

INLETKEEPER

PROTECTING THE COOK INLET WATERSHED & THE LIFE IT SUSTAINS



SCIENCE, ACTION, *Resilience*

Alaska is a place where your voice, your actions, and your community truly matter. At Cook Inletkeeper, we believe science must lead the way in shaping the future of our watershed. Facts—not corporate interests and short term profits—should guide decisions about our clean water, fisheries, and communities. Your support ensures that science remains a force in Alaska's future, that polluters are held accountable, and that informed voices are in the room when it matters most.

Now is the time to act. Your donation fuels the fight to protect Cook Inlet | Tikahtnu, elevating the research, advocacy, and community action to hold strong against industry pressure. **Donate today at inletkeeper.org/give** and help keep science at the forefront of Alaska's future. With you by our side, we will continue to defend Cook Inlet for generations to come.



The West Su Woe *by Loren Barrett*

Alaska has seen its share of large-scale infrastructure projects, but the West Susitna Access Road raises significant environmental and financial concerns that we must watch closely. While presented as a public investment, this road is nothing more than a taxpayer-funded giveaway to foreign mining companies, jeopardizing salmon habitat, wildlife corridors, and Alaskans' way of life—all at the expense of public funds that are desperately needed to support our existing infrastructure, our schools and our social services.

If built, the road would carve a 100+ mile industrial corridor into the heart of the roadless region west of the Susitna River. The proposed West Susitna Access Road would be an industrial corridor crossing 182 salmon streams, fragmenting intact wilderness relied on for hunting, fishing, tourism, and recreation. The project paves the way for large-scale foreign gold and coal mining operations, prioritizing outside corporate interests over Alaskan communities.

The Alaska Industrial Development and Export Authority (AIDEA) is a public corporation within the Alaska Department of Commerce, Community, and Economic Development. Its mission is to provide financing that expands Alaska's economy and creates jobs. While a great idea in concept, AIDEA has operated with incredibly little public or legislative oversight, and their track record speaks for itself. From the never-used Mat-Su ferry to the failed Knik Arm Bridge, the agency has cost Alaskans \$10 billion while failing to create economic growth or jobs.

Now, AIDEA is doubling down on yet another flawed venture with the West Susitna Access Road—despite the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) having twice rejected its funding approach for failing to meet public interest criteria. Unlike other public agencies, AIDEA maintains an unchecked slush fund, diverting resources into politically driven schemes instead of returning unspent money to the general fund. The Senate Finance Committee must hold AIDEA to the same fiscal responsibility standards as other agencies and dissolve this slush fund.

It's time for the Alaska Legislature to hold AIDEA accountable. The Finance Committee must scrutinize its budget, restrict its ability to mismanage public funds, and ensure that state resources serve Alaskans—not foreign mining interests. Right now, school districts face closures, critical infrastructure projects remain unfinished, and rural communities struggle to maintain existing roads. Prioritizing a road that benefits foreign mining for non-essential minerals at the detriment of salmon and local communities is an insult to Alaska's future.

We encourage our members to engage in this discussion by contacting their legislators. Ensuring that public funds are used effectively is a shared responsibility, and legislative oversight is integral to maintaining accountability in state investments. An industrial road will cause irreversible harm to salmon waterways, wetlands, and critical fish and wildlife habitats. Following AIDEA's budget process and advocating for responsible financial decisions will help shape the future of public infrastructure and economic development in Alaska.



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. Our headquarters is in Homer and our Community Action Studio is in Soldotna.

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Central Peninsula's New Local Solution: Protecting Salmon Habitat for Future Generations

Over the past 25 years, under the leadership of Sue Mauger, Inletkeeper's stream temperature monitoring network has shown that salmon stream temperatures in the Cook Inlet | Tikahtnu watershed often reach temperatures that can negatively stress salmon during all life stages, including egg incubation, fry development, and adult migration. Rising air temperatures caused by climate change are significantly contributing to higher salmon stream temperatures. Additionally, the Kenai Peninsula Fish Habitat Partnership's 2022 freshwater conservation plan acknowledged that our region is defined by relative ease of access and abundant wild fish populations. However, changing fish habitats and populations continue to present challenges for those pursuing sustainable management, and the growing complexity of threats demands **creative solutions**.

