

INLETKEEPER®

...PROTECTING THE COOK INLET WATERSHED & THE LIFE IT SUSTAINS

www.inletkeeper.org Headquarters: 907.235.4068

Winter Quarter 2015



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Protecting Alaska's Special Habitat Areas *Walker/Mallott Administration replaces Bates at ADFG Habitat Division*



Inletkeeper's challenge to illegal drill rig storage in Kachemak Bay created a "controversy" helped prompt efforts to rollback critical habitat protections.

In October 2013, Inletkeeper learned the Director of ADFG's Habitat Division – Randy Bates – had embarked on a radical new plan to re-write the plans governing Alaska's 32 Special Habitat Areas – our critical habitat areas, fish and game refuges and wildlife sanctuaries. The plan included cutting Alaskans out of the process for revising habitat management plans, and rolling back basic safeguards for fish and wildlife. The rollbacks were prompted in-part by efforts undertaken by Inletkeeper to protect critical habitat from industrial development; Mr. Bates later referred to these incidents as "controversies" to rationalize his rollback plan. For example, in

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We're Setting The Standards *Inletkeeper is helping with statewide data collection standards*

As we continue to feel the impacts of a changing climate, the need for Alaskans to understand how these changes will alter salmon streams and fisheries resources grows. Cook Inletkeeper has been leading the way by collecting water temperature data in Cook Inlet streams for years; however, the need for data across the state is ongoing. The good news is that many new players are beginning to collect temperature data for a variety of purposes to meet project or agency specific goals. The trick now is to make sure we end up with comparable data sets between data collectors in Alaska so we can understand broader regional patterns.

Cook Inletkeeper, with collaborators at the Alaska Natural Heritage Program, University of Alaska Anchorage, took up this challenge in 2014. We identified minimum standards for things such as the type of data logger to use, how often to sample per day, and how long to keep the logger in stream. Stream Temperature Data Collection Standards and Protocol for Alaska explains why we selected each standard and provides detailed instructions on how to implement them in the field. We hope this effort will result in a robust understanding of temperature trends in Alaska's salmon streams during this time of rapid change.

Stream Temperature Data Collection Standards and Protocol for Alaska:

Minimum Standards to Generate Data Useful for Regional-scale Analyses




UAA Alaska Natural Heritage Program
UNIVERSITY OF ALASKA ANCHORAGE

December 2014

To learn more about data collection standards, go to: inletkeeper.org/healthy-habitat/stream-temperature-data-standards

New York State Bans Fracking; Alaska Adopts Rules Allowing It

Fracking shown to contaminate drinking water sources in lower 48

In mid-December, New York State banned the controversial practice known as “fracking.” Just prior to that decision, the State of Alaska issued new rules that allow fracking to occur across the state. So, why did New York take such a strong stand on fracking, while Alaska just opened the door to better accommodate this practice?

Fracking – or hydraulic fracturing – is a form of well stimulation that blasts fluids under high pressure into underground formations to enhance the flow of hydrocarbons. Well stimulation techniques have been common industry practice for decades, but they have typically been applied in deeper, conventional reservoirs.


Two things have brought fracking into the American lexicon. First is the advent of directional drilling, where new technologies allow drillers to snake wells out horizontally from the bore hole to reach a variety of hydrocarbon-bearing zones. The other difference between fracking and more conventional stimulation techniques is the relatively shallow geologic targets where they’re used, the large volume of fracking fluids involved and their potential to impact freshwater aquifers.

The Alaska Oil & Gas Commission (AOGCC) is the state agency charged with regulating “down hole” activities, including drilling plans, blow out plans and well stimulation techniques, including fracking. Starting several years ago, AOGCC began a rule making process to address fracking, and to its credit, the first round of proposed rules were strong on public notice, monitoring and fracking fluid information disclosure.

Unfortunately, once industry lobbyists got involved, the



The large volume of fracking fluids involved have the potential to impact freshwater aquifers.

rules became increasingly weaker, and while the final rules remain good on public notice and baseline monitoring, they make post-drilling aquifer monitoring discretionary, and allow industry to continue to hide the chemical constituents of fracking fluids through trade secrets claims. To see the new regulations, go to: <http://doa.alaska.gov/ogc/Regulations/RegIndex.html#amend>. If you want to know about fracking operations in your neighborhood, contact Inletkeeper at 907.235.4068 x22. 

