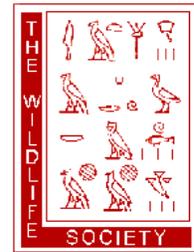




# The Alaskan Wildlifer

Newsletter of the Alaska Chapter of  
The Wildlife Society

August 2007



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- *Chapter Begins Position Statement on Use of Pack Goats Near Wild Sheep and Goats*
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## Message from the President

Alaska is 2007 Chapter of the Year! Our chapter was chosen by a national panel for this annual award to highlight outstanding achievement. I'll be making my first trip to a national TWS meeting outside our state to accept the honor on behalf of the Alaska Chapter at the awards banquet in Tuscon and give a short presentation about our activities during the leader's luncheon. Some of the ideas or innovations our Chapter has embraced to keep up with the times are benefiting TWS and providing a model for how other chapters or the national organization can continue to improve service to members while meeting our conservation mission. To all the Alaska Chapter members who have helped in innumerable ways during 2006-- whether by volunteering for the national meeting, assisting with technical reviews or correspondence, keeping track of legislative issues, helping with the membership drive, contributing to newsletters, anything large or small—you have the sincere gratitude of the Executive Board and deserve a pat on the back. Thanks for your service!

**COWCH program.** I teamed up with an oral history specialist from University of Alaska-Fairbanks (UAF) in June to interview John Burns of Fairbanks. John came to Alaska in 1960 and completed a graduate study on mink of the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta, worked as a marine mammal researcher for the Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADFG), and continues with part-time consulting work as principal of Living Resources, Inc. He served for many years on the Scientific Advisory Committee to the Marine Mammal Commission and on the Scientific and Statistical

Committee of the North Pacific Fisheries Management Council. Over his career he produced over 100 papers and reports on the biology of marine mammals in the subarctic and arctic and was lead editor of *The Bowhead Whale* (1993, Society of Marine Mammalogy). John received an honorary doctorate of science from UAF in 2002. Upon retirement from ADFG in 1986 he began trapping marten in winter and commercial fishing for salmon and halibut in summer, activities that he presently continues.

Spring 2008 chapter meeting—President-elect Howard Golden ([howard.golden@alaska.gov](mailto:howard.golden@alaska.gov)) and Southcentral Representative Robin West ([robin.west@fws.gov](mailto:robin.west@fws.gov)) will co-chair the Program Committee for our spring meeting in the Anchorage area. They anticipate holding the first planning teleconference sometime this autumn and to have a program outline for the November newsletter. **If you are willing to helping organize the meeting, please contact Howard or Robin.** We are particularly looking for people who have experience with raffles or ideas on fundraising strategies for student travel reimbursement (see article on page four).

**Position statement on pack goats.** Kimberlee Beckmen is chairing a committee review of information on the risk of introducing disease to Dall's sheep and mountain goats from domestic goats used as pack animals in Alaska. Dr. Beckmen, along with Jim Herriges and Jim Lawler, submitted a position



statement questionnaire to the Executive Board in May that was unanimously accepted. There is a small but growing use of goats and llamas as pack animals in alpine areas of Alaska, where wild populations are considered "naïve" with respect to immunity. A draft is expected for member review this autumn. (Note: immediately following the TWS meeting in Tucson there will be a workshop to examine potential disease risk to bighorn sheep when they come in contact with domestic sheep and goats. The workshop will address methods for doing quantitative disease risk assessment, provide background and foundational information, and present varied perspectives on the subject. Further information can be found at [http://www.wildlife.org/conference/bighorn\\_sheep\\_workshop.pdf](http://www.wildlife.org/conference/bighorn_sheep_workshop.pdf)).

**Values and Functions of Scientific Societies.** Past-president Eric Taylor took a leave of absence from his job with the US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) in Alaska during 2005-07 to collaborate on a national internet-based survey of USFWS and US Geological Survey (USGS) employees by TWS. Eric worked at TWS headquarters in Maryland during this time. A brief account of preliminary results is in the summer 2007 issue of *The Wildlife Professional* (<http://www.wildlife.org/publications/index.cfm>).

The study examined professional needs of employees, participation in TWS, importance of TWS products and activities, and factors that influence membership. Needless to say, the full-length articles to result from this work will have valuable insights on recruitment and retention of TWS members. Good job, Eric!

