

INLETKEEPER®

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

www.inletkeeper.org Headquarters: 907.235.4068

Summer Quarter 2016



**August 31 is
the Last Chance
for 2016
Pick.Click.Give.
Donations**

.....
If you did not get a chance to Pick.Click.Give. when you filed for your PFD, or if you needed to wait for summer income to roll in before deciding how much to donate, there is still time! The deadline to add a charitable contribution through Pick.Click.Give. is August 31.

www.pickclickgive.org

And you can always give online:

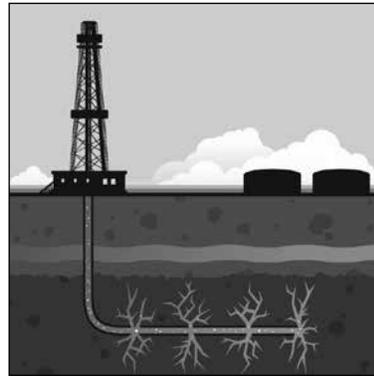
inletkeeper.org/donate

**...because you
love Cook Inlet.**

Lovalaska
Pick Click Give

New Fracking Coming to Inlet *Critical to press for fossil fuel alternatives*

Hydraulic fracturing—“fracking”—has jumped into the American lexicon in the past decade, largely due to the advent of directional drilling technology targeting shallow shale gas plays in the Lower 48, and the drinking and groundwater contamination threats they pose. The Bush Administration compounded the problem when Dick Cheney—fresh off his stint running Haliburton, the world’s largest fracking fluid manufacturer—convened secret meetings in the White House with oil and gas executives to exempt fracking fluids from disclosure under the Safe Drinking Water Act.



Oil and gas development has to stop so we can transition to a post-carbon economy.

Inletkeeper has been involved with fracking long before it became a household word. In 2002, the state issued coalbed methane leases for over 20,000 acres on the Homer bench, and over 300,000 acres in the Mat Su Valley. Directional drilling would allow producers to

target shallow coal seams, and to use fracking fluids to blast apart the coal to release methane gas—all the while using massive volumes of water and generating equal volumes of toxic waste. Inletkeeper quickly organized broad-based opposition from property owners who were upset to learn oil and gas companies could occupy their land to produce coal gas (we even developed a 10-point

“Property Owners Bill of Rights” to highlight the threats). The prospect of coalbed methane—and the fracking used to produce it—sparked an enormous backlash, leading the oil and gas companies to relinquish all their leases, and forcing the state to rescind its coalbed methane program.

Since then, fracking has gained nationwide attention, as communities wrestle with the enormous social, health and environmental costs of large-scale shale gas development. In Alaska, various forms of well and reservoir

Continued on page 4

For Many Residents, Wishes Do Come True at Wishbone Hill

Imagine raising a family, growing a garden, or building onto your home not knowing whether or not huge coal trucks would share the winding road you drive to take your kids to school, or if coal dust would cover your garden after a regular afternoon wind event, or if explosive blasts would rattle your house. This was reality for many Matanuska Valley residents for the past 6 years.

The Sutton area in the Matanuska Valley was home to historic, small coal mining operations since the early 1900’s. The area provided coal for railroads and the Navy during World War I.

But, as transportation and energy needs shifted, many of the small mines closed. In the late 1980’s, a company called Idemitsu, interested in mining and exporting coal to Japan, bought the Wishbone Hill leases and completed the permitting process to open the Wishbone Hill Coal mine. As markets shifted, the mine never opened and the ownership of the leases and associated permits changed hands several times, eventually landing in Usibelli’s hands.

The Surface Mining and Reclamation Act (SMCRA) was passed in 1977 to provide oversight and standards for coal mining

Continued on page 2



Tracking Changes in Stream Levels Vital for Salmon

Among the many ways that a changing climate might impact salmon habitat is by altering stream flow patterns through reduced snow pack conditions and increased intensity of storms, so it is important to begin tracking the timing and magnitude of high and low flow events and their impact on fish habitat. Unfortunately, typical stream gauges are expensive to install and operate. In southcentral Alaska, existing gauges only provide limited coverage across hundreds of salmon streams. So starting this fall, we will be working with the National Weather Service's River Forecast Center and the USGS Climate Science Center to develop a low-cost, digital camera-based stream level monitoring system. This system will involve collecting images of stream water heights by focusing a camera on



The new camera-based system will focus on an instream ruler (or staff plate) and capture stream level data to track changing water availability in salmon habitats.

an in-stream ruler and generating a time series of water levels. And because having information in real-time greatly enhances the usefulness of data for resource managers, we will set up the new system with real-time, web-based connectivity. What can we do with this information? Over time we can assess changing salmon spawning conditions by tracking summer base flows as well as assess changing conditions of juvenile salmon overwintering habitat. Additionally, we could also use this system to evaluate the effectiveness of culvert replacement projects or remotely monitor conditions on reaches with existing reservations of water. We'll set up the first camera on the Anchor River and plan to facilitate water level data collection broadly across the Cook Inlet watershed. 