Inletkeeper Helps Get Rule Released on Toxic Dispersants

The Exxon Valdez taught us many painful lessons. For industry, a vital lesson learned was to never let oil hit the beaches, where TV cameras could highlight spill impacts. When




USCG Photo

Dispersants are increasingly the first response tool out of the box for large oil spills. They are shown to increase oil spill toxicity and worker illnesses.

the BP Gulf Disaster unfolded in 2010, BP used nearly 2 million gallons of dispersants to respond to its massive spill, to drive the oil out of sight into the water column. But industry has refused to reveal the chemicals found in its dispersants, and numerous studies show dispersants amplify the toxicity of spilled oil and lead to clean-up worker illnesses, among other problems. A few years ago, Inletkeeper joined groups across the nation on a petition to EPA to get basic rules and testing for dispersants. In early January, EPA released a draft rule to address these issues. As more leasing unfolds in Lower Cook Inlet, and as Shell looks to drill again in the Arctic, it’s vital we understand the impacts of dispersants on Alaska’s people, fish and wildlife. Inletkeeper will stay engaged, and work to get the strongest protections possible for Alaskan communities.

For more information and to comment on the dispersants rule, go to: <http://www2.epa.gov/emergency-response/revisions-national-oil-and-hazardous-substances-pollution-contingency-plan>.

For background information on the risks posed by dispersants, go to: <http://dispersantban.org>. 

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Protecting Alaska's Special Habitat Areas

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2011, Inletkeeper challenged ADFG for violating state law when it allowed a foreign oil company to store a jack-up drilling rig in the Kachemak Bay Critical Habitat Area. In a separate incident, Inletkeeper appealed a decision by ADFG to allow the Hilcorp corporation to mine boulders and fill a salmon stream in the Redoubt Bay Critical Habitat Area so it could resume storing oil at the base of the Mt. Redoubt volcano (in an Orwellian decision, ADFG rejected Inletkeeper's appeal, ruling only the oil company – and not Alaskans or groups – had proper standing to challenge the decision).

To combat the attacks on our special areas, Inletkeeper worked with dozens of

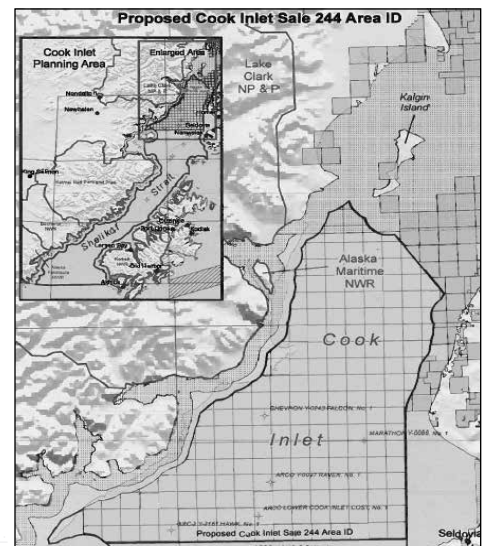
groups across the state, created a website that drove nearly a thousand comments to politicians and agency staff, and helped push the issue into statewide dialog. Recently, the Walker/Mallott Administration removed Bates, and halted the planning process, saying it will proceed with a more open public process in the future. This is an important win for democracy and fish and game protection across the state, and we tip our hats to the many Alaskans who stood up for clean water and healthy salmon! Please take a moment to thank Governor Walker and his team (bill.walker@alaska.gov)!

Visit our resource library for a number of articles and letters on the rollbacks: www.inletkeeper.org/resources/



Feds Plan Yet Another Lower Cook Inlet Oil & Gas Lease Sale

The Bureau of Ocean Energy & Management (BOEM) is moving forward with plans to lease 1.17 million acres of federal waters in Lower Cook Inlet for oil and gas exploration. During the last lease sale in 1995, the feds estimated a roughly 3 in 4 chance of a major spill in waters that are vital to local fishing families and subsistence users. Inletkeeper submitted comments opposing the sale, and is now working with local Tribes and fishing groups to highlight the importance of Lower Cook Inlet to our local communities. Contact Bob Shavelson if you want to get involved at 907.299.3277 or bob@inletkeeper.org.