**Alaska Chapter is test case in new TWS website.** Our chapter was offered the opportunity to lead the transition into greater autonomy in website maintenance under the new website model (Joomla) being adopted by TWS. Liz Solomon, our webmaster, agreed to become trained for the transition process.

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## News from Southeast:

By Steve Lewis, Southeast Representative

### People

**Matt Robus Retires.** After working 30 years as a biologist, including 26 years with the State of Alaska, Director of Wildlife Conservation Matt Robus retired at the end of July. Following graduate studies at UAF, Matt began his career in 1977 as a fisheries technician working for ADFG at the Holitna River weir. Matt went on to biologist positions with the Bureau of Land Management Arctic/Kobuk Resource area and ADFG Habitat Division (serving as lead Habitat Biologist for

the Red Dog Mine near Kotzebue). In 1991, Matt became the Juneau Area Wildlife Biologist with the ADFG Division of Wildlife Conservation, became Deputy Director of the Division in 1999, and followed Wayne Regelin as the Division's Director in 2003. During his time at Headquarters, Matt has been impressed by the high level of staff expertise and knowledge about wildlife and conservation issues across the state. Matt deeply respects the staff he has worked with or led for the past 26 years and reflects favorably on his career-long efforts to work cooperatively with other divisions, agencies, and organizations.

### News

Alaska Audubon and The Nature Conservancy have co-sponsored *A Conservation Assessment and Resource Synthesis for The Coastal Forests and Mountains Ecoregion in the Tongass National Forest and Southeast Alaska*, which is now available at <http://home.gci.net/~tnc>. The long term plan is to archive this summary at Conserve Online (<http://www.conserveonline.org>), where the PDF components of the summary already are stored.

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## News from Southcentral:

By Robin West, Southcentral Representative

### People

**Russ Oates** was hired as the US Fish and Wildlife Service Migratory Bird Chief for Alaska, replacing **Bob Leedy** who retired last September. Russ will supervise the waterfowl and nongame migratory bird programs in Anchorage.

**Tom Melius**, Regional Director of the US Fish and Wildlife Service, moved to Alaska last year and recently joined the Alaska Chapter TWS. Tom is no stranger to TWS, having been a member for many years. Tom moved from Washington, D.C. to Alaska but was previously the South Dakota Chapter TWS President. Welcome Tom!

### News

*King Cove-Cold Bay Road.* Alaska Representative Don Young and Alaska Senators Lisa Murkowski and Ted Stevens introduced companion legislation (H.R. 2801 and S. 1680) that would provide King Cove residents a right-of-way for a road through Izembek National Wildlife Refuge to Cold Bay, a community about 25 miles away. In exchange, 61,723 acres would be



added to Izembek or Alaska Peninsula National Wildlife Refuges ([www.govtrack.us/congress/](http://www.govtrack.us/congress/)).

*Yellow-billed loon status review.* The USFWS recently announced that a petition seeking to add the yellow-billed loon to the federal list of endangered and threatened species presented substantial information and that Endangered Species Act protection may be warranted. A Federal Register Notice (published June 6, 2007) stated that in response to this initial finding, the Service will initiate a thorough review of all available biological information regarding the loon's status to determine whether to propose it for listing. In the initial status review the Service asks the public to submit any pertinent information on the status of, or threats to, the species (See: [www.r7.fws.gov/mbsp/mbm/loons/pdf/ybl\\_press\\_release.pdf](http://www.r7.fws.gov/mbsp/mbm/loons/pdf/ybl_press_release.pdf)).

*USGS and USFWS directorates meet in Alaska.* USGS and USFWS directorates from around the United States met jointly in Alaska on 23 July to discuss a variety of ongoing collaborative efforts and research issues. The joint meeting focused on the implications of climate change to fish and wildlife conservation, partnerships associated with the Strategic Habitat Conservation Initiative, and priorities for future collaborative efforts. Directorates of both agencies then stayed in Alaska the remainder of the week to continue agency specific meetings.

*Attu Island Ptarmigan Decline.* After successfully restoring Evermann's rock ptarmigan on Agattu Island through transplantation from nearby Attu Island, Alaska Maritime National Wildlife Refuge sent Dr. Clait Braun and Dr. Bill Taylor to Attu Island this spring to investigate apparent population cycling. Grouse and ptarmigan are known to cycle in areas on the mainland of Alaska and elsewhere, but this had not been documented in the western Aleutians. Based on the 2007 surveys, ptarmigan appear to have declined to 5% of the estimated number in 2003. By comparison, populations of mainland rock ptarmigan appear to typically fluctuate only 2- to 4-fold between highs and lows during a similar time frame. Additional work is warranted. For more information contact Steve Ebbert at the Alaska Maritime National Wildlife Refuge ([steve\\_ebbert@fws.gov](mailto:steve_ebbert@fws.gov)).