Wishes Do Come True at Wishbone Hill

Continued from page 1

operations. One key provision in SMCRA that applies to all coal mines, including those in Alaska, is that operations must commence on the property within 3 years of receiving a permit. This provision provides several protections for communities. It ensures that a coal company can't sit indefinitely on a permitted project thereby tying up the land and resources, and it ensures that a coal company is held to current standards of operations.

In 2011, Department of Natural Resources (DNR) renewed the coal mining permit for Wishbone Hill, despite the fact that the first permit was issued in 1991 and coal mining operations had not commenced. During that 20-year period, the surrounding community had changed significantly. Neighborhoods were built within ¼ mile of the mine site, close enough for blasting to break windows. The restoration project to restore fish passage in Moose Creek was just getting underway. And, the Mat Su Valley became one of the fastest growing areas in the nation, adding more people and cars on roads than ever before.

Residents and community organizations like Cook Inletkeeper joined together to hold Usibelli, DNR, and the federal Office of Surface Mining (OSM) accountable to the laws meant to protect our land, water and people from the impacts of coal

mining. After issuing several complaints that went unanswered by state and federal agencies, we decided to join a lawsuit against the Office of Surface Mining to force them to follow the intent and explicit language of the law.

Nearly five years later, this ongoing dispute on the validity of Usibelli's Wishbone Hill coal leases was resolved this month when the Alaska District Court ruled in our favor that OSM did not follow the law when it allowed DNR to renew the coal leases from 1991. While the administrative process to address the illegally renewed permits will take some time, the bottom line is that if Usibelli wants to open up the Wishbone Hill Coal Mine, they have to obtain a new permit. This new permit would require a new analysis of the impacts of the mine on the community and ensure that an honest and transparent public process accompanies any decisions by DNR.

Locally, this decision lets many Mat Valley residents breathe a huge sigh of relief and move forward with their lives in a community without a coal strip mine. Globally, this decision helps keep another 14 million tons of coal in the ground, and the resulting carbon emissions out of our climate. For both reasons, we are celebrating a hard-fought victory here at Cook Inletkeeper! 



Photo: Tim Leach, courtesy of Mat Valley Coalition

Residents can move on with their lives in a community without a coal strip mine.

Kenai Peninsula Food Hub Takes Off



INLETKEEPER is published by Cook Inletkeeper, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization dedicated to protecting the Cook Inlet watershed and the life it sustains. Newsletters are mailed free to members and available to others upon request. Headquarters are in Homer, with offices in Anchorage, Soldotna, and Talkeetna. Contact:

Cook Inletkeeper HEADQUARTERS

3734 Ben Walters Ln, Homer, AK 99603
 ph: 907.235.4068
 fx: 907.235.4069
 www.inletkeeper.org
 keeper@inletkeeper.org

STAFF

- Bob Shavelson
Executive Director & Inletkeeper
- Laura Bartholomae
Digital Organizer and Data Manager
- Brandon Hill
Chief Creative Officer
- Matt Koenig
Anchorage Organizer
- Rachel Lord
Clean Water Program Director
- Heather Leba
Clean Boating Coordinator
- Sue Mauger
Science Director
- Robbi Mixon
Local Foods Coordinator
- Margo Reveil
Development & Office Coordinator
- Carly Wier
Coal Campaign Director
- Kaitlin Vadla
Alaska Coal Organizer

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

- Benjamin Jackinsky, President (*Kasilof*)
- Mako Haggerty, Vice President (*Homer*)
- Mike O'Meara, Treasurer (*Homer*)
- Nancy Wainwright, Secretary (*Anchorage*)
- Pat Dougherty (*Anchorage*)
- Rob Ernst (*Nikiski*)
- Tom Evans (*Namwalek*)
- Willow King (*Kasilof*)
- Peter Mjos (*Anchorage*)
- Shannyn Moore (*Tutka Bay*)



Local is growing! Through the funding of Local Foods Promotion Program, a two-year grant provided by the USDA, Cook Inletkeeper launched the Kenai Peninsula Food Hub in late April, 2016, with pick-up locations in Homer and Soldotna. In the first 3 months of operation, the Food Hub has distributed over to \$10,000 in 100% locally grown and harvested produce, seafood, oysters, meats, and crafts, and boasts 25 active producers and over 350 customers signed up. In late June the Hub added a pick-up location in Seldovia, courtesy of the Seldovia Bay Ferry.