Implementing solutions locally is one of the most direct ways to effectively address climate change. The Central Peninsula's locally chosen solutions since 2019 include:

- **Community Compost** diverted over 60,000lbs of food waste from the landfill to local livestock and earned a \$128,000 USDA grant to extend the pilot effort.
- **Solarize the Kenai** allowed neighbors to use their collective buying power to save on their electrical bills and added over 845 kW of new solar capacity to 142 households and businesses.
- **Project ReTree** planted over 3,000 trees in the wake of the spruce beetle outbreak — to restore and enhance tree cover in neighborhood public spaces.

After five years of implementing local solutions, Inletkeeper's newest community-led project focuses on improving salmon habitat in the Central Peninsula. Earlier this year, we gathered for our first meeting with the public and local experts to brainstorm solutions for salmon habitat in the Central Peninsula. There were many great ideas and various types of actions and strategies at all levels of engagement. The results from the brainstorming session fell mainly into three categories: Education and Awareness, Conservation and Restoration, and Local Government and Policy Engagement. A handful of dedicated salmon champions volunteered to conduct further research on the most popular ideas and presented the projects at the March Salmon Habitat Solutions meeting. To get involved with decision-makers and citizens to implement the chosen Salmon Solution, contact david@inletkeeper.org

We would like to give special thanks to our expert panelists, Syverine Bentz and Katherine Schake from the Kachemak Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve, and Ben Meyer from the Kenai Watershed Forum, for sharing their expertise in salmon science and habitat.



The High Cost of HEA's Lost Time

Complacent leadership at Homer Electric Association (HEA) is steering us toward a costly and stagnant path. This month's utility elections offer a unique opportunity as member-owners to make a big difference in the future of our local energy system.

From now until April 2026, HEA will rely on a gas supply contract with ENSTAR, which not only lacks a confirmed fuel source but imposes no penalties if gas isn't delivered. Even the Regulatory Commission of Alaska (RCA) had dissenting voices, warning that all ENSTAR ratepayers will bear the cost of expensive spot market gas. HEA must now explain the risks to members and submit a contingency plan for potential power outages.

Despite the long-foreseen gas crisis, the sources of our power have barely shifted in 30 years. HEA still depends on natural gas for 86% of its power. The only major renewable additions since the 1990s came from state-led expansions of the Bradley Lake hydroelectric plant. In 2022, HEA did add a battery system, which reduces gas use for backup power, but a battery doesn't generate electricity. When it comes to how we get our power, the HEA board majority has largely decided not to decide.

In December 2023, the board voted 6-3 to abandon its only measurable clean energy commitment—a goal of 50% renewables by 2025. While that target was ambitious, dropping it entirely signals an alarming lack of direction. In the absence of a public goal, HEA's decisions have been driven by a 2022–2025 strategic plan drafted by the board in closed sessions. The only public information is a vague trifold brochure, in stark contrast to Chugach Electric's 48-page Integrated Resource Plan detailing new energy projects.

Two board incumbents—Wayne Ogle and HEA president Dan Furlong—voted to scrap the renewable goal and are now up for re-election. Erin McKittrick, also up for reelection, notably opposed the rollback. Ogle insists HEA is “on the right track,” begging the question, is a utility on the right track when it's forced to plan for scheduled power outages due to an unreliable fuel supply? Whatever you call it, that's the track we're on.

HEA plans to reduce gas use by 7% in 2028 by upgrading an aging turbine—necessary maintenance but hardly forward-thinking. Real progress demands stronger leadership, including support for stalled projects like the Puppy Dog Lake solar farm, which could supply 12% of HEA's power if HEA took an active role as an investor, not just a customer.

Meanwhile, HEA's wind energy efforts remain sluggish. It only began collecting wind data in late 2024—after sitting on an \$833 million state grant since 2022—delaying a potential 30-megawatt wind farm on the Kenai Peninsula. Rising labor and equipment costs won't reverse, and HEA is paying a steep price for lost time.

HEA members deserve a board willing to make bold decisions and invest in a resilient energy future. Your vote will determine the decision makers on this key infrastructure.