*Alaska's Kenai Wildlife Viewing Trail Guide* was produced in a collaborative effort of over 50 volunteers utilizing state and federal funds ([http://www.kenaipeninsula.org/kenai\\_guide/](http://www.kenaipeninsula.org/kenai_guide/)). Many Alaskan biologists, including several Alaska Chapter members, contributed outstanding photos of wildlife and habitat. The guide covers view tips and ethics,

safety, land ownership, checklists, and a seasonal calendar of birds, mammals, fish, and amphibians.

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## News from the North:

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By Carol McIntyre, Northern Representative

### People

At the Alaska Department of Fish and Game, **Letty Hughes** is the new Unit 18 Assistant Area Biologist (Bethel), **Tony Gorn** is the new Unit 22 Area Biologist (Nome) and **Kate Persons** retired on 1 May 2007 after serving as the Unit 22 Area Biologist.

**Kris Hundertmark**, assistant professor of wildlife ecology at the UAF Institute of Arctic Biology, received the Distinguished Moose Biologist award at the 43rd Annual North American Moose Conference and Workshop held this June in British Columbia. The award honors an individual who has made outstanding contributions to moose research and management. Kris worked for ADFG for 21 years, mostly at the Kenai Moose Research Center in Soldotna. He has published more than 30 articles and a book chapter on moose. His research included the genetics and evolution of moose, particularly the origins of moose and their colonization of the New World. Congratulations, Kris!

### News

*Tanana Lakes Management Plan.* The Fairbanks North Star Borough has completed a management plan for the Tanana Lakes Recreation Area in south Fairbanks (<http://co.fairbanks.ak.us/ParksandRecreation/OngoingProjects/>). The Alaska Chapter provided extensive comments on the draft plan ([http://www.wildlife.org/chapters/ak/TWS\\_Tanana\\_Lakes.pdf](http://www.wildlife.org/chapters/ak/TWS_Tanana_Lakes.pdf)), and many of our comments were adopted.

*Northeast Petroleum Reserve Supplemental EIS.* The Bureau of Land Management will soon release a Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement to address cumulative impacts of conducting a 400,000 acre oil lease sale north and east of Teshekpuk Lake in the National Petroleum Reserve-Alaska. The release of the document will begin a public comment period of presently unknown duration. Our chapter has been involved in commenting on this proposal for several years, and we anticipate reviewing the SEIS.



## Strategy for student recruitment and travel assistance

By Tom Paragi

I recently reviewed the strategic plan for our Chapter (<http://www.wildlife.org/chapters/ak/index.cfm?tna=me=strategicplan>) that the Executive Board put together in 2001 under the guidance of former president Doug Larsen. I am pleased to report that we are addressing all the key components, with a substantial increase in membership last year being a major accomplishment! The latest issue of *The Wildlifer* noted that TWS membership declined by 1.5% in 2006, so our efforts are helping both locally and nationally, given that we now require Chapter members to be TWS members.

We seek to maintain the financial ability to carry out the basic goals of our Chapter strategic plan, which I will paraphrase:

- hold an annual scientific meeting (which ideally breaks even with registration fees)
- support Alaskan conservation issues (e.g., contribution to assist with associated meetings, such as the Alaska Bird Conference)
- provide recognition for outstanding service to the Chapter and profession (e.g., plaque and modest gift certificate)
- encourage participation in the Chapter and TWS by professionals and students
- provide effective conservation outreach for Alaskan wildlife issues where professional expertise is required.

Looking at the activity history of the Chapter over the last 20 years, we should maintain a balance to cover travel for 2 people to Washington, DC for congressional testimony, cover travel for the President to the national meeting if his/her employer does not provide expenses, provide public outreach (including to elected officials) through the most effective media, and maintain a reserve to sponsor a major fundraising campaign to rebuild the treasury if all these events occur at once! Our treasury is presently healthy (ca. \$10K) and should be sufficient to cover our needs, thanks to substantial revenue from better-than-expected attendance at the national meeting in Anchorage last September.

