alaska Conservation Foundation

coalfields in Cook Inlet (where permit applications are now pending), and in the even larger coal reserves in the Western Arctic near Point Lay (in the North Slope Borough, on the coast of the Chukchi Sea), plans for coal strip mines are moving ahead to feed voracious economic demand.

Despite expensive ad campaigns touting “clean coal,” coal is the dirtiest choice for Alaska’s energy future. From denuded habitat and aggravated climate change, to mercury in our fish and asthma in our kids, there’s nothing clean about coal. ACF is working with the Alaska Coal Working Group to reject 19th Century solutions to our 21st Century energy problems, and to promote a secure and sustainable energy future in the Last Frontier.

*ACF has awarded \$58,636 in grants to Cook Inletkeeper since January 2006.*



# The Renewable Energy Working Group:

*Leading Alaska's transition to a clean energy economy* By Pat Lavin, National Wildlife Federation

Alaska has always been known for its bountiful natural resources. Such abundance also holds true for the energy sector, as Alaska boasts more energy-generating potential than any other state. This potential comes in the form of renewable sources, such as geothermal, wind, and tidal power. It also comes from Alaska's underground fossil fuels—most notably massive, undeveloped coal deposits. The Alaska Renewable Energy Working Group, one of the prongs of the Alaska Clean Energy Campaign, was formed to help chart the course toward clean, renewable, secure power as well as provide maximum economic benefit to the state from this transition.

The opportunity for a new direction is ripe. Existing natural gas supplies used for power generation are dwindling at the same time that several major utility contracts for purchasing power are set to expire. As a result, many organizations, including the Anchorage Chamber of Commerce, Alaska Energy Authority (AEA), Municipality of Anchorage, and Matanuska-Susitna Borough are actively discussing energy policy and infrastructure, creating an opportunity for meaningful participation by conservation organizations.

The Renewables Working Group is set to embark on a multi-tiered campaign. As a first step, the Renewables Working Group will publish the Balanced Energy Plan for Railbelt Alaska, covering an area that stretches from Homer on the Kenai Peninsula through Anchorage and the Mat-Su northward to Fairbanks. This report details how the state can meet its energy needs over the coming decades



Tomatoes are grown year-round at Chena Hot Springs Resort's geothermally heated greenhouse north of Fairbanks, despite winter temperatures that regularly dip to 50 below zero.  
*Photo by Gwen Holdmann*

in a cost-effective manner through a combination of energy efficiency, renewable energy, and natural gas, which is viewed as a bridge fuel.

The report will be used as a basis for campaign members to advocate for specific renewable and efficiency projects, partnering with government, business, and development interests. The list of projects includes a highly promising renewable mega-project deemed the "Beluga Triangle," located just across Cook Inlet from Anchorage. It would comprise developing geothermal power from Mt. Spurr, hydro power from Lake Chakachamna, and abundant wind on the western shores of Cook Inlet.

All told, the "Beluga Triangle" project could produce up to 75 percent of the railbelt's energy needs. It is located

less than 30 miles from the existing power infrastructure and, ironically, in the same vicinity as the proposed massive Chuitna coal strip mine. The state has sold geothermal leases, and exploration of Mt. Spurr is currently underway. Fire Island Wind, a proposed 60-120 MW wind farm located three miles off the coast of Anchorage, is another prominent project that has broad public recognition and support.

Clean Energy Campaign partners continue to pursue legislative and administrative solutions. Several bills are in play in the Alaska legislature, including one that will create a renewable energy fund for Alaska to provide capital to push renewable projects into production. Alaska Governor Palin and the AEA have also addressed the need for coordinated energy planning, which is a high priority goal of the ACEC and currently nonexistent. Efforts are underway to determine how

such a structure could work in a region where six independent member-owned cooperatives currently produce and supply all the power for railbelt consumers.

The issues of sound energy planning, energy efficiency, and renewable energy are opportunities to engage consumers where they are most interested—in the pocketbook. The Alaska Renewable Energy Working Group has tremendous potential to enact major change in Alaska energy policy as well as reach a long-standing goal of ACF—broadening the base of support for conservation.

*ACF awarded \$25,000 to the National Wildlife Federation's Alaska office to produce the Balanced Energy Plan.*

# Sportsman's Alliance for Alaska rallies hunters to protect Teshekpuk Lake

By Scott Hed, Outreach Director, Sportsman's Alliance for Alaska

ACF's Sportsman's Alliance for Alaska (SAA), in partnership with Audubon Alaska, recently rallied hunter-conservationists around the need to maintain protections in place at Teshekpuk Lake.

Teshekpuk Lake is one of North America's great waterfowl nurseries. Although located in the Northeast Planning Area of the National Petroleum Reserve-Alaska, it has been off-limits to oil and gas exploration and development for over 30 years. The administrations of Presidents Carter, Reagan, George H.W. Bush, and Clinton all recognized the importance of Teshekpuk Lake. Now, however, the protections that have kept this area healthy and productive are being threatened, as the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) considers opening currently protected land and waters for oil and gas development for the first time.

