

The Quiet Times

The Alaska Quiet Rights Coalition
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1998 Quiet Times

This newsletter is the second in a series planned by the Alaska Quiet Rights Coalition (AQRC) for 1998. This issue is focused on aircraft noise. The next publication will discuss watercraft noise.

Each newsletter has news on natural quiet from around the state. Please submit news from your locale!

Each newsletter also contains a supplement, carefully researched and meant to be accurate. These supplements are designed to be informational and educational, ideas that readers may find useful in staying informed, or putting together public testimony. (See the attached material on aircraft noise.)

If you are interested in participating in research for the watercraft newsletter, contact AQRC. We welcome your contributions.

Sighted In Juneau

There seems to be no end to what the noisy, two-cycle engines can do besides use up fossil fuels, emit noxious gases and make terrible sounds. Now there are gas-powered parachutes. These machines look and sound like an air boat. They become airborne with an air foil or chute. They appear to be a hazard to shore bird nesting as well as yet one more toy that destroys natural quiet.

Our messages are clear. Please make them your messages as well:

- 1) Quiet is a Natural Resource and needs to be treated as such by all governing bodies.**
 - 2) Some areas in Alaska have reached a population density such that multi-use trails aren't working.**
 - 3) The carrying capacity of public lands for various activities needs to be determined prior to any permitting.**
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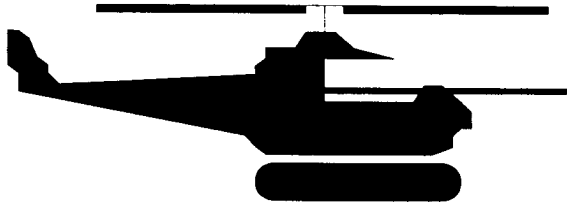
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NEWS FROM AROUND THE STATE



Helicopters in Denali State Park

Alaska-Denali Guiding Inc. has been leading hiking trips in Denali State Park for 14 years. With an attitude towards education and minimum impact we have always limited our groups to 6 clients and 2 guides. Our clients have enjoyed the views of the mountains, the opportunity to discover the beauty of the tundra and the chance to see moose and bear. In 1997 there was an dramatic change in our clients appreciation of the landscape. The airspace had now taken the edge off of their wilderness experience. The new helicopter flight-seeing trips came so low over a group of rafters that the clients commented "we could see everyone's face clearly and their hands waving" as they noisily zoomed by. When the sun shines the increase in scenic flights and the associated noise changes the entire outlook on the trip for our clients seeking an "Alaskan experience". The trips that used to amaze people with the sense of being remote and wild now often get comments about the noise and low aircraft. The most obvious change for us is not that there are scenic flights, it is the number of flights every day.

Alaska-Denali Guiding, Inc. uses fly-in access for almost all our trips and most of our clients enjoy their own

scenic flight at some time during their stay in Alaska. Since we use aircraft and also want to enjoy the peace and quiet of the back country we have thought a lot about ways to alleviate the growing problem. We feel there are some worthwhile efforts that could be made by the air taxis and helicopters to help deal with the conflicts that will only mount as the years go by. The most immediate result would be for the air taxis to use three-bladed props which are known to be quieter and could replace the noisier two-bladed props. Another contributing solution would be to create flight paths that avoid specific areas used for quiet recreation or home sites. Limiting the numbers of overflights of helicopters and fixed wing by some sort of permitting system is a more politically complicated issue. Let's hope that Alaskans have the foresight to find cooperative solutions for these conflicts instead of the heated legal battles that are taking place in the lower 48 over similar problems.

Diane Okonek

Flightseeing Permits in Alaska Over National Parks

There were a total of 90 separate commercial flightseeing permittees in Alaska National Parks and Preserves for 1997. Of these, 28 were in Katmai, 16 in Lake Clark, 14 in Denali and 13 in Wrangell St. Elias.

(source: National Park Service)

Heard at The Lunch Counter

"These guys spend their summers making noise out of gas!!!"



NEWS FROM AROUND THE STATE

Success Story

McCarthy

Although the McCarthy II airstrip was built in the 1960's to accommodate DC-3 airplanes, air traffic in McCarthy has been until recent years fairly quiet, composed of small fixed-wing airplanes. In 1994 the airstrip was drastically expanded to a federal airstrip so that now just the size of the present taxi-way nearly exceeds that of the former airstrip. Since this expansion, larger companies including helicopter services have expressed an interest in operating air tours from the area.