As the Board looked at how we best could be using our treasury to address goals in the strategic plan, recruitment and retention of students into our Chapter came out as a top priority. We recently approved some incentives for student recruitment and retention

in the Chapter and TWS. Each year for up to 10 student members of TWS who live in Alaska, we will pay the \$32 cost upgrade to regular membership one time per person upon graduation, which hopefully will bridge the gap between school and employment with some young professionals. In addition, we committed to providing a total of \$1000 in travel reimbursements to be divided among 5 or more students per year (on some sort of competitive basis) to attend our Chapter meeting, which rotates between Anchorage (every other year) and Fairbanks and Juneau (each every fourth year). The combination of one-time membership upgrade and in-state travel reimbursement is \$1320, which is nearly matched by the annual dues revenue (\$5 each) from our present membership of about 240. Additional expenses or special projects would cause a decline in the treasury.

*As the Board looked at how we best could be using our treasury to address goals in the strategic plan, recruitment and retention of students into our Chapter came out as a top priority.*

We are also considering fundraising options to reimburse some travel costs for a student to attend the national meeting. We recognize that this is something that many long-time members have never done. However, we also acknowledge that the contacts made and experience gained from this event can literally be a career-changing move for a young person seeking a graduate school project, his/her first full-time job, or the opportunity to meet potential mentors or gain experience in a completely different environment.

Aside from dues, we don't have an established fundraising strategy or committee. One option to fund a partial travel reimbursement to the national meeting is to sponsor a raffle dedicated to this purpose at our annual meeting. A raffle would require at least a couple people willing to solicit donations and conduct the event. There are many other options for fundraising, limited only by creativity and energy of willing members. Raising the Chapter dues from \$5 to \$10 per year would be an easy solution.

My purpose with this article was to plant the seed for members to think about how the Chapter can better serve students, whom are the lifeblood that will carry our organization into the future. We need an effective mechanism to recruit and retain them; funding incentives are only one part of the process,



but an important one. Feel free to contact me with ideas, or bring your thoughts to the spring 2008 meeting in the Anchorage area. The Board plans to have the topic of fundraising to support student recruitment and retention on our business agenda.

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## Meetings and Announcements

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The 12th Biennial Alaska Bird Conference will be held in Fairbanks, Alaska, 4-7 March 2008. The local organizing committee is seeking suggestions for pre-conference workshops, special sessions, and associated meetings ([www.alaskabird.org](http://www.alaskabird.org)).

Bird Cinema (<http://www.birdcinema.com/>) is a relatively new website that contains footage on wild birds and is a venue for posting video footage. In addition to several hundred video clips, the site includes educational links.

*Bear Viewing in Alaska: Expert Techniques for a Great Adventure* (2007, Falcon Press, 128 p.) by Stephen F. Stringham with photographs by Kent Fredriksson. This recent release by a professional viewing guide in Soldotna describes where to go for the bear viewing, photography hints, and how to behave around bears. Learn more at <http://www.bear-viewing-in-alaska.info/>.

Wildlife Policy News is available approximately quarterly at the TWS website. Produced by Laura Bies, it frequently discusses issues that are pertinent to Alaska, such as the following topics in the current issue. (It is also typically distributed through the TWS Listserv <http://www.wildlife.org/professional/>).

- House Appropriations Subcommittee Increases Funding for Wildlife
- National Wildlife Refuge System Funding Crisis
- Energy Reform Bill Introduced
- Bill to Codify Clinton-era Roadless Rule
- Wind Energy Costly for Birds and Bats
- Political Interference in Endangered Species Science
- 2005 Forest Planning Rule Violates ESA, NEPA
- House Bill Could Restore Regulatory Power to Clean Water Act

**Lower 48 Bald Eagle Delisting Would Bring Some Changes to Alaska Management.** Regulatory changes to the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act that would accompany the eagle's delisting in the Lower 48 would also apply to Alaska. First, the USFWS finalized modifications to a regulatory definition of "disturb"

under the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act. The new language defines "disturb" as "to agitate or bother a bald or golden eagle to a degree that causes, or is likely to cause, based on the best scientific information available, 1) injury to an eagle, 2) a decrease in its productivity, by substantially interfering with normal breeding, feeding, or sheltering behavior, or 3) nest abandonment, by substantially interfering with normal breeding, feeding, or sheltering behavior." Second, the agency announced a set of National Bald Eagle Management Guidelines designed to help landowners ensure that actions they take on their property are consistent with the Eagle Act and the Migratory Bird Treaty Act. Finally, the Service opened a 90-day public comment period on a proposal to establish a permit program under the Eagle Act that would allow limited take of bald and golden. For more information, see [www.r7.fws.gov/mbasp/](http://www.r7.fws.gov/mbasp/).