Teshekpuk Lake is an irreplaceable wetlands complex, vital to hundreds of thousands of migrating waterfowl that nest, molt, and rest there. Tundra swans, snow geese, brant, white-fronted geese, Cackling (Canada) geese, pintails, and other duck species are all sought after by hunters across America. These birds utilize the



Teshekpuk Lake is an important nesting, molting, and resting area for migratory birds, benefiting waterfowl enthusiasts across the country like Ann Rothe and her dog, Hal.

Photo by Tim Robertson

Teshekpuk Lake area, migrate across the continent, and are taken by hunters in the Great Lakes, along the Mississippi River, the Eastern Seaboard, Plains and Western states, and the coasts of Texas and Louisiana.

SAA brought this issue to the attention of groups dedicated to waterfowl hunting and conservation. The response was incredible. National organizations such as Ducks Unlimited, Delta Waterfowl, the Izaak Walton League of America, and others were joined by regional and state organizations in writing public comments to the BLM. They asked the federal government to spare this valuable waterfowl nursery. Millions of acres of nearby lands are already leased, and keeping Teshekpuk Lake off-limits is an important part of balanced and responsible energy development.

SAA also assisted in getting media coverage for the issue in radio, print, and online forums, and included a special Teshekpuk Lake section on

the SAA website ([www.sportsman-salliance4ak.org](http://www.sportsman-salliance4ak.org)). *Field and Stream* magazine even included a special Teshekpuk Lake slide show on its website ([www.fieldandstream.com](http://www.fieldandstream.com)).

“Although wildlife management professionals have long known about Teshekpuk Lake, thanks to the Sportsman's Alliance for Alaska, many of their members now know what this place means to North American waterfowl populations and how industrial development there could harm their opportunity to hunt ducks and geese across the country,” said Audubon Alaska Executive Director Stan Senner. “The conservation community is most successful when we can broaden our base of support, and SAA's efforts to involve waterfowl hunters in the Teshekpuk Lake issue is a prime example.”

*Sportsman's Alliance for Alaska is a program of Alaska Conservation Foundation, which recognizes the importance of the sporting community in promoting conservation.*

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## ACF intern's composting business plan wins competition and \$30K

By Kristin Smith, Executive Director, Copper River Watershed Project

During his summer 2008 internship, ACF Intern Brendan Reilly drafted a business plan for the Copper River Watershed Project's Growing Wild! compost product that was submitted to the Alaska Marketplace Competition. The competition is a program designed to help rural Alaskans make the transition from a subsistence to a cash-based economy and give them business start-up support.

As a marketing major at Boston College, Brendan took the project to heart. He discovered that the Copper River Water Project (CRWP) had accumulated quite a bit of composting equipment that counted as business assets. He helped outline scenarios for how the business could grow and either contribute to CRWP's sustainable development work or be sold in a few years, with the proceeds

going toward starting another sustainable development venture.

Brendan and Kristin Smith, CRWP Executive Director, prepared the business plan for submission to the Alaska Marketplace Competition in June 2007, and CRWP was selected as a finalist.

In late October, Smith went to the Alaska Federation of Natives Convention in Fairbanks to participate in a final round of interviews with business consultant judges. The CRWP business plan received an award of \$30,000 to help transform the Growing Wild! salmon soil compost venture from a hand-labor operation, to a more mechanized



Brendan Reilly mixes salmon soil compost.  
Photo by Kristin Smith

operation that can increase production in the coming seasons.

*ACF has granted \$19,804 to the Copper River Watershed Project since 2006, and granted \$69,568 in 2007 for 17 conservation internships.*

## Alaska Rainforest Program: Over \$1 million raised to advance Tongass protection

By Brian McNitt, Rainforest Program Officer

Recent months have been extremely exciting and busy for the Rainforest Program at ACF. November began with an ACF-organized, three-day meeting in Seattle of the core conservation organizations and several of our foundation partners to complete work on the campaign's primary strategies and a work plan for the coming year. The meeting was extremely helpful and has in many

ways marked the official beginning of this campaign that will result in significant, permanent conservation gains in Southeast Alaska.

Since that meeting, ACF has received \$1.1 million in grant funding to support conservation efforts toward a collaborative approach to permanent protection of the Tongass.

ACF and our conservation partners are continuing to work enthusiastically and productively within the Tongass Futures Roundtable process to build new relationships and work toward shared solutions with a broad range of stakeholders in the region. We are aggressively seeking a "conservation vision" for the Tongass that results in real progress for everyone involved in the process.

ACF and its conservation partners have also had several meetings with Sealaska Corporation to discuss its recently introduced land exchange bill. We also helped coordinate conservationists' testimony before Congress on the Sealaska bill. While the conservation community does not support the legislation as proposed, we have made clear our willingness to work with Sealaska on an alternative that we could all support.

Rainforest Program staff also attended the Tongass Futures Roundtable meeting in Seattle on December 3 and 4. The meeting was followed with one-on-one meetings with key individuals within the region to continue work on shaping a new Tongass conservation vision. Our partner organizations will also be fully engaged in talking with conservation leaders throughout the southeast Alaska to ensure that they understand and support our new direction.



ACF continues to work toward solutions that benefit the Tongass and all who rely on it.  
Photo by Brian McNitt