Currently air taxis operating in McCarthy are locally owned, and the pilots are active in the community. Air taxi operators continually work with each other and the community to maintain a peaceful coexistence as much as possible. Air taxi services have even solicited feedback from community members regarding air noise and possible flight patterns that would alleviate any potential problems.

The potential for air noise problems does exist however, if new companies who do not seek a rapport with the community choose to operate out of McCarthy. While flight service expansion may be imminent, local ownership and community involvement as a means of self regulating the air taxi industry seem to be the answer to avoiding an overwhelming encroachment of noise.

Lilly Goodman

AQRC Photo Contest

What does quiet look like? Send in your photos of natural quiet to the AQRC photo contest. Entries to be judged this fall by famous jurors yet to be selected. Send \$5.00 and your photo to the address on the front of the newsletter. Photos will not be returned and may be used by AQRC for promotion. Win a year's membership!

Chugach National Forest Helicopter Lawsuit On Appeal

The Alaska Center for the Environment and the Alaska Wildlife Alliance, represented by the environmental public interest law firm Trustees for Alaska, filed suit last year to challenge the Chugach National Forest's decision to allow commercial helicopters to land in large areas of the western forest.

Plaintiffs contended that an Environmental Assessment (E A) or Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) should have been prepared to analyze this controversial proposal, and that rather than making decisions on an ad hoc basis the issue should be comprehensively evaluated during the forest's plan revision process, which is currently in progress.

Although the court invalidated one of the permits, it failed to hold that an E A or EIS was required and plaintiffs appealed. The appeals court has yet to rule.

Cliff Eames



NEWS FROM AROUND THE STATE

South Denali Summers: Fun In The Air, Misery On The Ground

It wasn't all that long ago that hikers, boaters, and cabin owners in southwestern Denali National and State Parks and the state lands to the south took for granted being able to enjoy the sounds of bird song, running water and the wind in the trees. Now those beautiful natural sounds, once thought to be timeless, are all too often drowned out by the ugly, artificial and annoying sounds of small planes and helicopters taking tourists on flight seeing trips to the Ruth Glacier. Cabin owners in the area have counted up to 60 overflights a day, the duration of each disturbance being anywhere from a minute or two to four or five minutes. While flights had been increasing steadily in recent years in any case, the opening of the new 300 bed Princess Lodge at the south end of Denali State Park has accelerated even that rapid rate of increase (and Princess intends to double its capacity). Ironically, and sadly, instead of treasuring the clear sunny days that can be few and far between in south central Alaska, people in the area increasingly hope for rainy, foggy days that will keep flight seeing aircraft grounded.

There has been, however, at least one encouraging development. Several months ago several (but not all) of the Talkeetna air taxi operators agreed to attend a meeting of concerned individuals to discuss the problem and possible solutions (including altering the routes slightly to avoid many of the conflict areas). Whether anything concrete will result is unclear--but at least people are talking. *Cliff Eames*

Forest Service Permits

The United States Forest Service has authorized 19,039 helicopter landings this summer in the Juneau area!

Aircraft Management Plan Environmental Assessment, 1986 (page 16), Grand Canyon National Park

As we look at quiet rights issues here in Alaska it is important to keep in mind the efforts that have already been made in this area and to build on existing case studies where they exist.

The first National Park Service written definition of "natural quiet":
"Natural Quiet is defined to be the absence of man-made sounds. It is considered a natural resource for the purpose of this plan. Natural quiet in this plan is considered in reference to aircraft sound only, not in reference to any other sound. **Natural quiet can be an integral part of a visitor's recreational experience** in the park, whether the visitor seeks enjoyment from the rim or during a hike in a remote location. However, natural quiet is **not a necessary part of the recreational experience of some park visitors and not all visitors are sensitive to aircraft sounds.** Among other phrases concerning the absence of human influences, the 1964 Wilderness Act defines a wilderness experience as including 'outstanding opportunities for solitude.'

For many people, natural quiet is integral to a wilderness experience."



NEWS FROM AROUND THE STATE

Denali National Park

I discovered Denali National Park in the summer of 1989. There I found the essential Alaska wilderness experience. Denali's mix of abundant, watchable wildlife, and awe-inspiring scenic grandeur is unmatched almost anywhere in the state -- perhaps the world. But I discovered Denali offers something more than a feast for the eyes. It offers a feast for the ears -- quiet.