Important

UTILITY ELECTION DATES & CLEAN ENERGY CANDIDATES

The annual electric co-op elections are a powerful chance for everybody who pays an electric bill to take action for clean and sustainable local energy. Here are the candidates running for a better energy future and the dates for voting:

HOMER ELECTRIC ASSOCIATION

CLEAN ENERGY CANDIDATES



District 1 • Kenai and Nikiski
Patrick Parker



District 2 • Soldotna and Sterling
Mitch Michaud



District 3 • South of Kasilof River
Erin McKittrick

ELECTION DATES

- Ballots available online: March 28
- Online and mail-in ballots due: April 30
- In-person voting and Annual Meeting: May 1

MATANUSKA ELECTRIC ASSOCIATION

CLEAN ENERGY CANDIDATES



Matanuska District • Mark Masteller

ELECTION DATES

- Ballots by mail: Early April
- Online and mail-in ballots due: April 28
- Annual Meeting: April 29

CHUGACH ELECTRIC ASSOCIATION

CLEAN ENERGY CANDIDATES



At large: Katherine Jernstrom

ELECTION DATES

- Voting will begin in late April
- Annual Meeting: May 30





A Good Run — Pushing Against the Current with Salmon Science

by Sue Mauger

I arrived on the shores of Cook Inlet 25 years ago. My first impression of Tikahtnu and its watershed was that it was a place of awe-inspiring natural beauty and wildness, but with significant community concern about its future. This impression still rings true all these years later.

My early memories in the watershed include catching wild king salmon in Kachemak Bay and the Kenai River, seeing the bore tide and beluga whales along Turnagain Arm, and hiking in Denali National Park on a blue sky day. The giddy bustle of fishing and tourism-based small businesses on the Homer Spit was intoxicating. I was fresh with anticipation of a new job. I had been hired by Cook Inletkeeper to take on a water quality monitoring project to assess if the four million acres of beetle-killed spruce forest on the lower Kenai Peninsula was negatively impacting local salmon streams. Clearly not all was perfect in my newfound paradise.

As a freshwater ecologist, I was well trained to take on the challenge of unraveling the clues of forest and river health. I was less prepared to engage in the complex policies and politics of salmon in Alaska. Having moved up from Oregon, I was well aware of human conflicts associated with salmon recovery and the myriad of poor choices that result in habitat destruction, migration-blocking dams, over harvest, and a reliance on hatcheries. But I was naïve about the unrelenting challenge of preventing these same mistakes — and a slew of new ones — from taking down Alaska's healthy wild salmon populations.

New federal challenges are stacking up quickly: removal of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), stalling progress on the transition to renewable energy, fast tracking permitting for "critical mineral" mining, and hacking away at the trust and soul of the federal workforce.

At the state-level, we've been here before. Dismantling environmental protections is a well-used tactic for the drill-baby-drill crowd. From the voluntary elimination of its Coastal Zone Management Program to the





expansion of mixing zones in state waters, thus helping industry dilute more pollution, Alaska has a confusing relationship with clean water and healthy salmon habitat.

This current federal assault, however, is much more dangerous. It leaves Alaskans with limited pathways for a future with thriving salmon populations.

Although I have confidence that Alaskans — especially Inletkeeper supporters — will fight back against state and federal actions when there are direct threats to specific salmon systems and fisheries, I have less confidence that Alaskans and Alaska will thrive after the abrupt about-face on climate-related policies. Despite the current Administration's opinion that addressing climate change is bad for consumers and thus needs to stop, the window is closing on actions that will change our trajectory away from the worst-case scenarios for life as we enjoy it now. Allowing the oil & gas industries another four-year grace period is unconscionable.

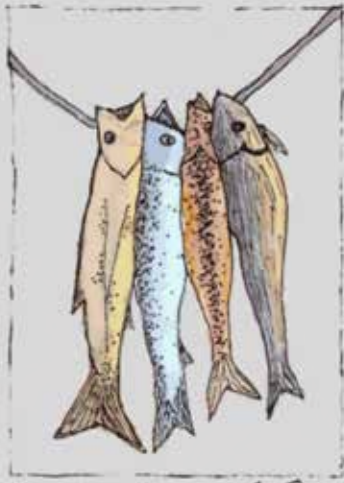
Finally, I need to tip my hat to the federal and state employees, scientists, Tribal and community-based groups I've been lucky enough to work with over the years. Whether it was out in the field in waders, discussing temperature monitoring protocols around a table, or zooming in to share research results and ideas, I have great admiration for the Alaskans who chose careers of service or collaborated on federal opportunities to work on salmon conservation issues together. You are all part of the critical workforce that makes Alaska a great place to live and work.

It feels like an odd time for me to step down voluntarily from a job I've loved, but perhaps the time is just right as a new batch of scientists — whether fresh out of school or recently let go — are available to serve in the increasingly important nongovernmental sector. When the musky dust settles, and critical funding streams begin to flow again, Inletkeeper will continue to set its science priorities to best meet current community concerns.