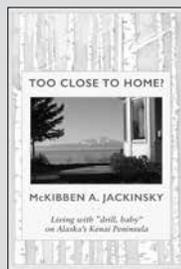
The goal of the Food Hub is to provide opportunities for Kenai Peninsula producers and consumers to connect in a way that will create benefit for both, as well as strengthen the Kenai Peninsula economy, increase food security, and reduce the carbon footprint created from importing food. In so doing so, the Food Hub will:

- Provide locally produced food and products direct from our producers, connecting producers to consumers
- Support sustainable, local, high quality agricultural practices

- Provide a network for the production and distribution of locally grown and harvested foods and locally made non-food products
- Support a Kenai Peninsula food system that in turn preserves the landscape, water, soil and air vital to a sustainable community



Plan ahead! Order your local goods online and support your local producers. It helps them focus on their craft and keeps the dollars in our community.



Too Close to Home?

Living with "drill baby" on Alaska's Kenai Peninsula

By McKibben Jackinsky

Pick up a copy of this new book by local author and Kenai Peninsula resident McKibben Jackinsky for an insightful and personal look at the interactions between the oil and gas industry and local residents on the Kenai Peninsula.

Upcoming Book Signings and Readings:

- August 13 at 3pm at the Kenai Library
- August 26 from 3pm to 5pm at Already Read Books in Kenai
- September 17 at 3pm at the Soldotna Library
- September 21-24 at the Alaska Historical Society in Juneau



Join Cook Inletkeeper in Ninilchik to celebrate and take action to protect our amazing salmon resources.

August 5-7, 2016

Buy tickets today at:

www.salmonfestalaska.org

Fracking: Time for Alternatives

Continued from page 1



Photo: Ground Truth Trekking

Witnessing a tidal bore in Turnagain Arm makes you wonder, what might investments in alternative energy exploration be achieving for Alaska if all our state eggs were not in the oil and gas basket.

perforations and stimulations, including fracking, have been around in Cook Inlet and on the North Slope since production began. But as technology changes, the prospects for more fracking in Alaska are increasing. In response, the Alaska Oil & Gas Conservation Commission—the agency responsible for down-hole aspects of oil and gas operations—proposed new rules on fracking in 2013. The rules started out strong, but after three revisions, industry opposition eventually eroded some of the better protections. Inletkeeper joined a coalition of groups and submitted comments in April and August 2013, and sent

out action alerts and provided information to the public. While the new rules are better than most states (e.g., they require pre-fracking water testing, and the disclosure of fracking fluid constituents online), they still give the state discretion to require post-fracking water testing to see if contamination has occurred.

Now, BlueCrest Energy has proposed a fracking program at its Cosmopolitan Unit north of Anchor Point. The fracking target is about a mile and half deep, and over two miles offshore, so there's little risk to drinking or surface waters. And BlueCrest plans to dispose of its fracking fluid wastewater in a regulated Class II disposal well on the Upper Peninsula. The BlueCrest fracking project has attracted considerable attention, but from Inletkeeper's perspective, the greatest problems posed by more oil development don't involve fracking in deep, offshore formations. Rather, the fact there's zero production tax on Cook Inlet oil, on top of massive tax credits, means we're almost giving away our publicly-owned resource. Furthermore, Inletkeeper sees climate change as the greatest threat to our people and planet, and we believe all oil and gas development has to stop so we can transition to a post-carbon economy around renewable energy.

On May 17, Inletkeeper hosted a panel discussion to help citizens get more information about proposed fracking operations around Cook Inlet; and we've posted the panel video on Youtube. While there are currently no obvious legal handholds to directly challenge deep, offshore fracking operations, Inletkeeper will continue to press for alternatives to massive climate change, social and economic impacts from continued fossil fuel production. 

Thermal Landscape of the Little Susitna River Salmon Habitat

Every summer we set out to deepen our understanding of how salmon streams are responding to our changing climate. This summer we expanded our field work into the Little Susitna River in the Mat-Su basin. This clear-water system supports important Chinook and Coho fisheries and drains a diverse landscape of high elevation tributaries coming out of Hatcher Pass and the Talkeetna Mountains, growing residential development north of Wasilla and through Houston, and lake- and wetland-rich lowlands as the river wends its way to Cook Inlet. With funding through the Mat-Su Basin Salmon Habitat Partnership, we are working with partners to use the data collected from our long-term monitoring efforts to model current and future stream temperatures across the whole Mat-Su basin. To do this we need more intensive data in one watershed to help us understand smaller-scale thermal variability. So in May, we headed to the field with researchers from UAA and UAF and deployed temperature data loggers at 20 new sites in the Little Su and its tributaries. We anticipate that this very warm summer will result in a variety of responses in stream temperatures. Our goal is to understand how the diverse landscape influences these responses and how that



Project Partners Dan Bogan with UAA (on left) and Jeff Falke with UAF at a new temperature monitoring site on the Little Susitna River.

all gets integrated into the temperature of the main channel of the Little Susitna that our adult salmon are migrating through and spawning in each summer. Besides all the fun of field work, this effort to understand and anticipate the effects of warming on Alaska's salmon populations is critical for guiding decisions regarding management and habitat conservation. 