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## Decline of Eastern North Slope Muskoxen

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By Richard Shideler, Patricia Reynolds, Steve Arthur, Elizabeth Lenart, Tom Paragi.

A recent "YouTube" video clip of a grizzly bear killing 2 young muskox calves in the Prudhoe Bay oilfield ([www.youtube.com/watch?v=-nPS1xs-U3I](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-nPS1xs-U3I)) has focused more public attention on the recent decline of muskoxen in the central and eastern North Slope.

Musk oxen were extirpated from Alaska, including the North Slope, in the late 1800s to early 1900s. Sixty-four muskoxen were reintroduced into areas near the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge in 1969 and 1970. By the mid 1980's, numbers of muskoxen in the refuge reached over 300 and stabilized as the population expanded its distribution westward to adjacent state land and eastward to the northwestern Yukon. Total population numbers peaked in 1995 and stabilized at 600-700. But after 2000, numbers of muskoxen dropped sharply in the refuge, resulting in a decline in the total population, although numbers continued to be relatively stable or slightly increasing and calf survival relatively high in both the central North Slope (between the Colville and Canning rivers) and northwestern Yukon. Annual surveys, composition counts and radio-tracking surveys begun in 1982 by USFWS were expanded into cooperative surveys with ADFG, the Yukon Government and Parks Canada as the muskox population moved into new regions. The first comprehensive, multi-agency survey of all known muskox habitat in northeastern Alaska and adjacent Canada was conducted in April 2006. Virtually no



muskoxen were found in the refuge, 216 animals were found west of the refuge, and 79 animals were found in Canada. Outside the survey area a few small mixed groups were seen on the south side of the Brooks Range in Alaska. Subsequently, an additional 100 animals were found outside the survey area in Canada. This suggests that the population is at least 400 animals, or about 60% of the peak. The survey supports earlier indications of the near disappearance of muskox from the Arctic Refuge portion of the North Slope; however, it appears that numbers may have declined west of the refuge, and slightly increased in the Yukon.

There appear to be several factors involved in the decline. Weather conditions, especially recent icing events and changes in density, persistence, and depth of snow may have resulted in muskoxen entering spring in poorer body condition and/or being more susceptible to predation. Although investigations of disease, parasitism, and trace elements have only recently begun these factors appear to also have had a role. Pathogens identified in carcasses and live-captured muskox from the area include *Chlamydia*, *Pasteurella trehalosi* (pneumonia), Bovine Viral Diarrhea, and 3 suspected cases of contagious ecthyma ("orf" in humans). Several of the dead animals suffered from polyarthritic joint problems, which are often associated with disease agents such as *Chlamydia* that can also affect reproduction. Although some of these pathogens are present at low levels in many muskox populations, they can have significant effects on populations that have only recently become exposed or which are suffering from nutritional or environmental stress. Thus, it may be significant that analysis of a small number of live-captured animals and carcasses indicated a deficiency in copper, which is necessary for immune system function.

Muskoxen also appear susceptible to flood events. Several muskoxen groups have been observed on the sea ice in spring and disappeared (presumably drowned) as the nearshore areas flooded during breakup of major rivers. At least 13 members of a group on the Colville River drowned in one spring flood event.

Predation by bears and, to a lesser degree, wolves also appears to have played a role. Observations of marked bears from the ADFG Oilfield Grizzly Bear Project indicated that at least 16 different marked bears and several unmarked bears have killed at least 47 muskoxen over the past 14 years. Although most of these were events in which a bear killed only one muskox, several cases were observed in which a bear

or bears killed and ate up to 7 muskoxen per event. The multiple kills occurred during early spring when mobility of muskoxen may have been reduced due to snow conditions, body condition, or pregnancy. Calving chronology of muskox also increases susceptibility to predation: calving takes place over a long period (late April to early June) rather than in the short pulse characteristic of caribou. There has been adult mortality from other sources as well. Legal and illegal hunting and a few animals killed in vehicle collisions along the Dalton Highway have accounted for about 200 animals since 1982. No permits for federal and state hunts have been issued since 2003.