One of my first backcountry adventures in Denali National Park was a three-day looping backpack up the Savage River to its headwaters, and over a pass to the Sanctuary River following it downstream back to the road. This loop traverses many types of habitat and offers excellent chances to encounter moose, caribou, bear, wolves, sheep, and many kinds of birds. Portions of the hike are not easy with the trail becoming easily lost necessitating grueling slogs through willow and dwarf birch. This only added to the sense of achievement and solitude we experienced.

On my first trip to this wonderland of the senses, I was disappointed to discover that the upper Savage valley is beneath one of the flightpaths used by "flightseeing" companies hauling tourists for a once in a lifetime photo of Denali. On sunny days, our hard won silence was occasionally shattered by the lingering drone of a fixed wing airplane. I was surprised at how disappointed, intruded upon, and even angry we felt. We jokingly discussed writing "Go Away" with stones from the river.

My last trip to this area was last summer. It was a farewell. In the ensuing years, I had returned several times, and each time there were more airplanes. Making matters worse, helicopter flightseeing has developed from a fledgling industry to a powerful force in modern Alaskan tourism. A fleet of helicopters now sits just outside the park waiting to ferry those who can afford it over Denali's clawing birch, thickets of willow, and mosquitoes for their photographic experience.

I almost wish I hadn't returned. I longed for the occasional drone of a fixed wing plane that I had first experienced. On this trip, we were assaulted by wave after wave of airplanes and the whup-whup-whup of helicopters that left little time for quiet reflection on sunny days. The helicopters in particular shattered the stillness I had come to love. We reflected that there were far quieter campgrounds along some of Alaska's highways.

What this personal experience has taught me is how much I took silence for granted. Only rarely do we even see quiet marked as a precious commodity.

Yet it is silence that is perhaps most vulnerable of all the characteristics we seek to protect in wilderness. In Denali, and in many other places in Alaska, I have learned that quiet is perhaps the most precious of all the gifts the outdoors has to offer. I long for the day I might return to the still and quiet of the Savage River valley so I can listen to the true essence of wilderness again.

Steve Wells

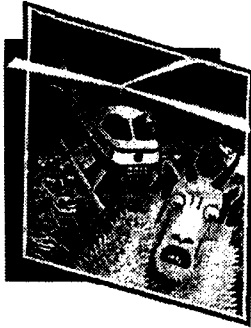


NEWS FROM AROUND THE STATE

Comment: No Comment Necessary

Number of Cruise Ship Passengers

	1997	Projected 1998
<u>Juneau</u>	515,000	570,000
<u>Valdez</u>	75,000	85,000
<u>Cordova</u>	100	9,600
<u>Seward</u>	110 dockings-9% increase over 97	
<u>Anchorage</u>	11 dockings, 0 dockings in 97	



They've Got Our Goat T-Shirt

(See picture of T-Shirt in the Information Packet)

Quantity	Size	Unit Cost	Total
	(S - XXL)	\$15.00	

Name _____

Address _____

City, State Zip _____

Make checks payable to Lynn Canal Conservation
\$5 from each t-shirt sale will be donated to AQRC.

The Alaska Quiet Rights Coalition needs volunteers to enter names and addresses into an existing data base. If you can help please call 566-3524.

Book Review

Candle Sparks ; Adventure and Trials in an Eccentric Alaska Bush Town by Lilly Goodman is a good book to add to your summer reading list. You will recognize the places and maybe the people too in this Alaskan novel. It is a good read and has a message for all of us quiet types as well as for the motorheads. We have to live here together, work here together, and play here together. Polarization between the different groups doesn't accomplish a lot. The author is a supporter of the Alaska Quiet Rights Coalition, but first is a member of a community. We could all benefit from what she has to say. *Libby Hatton*

State Parks Survey

In a State of Alaska Division of Parks survey 73% of the people that responded said they would like to see more non-motorized trails built, 51% said hearing motors or motorized vehicles negatively affects their recreation experience.

AQRC Board Members

Jim Adams, Michael Allwright,
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Nancy Michaelson, Susan Olsen
Bill Sherwonit, Kate Worthington,
Dori McDannold

AQRC thanks Cindy Schraer for her many hours of data base work