Fortunately, Cook Inlet | Tikahatnu still retains its wildness and beauty thanks to people like you who still believe in its thriving future. After all these years, my support for Inletkeeper — its board, staff, and mission — remains strong. I hope yours will too.



SOUL FOOD



TREASURES GREATER THAN GOLD.

Art from Mother Kuskokwim



The Next Rush For Gold: Why Risk Critical Habitat For a Non-Critical Mineral?

It doesn't take deep critical thinking to understand that the answer to this question boils down to corporate greed. Gold, plain and simple, does not deliver a public benefit that justifies the cost of degrading our healthy wild foods, clean air and water for its extraction.

The value of gold is teetering around an all-time high and mining corporations worldwide are looking at these Alaskan prospects with a renewed hunger. As proposed gold projects like the Johnson Tract Mine or Donlin Gold attract investors — advocates for clean water and healthy habitat must arm themselves with a deeper understanding of the tradeoffs Alaskans face if we open the door for another gold rush. Outside of our echo-chamber we hear these questions about gold come up over and over again. *Let's dig in:*

Can gold mining fill our deficit gap? No, Alaska's deficit has grown from our dependence on a steadily declining oil and gas industry. Royalties reaped from metal mining generate a fraction of the tax income we receive from oil and gas production. A 2021 report on the mining industry's role in the Alaskan economy found that between 2009–2014, oil and gas revenue was 60 times higher than metal mining. For mining dollars to match our oil and gas revenue stream, 300 new large-scale mines would need to be developed. Putting aside ecological and public health concerns, this level of industrialization is impractical.

The report highlighted another economic fallacy regarding mining jobs rhetoric. While mining provides some temporary local employment, most specialized workers are hired from out of state, taking home large paychecks for which we receive no income tax. We should not trade regenerative economies provided by healthy ecosystems for a mining industry's unlikely promise of stimulating local or state economies.

But don't we need gold for electronics? Yes, but we don't need to mine for it. Only 8% of the global gold demand is used in technology. The majority of new gold becomes jewelry or is stored in vaults underground as a form of investment.

At its current production scale, the recycled market supplies 25% of the annual demand for gold. That's 100% of the gold needed for consumer electronics, semiconductors, and dental implants and 45% of the demand for jewelry. Recycled gold generates only 0.33% of the greenhouse gas emissions and consumes 0.26% of the water as gold produced at a mine. This industry has room to grow and its significantly lesser impact on local watersheds warrants investment in this growth.

Won't our mining laws protect us from the toxic parts of mining? Despite claims that *we do it best*, Alaska's mining regulations fall short of the standards other mining states like Nevada, Minnesota, and Arizona have long had in place. The recent Alaska Hardrock Mining Policy Report compares the social, economic, and environmental mining policies of five mining states with those of Alaska. The report found that our state would need to make significant regulatory improvements to meet the *gold standard* and catch up with our state counterparts who better protect their resources, lands, waters, wildlife, and people. The irony is that while allowing mining corporations to cut corners on safeguards, our royalties and tax structures enable these corporations to compensate Alaska **less** for our mineral resources than other states.

As mining corporations lobby to unearth their cash crops, we will keep repeating **you can't eat gold**. It won't fix our economy, recycled markets supply what we need for electronics, and our laws will not protect us from the downstream flow of toxins unearthed for its extraction. Be it king, crab or clams, Alaskans already know the heartbreak of losing a beloved fishery. Protecting what we have left so that future generations can build a life nourished by our lands and waters is a gift far more precious than gold.



Just When We Thought We Were Out, They Pull Us Back In

Looking at our energy future, many Alaskans get double vision: in one eye they see the AKLNG (Alaska Liquefied Natural Gas) project, a state proposal for an 800 mile pipeline from North Slope gas fields to Nikiski. As Cook Inlet gas production declines and costs rise, the Alaska Gasline Development Corporation continues its 10-year run of any-day-now promises for bringing North Slope gas to the rest of the state at a cost less than Cook Inlet gas today. All it would take is \$44 billion. The other eye is clearer: it shows a future where no megaproject is coming to solve our energy problems. Voices shout in one ear that AKLNG is inevitable. Voices in the other ear say it's futile. Both sides have a lot of charts and graphs. Is it any wonder that our leaders are paralyzed in this urgent moment of energy decisions?

Inletkeeper is not confused about AKLNG's feasibility. The project is a bad idea, and we're among the many who've spilled a lot of ink saying so. Late last year we were part of a coalition of Alaskan nonprofits that helped fund, commission, and edit a report by veteran business reporter Stan Jones called Alaska's Pointless Pipe Dream: It's time to stop burning money on the North Slope Gasline.