We are just beginning to get a picture of how these and other factors are affecting eastern North Slope muskoxen. Arctic Refuge biologists are completing an analysis of factors associated with shifts in distribution and the long-term dynamics of the population. During 2007, ADFG began investigating potential causes of this population decline through more intensive monitoring, testing for diseases, and assessing nutritional condition of muskox from the GMU 26B area. As seen in many wildlife studies, population outcomes are likely the result of the inter-relationships among many factors.

And what about the "star" of the YouTube video? He is a young adult male collared as part of the oilfield project in 2005. After eating the 2 calves he moved westward approximately 60 miles to the Alpine oilfield, apparently looking for breeding females.

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## Member Contributions

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(Note: This section allows Chapter members to discuss topics or ideas pertinent to our organization, following review by the Executive Board. The purpose is to stimulate member involvement and professional discussion. Opinions of the authors do not necessarily reflect those of TWS, the Alaska Chapter TWS, or the contributor's employers.)

### Examining the "Illusion of Preservation" in Alaska

By Tom Paragi

In the plenary session on resource economics at our 2007 Chapter meeting in Juneau, economist Trista Patterson referenced a provocative paper written by three forest researchers from Harvard University:

["The illusion of preservation: a global environmental argument for local production of natural resources"](#) by M.E. Berlik, D.B. Kittredge, and D.R. Foster, 2002, *Journal of Biogeography* 29:1557-1568.



Berlik et al. describe how affluent countries with heavy consumption rates often have domestic environmental policies to protect nature, yet these nations import raw materials from developing countries less equipped to extract resources in an environmentally prudent manner. One consequence is greater global environmental degradation (often where species diversity is higher) than would arise if consumption were reduced and a larger proportion of resource extraction came from affluent nations in the North. Their analysis of wood in Massachusetts (the 8<sup>th</sup> most forested state) suggested that currently the 2% of fiber consumption produced in-state could be increased to 50% through aggressive reduction of consumption, effective fiber recycling, and judiciously increased harvest using sustainable practices while still maintaining large forest preserves. Whether it does is another matter, or at least a matter of time.

I am not aware of such detailed calculations for Alaska, which is a crowned jewel of wildlife populations and habitat in a largely undeveloped environment. However, Alaskan resources will be at the center of difficult conservation choices as increasing fuel prices raise the cost of transportation and the price of our currently imported foods, building materials, and other consumer items. We live a long way from the source of many of our imported items. Reckoning of values will occur when costs of many activities and consumer choices tied to fossil fuel prices increase to the point that the heretofore

externalized costs of our lifestyles must be internalized.

Community leaders in Alaska are seeing the need to prepare for what may be dramatic changes caused by global processes of nature and human economies. In response, the National Science Foundation is preparing to fund research to forecast the effect of climate change on supply of ecosystem services in the arctic and subarctic. The role of biomass fuels to supplant some consumption of fossil fuels for heat and power production (particularly in villages) is being explored in the boreal forest of the Interior and Southcentral with pilot projects that may be integrated with reducing wildland fire hazards, utilizing logging and milling waste, and enhancing moose browse. On another front, the Alaska Department of Natural Resources is currently reexamining Alaskan agriculture in light of the changing natures of the industry and climate. The extent to which red meat for our growing population will be supplied from domestic livestock, ranching of non-native game, and management of wild ungulates is unknown. The Alaska Chapter should remain abreast of scientific investigations on production of local resources. We should also become engaged in societal discussions about the role of Alaska in conservation of global biological diversity and about the ecological limits to management of renewable resources at high latitudes.

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## 2006-2008 Alaska Chapter Executive Board

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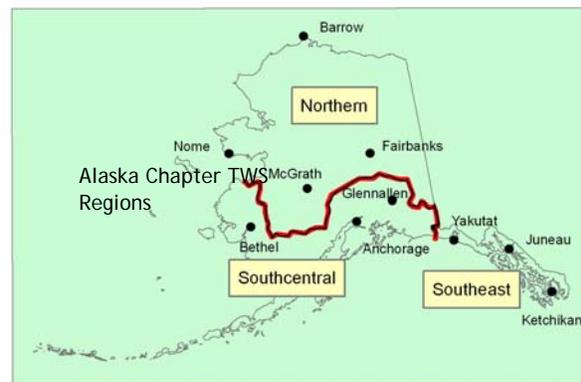
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