Two “Near Misses” in Five Days Highlight Shipping Risks in Cook Inlet

Recent risk assessment once again refuses call for more safety tugs

On January 17, the 840’ container ship *Midnight Sun* lost power in the unforgiving waters of lower Cook Inlet. Fast work by crewman re-started 3 of the 4 engines, and after a tug pulled from its station tending a tanker in Nikiski came to assist, the vessel made way to Kachemak Bay several hours later. Four days later, the 550’ tanker *Pyxis Theta* shut down her engines while departing Knik Arm due to an apparent ice clog in her cooling water intake; she was able to drop anchor to prevent grounding in the muddy shallows of Upper Cook Inlet, and received tug assistance to make her way back to the Port of Anchorage.

Fortunately, neither of these “near misses” involved a spill. And while Cook Inlet boasts some of the finest mariners in the world, we know all too often that accidents happen in our fast tides and icy waters. In 1993, a renowned navigational safety

expert from the North Sea – Captain Dickson - recommended high-powered tugs to escort and assist tankers and other large vessels in Cook Inlet’s notoriously dangerous waters. Despite numerous risk assessments since then – including a 2014 version lead by the Cook Inlet Regional Citizens Advisory Council and state and federal agencies – oil companies and shippers with a vested interest in avoiding the costs of tugs have thwarted much-needed advancements.

But all it takes is one spill to destroy a fishery, and to cripple the local families and businesses that rely on it. Inletkeeper will continue to work with its Native, fishing and business partners to get the tug support we need as shipping traffic increases in Cook Inlet. To get involved, contact Inletkeeper at 907.235.4068 x22.

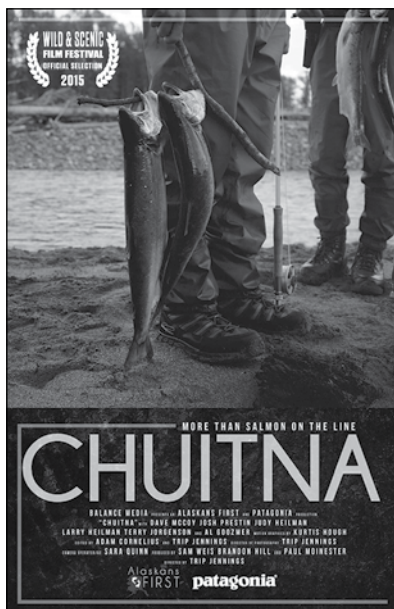


USCG Photo

The 840 foot container ship *Midnight Sun* lost power for an hour in Lower Cook Inlet in mid-January.



Chuitna: More Than Salmon on the Line



The Chuitna Citizens Coalition, in partnership with Patagonia and Balance Media, is VERY proud to announce the tour dates for a new film.

Chuitna chronicles the journey of a group of fly fishermen as they venture out for a trip of a lifetime in the salmon-rich Chuitna watershed. With every cast and conversation with local frontier Alaskans fighting to protect their homes from the proposed Chuitna Coal Mine, the travelers obtain a deeper

understanding of the mine’s devastating impacts.

Each local film premiere will be accompanied by food, drinks and a community space to hang out with your friends.

The events are all free and open to the public. Stay tuned for more details on the premiere in your area:

- Feb 3rd - Kenai - Triumvirate North Theater, 6pm-8pm
- Feb 5th - Seward - Ressurect Art Coffee House, 7pm-9pm
- Feb 24th - Anchorage - Anchorage Museum, 7pm-9pm
- March 5th - Homer - Homer Theater, 6pm
- April 6th - Kodiak - Kodiak Brewery, 7pm-9pm
- April 16th - Wasilla - Rock On Climbing Gym, 6:30pm
- April 28th - Talkeetna - The Hangar, 6pm-8pm
- TBD - Fairbanks
- TBD - Juneau - Silverbow Bakery
- TBD - Sitka - Larkspur Cafe
- TBD - Haines - Harriet Hall
- TBD - Cooper Landing

Spread the word far and wide - this is a film you definitely do not want to miss.

Sincerely,

Judy Heilman

Chuitna Citizens Coalition 



This Newsletter is dedicated to the memory of Esther Wunnicke.
“Cook Inlet and Kachemak Bay were both very near and dear to our mother’s heart.”