You can read the report here: www.bit.ly/AKLNGpdf

Since we released this report, President Trump has adopted AKLNG as a fixture of his "energy dominance" rap, with the bogus claim that South Korea and Japan are entering partnerships for the project "with investments of trillions of dollars each."

What's true is that diplomats and officials from several Asian countries whom Trump is threatening with tariffs have made guarded "maybe" statements about AKLNG. The agencies and private companies that would put their money and reputations on the line for AKLNG haven't done so. The bad economics are still bad. Nothing has changed except for Trump's naked willingness to use coercive policy against American allies for the benefit of friends in the fossil fuel industry. A South Korean business columnist compared talking with Trump about AKLNG to a meeting with Don Corleone.

It wouldn't be surprising if our threatened Asian allies decided to study the feasibility of AKLNG. It wouldn't be surprising if their studies took... say, around four years and then were quietly forgotten, like AKLNG's past letters of interest and memoranda of understanding.

The state money wasted has been significant, but worse might be the way it's distorted Alaska's foresight regarding our energy needs and options. If we devoted half the attention and resources that have gone to AKLNG to planning and building renewables, we'd make a significant dent in our gas reliance. It's time to stop legitimizing this bogus solution to our real energy problems.



PEBBLE MINE *Update*

Northern Dynasty Minerals has paused its lawsuit against the EPA for 90 days, allowing the new administration time to review the case. While the EPA's 2023 decision blocking the mine remains in place, this pause signals renewed uncertainty. While Dunleavy celebrated Executive Orders aimed at Alaskan resource exploitation, stating that he "see a path forward on discussions on Pebble," Inletkeeper remains optimistic that Bristol Bay protections will hold. However, we are again prepared to battle to ensure Pebble Mine does not move forward.





ELECTRONICS RECYCLING

Electronics Recycling: A Sustainable Alternative to Mining

For the 20th consecutive year, Cook Inletkeeper is proud to lead and host the annual Electronics Recycling Event. Our commitment to this event goes beyond keeping harmful electronic waste out of landfills; it also recognizes the immense value of the metals inside these devices—metals that should be recycled and reintegrated into the economy. Since the launch of our annual event Inletkeeper and partners have expanded programming to cover e-waste removal in Homer, Soldotna, Nanwalek, Port Graham, Seldovia, Ninilchik, and Seward and have collectively diverted 646,681 lbs. of electronic waste from local landfills.

To further support the creation of a circular supply chain, SB61 is currently moving through the Alaska State Legislature. This bill emphasizes the importance of recycling electronic devices, ensuring valuable resources stay in circulation while reducing environmental impact. It also holds electronics manufacturers accountable for the waste they create. Requiring electronic manufacturers to recycle their products through businesses or organizations in the state will drive funding and economic growth for local industries. This approach strengthens Alaska's recycling infrastructure and drives funding and economic growth for local industries. By ensuring companies recover valuable metals instead of relying on harmful mining practices, SB61 paves the way for a more sustainable future.

Electronics recycling is a clear, sustainable solution that benefits both the environment and the economy. The metals found in electronics, such as gold, copper, cobalt, and lithium, are valuable resources that should be recovered. If they're worth mining, they're certainly worth recycling. By recovering these metals, we reduce the need for destructive mining, which harms ecosystems and communities.

At Inletkeeper, we remain dedicated to preventing electronics from ending up in landfills. We're grateful for the support of our sponsors, whose financial contributions and in-kind donations make this community-driven event possible—special thanks to Weaver Brothers and Tote for supporting these events. Together, we continue to offer a safe, responsible way for Alaskans to recycle their old electronics, diverting tons of waste from landfills and giving precious metals a second life.

Thank you to our event partners: ReGroup in Soldotna, Sustainable Seward, the Kenai Peninsula Borough, Ninilchik Health and Wellness Center, Seldovia Village Tribe, Port Graham Village Council, and Nanwalek IRA.



Soldotna

10am - 3pm
Saturday, May 3
Central Peninsula Landfill

Homer

10am - 2pm
Saturday, May 3
Spenard Builders Supply

Ninilchik

Drop Off
April 30 to May 13
Ninilchik Health and Wellness Club

Seward

9am - 3pm
Saturday, May 10
Seward Transfer Facility



Dates and locations for Seldovia, Nanwalek, and Port Graham will be announced soon. Check www.inletkeeper.org/recycling for more details