

SCOMM

#22:64

Second Quarter Report
1978

Vol. XVII, No. 2

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Will A Law Lock Up Alaska?

Alaskans say development of their state will be stymied if proposed legislation now before Congress should become law.

LITTLE LETTER "d"; NUMERAL "2."
Diminutive as these symbols may seem, they have come to represent one of America's immense dispositions of land and resources. A day of decision for Alaska is at hand. The destiny of The Great Land is being cast in legislation now before Congress.

This year is deadline for parcelling the so-called "Alaska d-2 lands." By December, there may be an Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act, whose geographical, economic, and social consequences could rank with the Homestead Act, the treaties with Mexico, the opening of the West, and the establishment of the National Parks System.

Around Alaska's d-2 lands rages "the epic environmental battle of the century," in the words of Margot Hornblower in a recent issue of *Smithsonian* magazine. Joining in the fray are birdwatchers and bureaucrats, ecologists and sourdoughs, bush pilots and moose hunters, local and national politicians, natives and nonnatives, energy explorers and fur trappers, tourists and loggers, Alaskans and outsiders. Their grand debate: What part of Alaska's lands should be locked up as wilderness and what should be left open for development of natural treasures of enormous potential?

Wise responses require an understanding of three basic Alaskan realities: the state's size, its virginal status; and the economic importance of Alaska's natural resources.

Consider first that Alaska is more

than double the size of Texas. Superimposed upon a map of the Lower 48, Alaska reaches from California to Carolina. Of the 20 highest mountains in the United States, 17 grace Alaska horizons. Alaska extends across five time zones. Alaska contains the country's longest wild rivers, and boasts of half of the nation's seacoast. One Alaska glacier could cover Holland; one existing game refuge in size exceeds Hungary. In Alaska are a million lakes.

Amid such vast expanse, evidence of human activity to date is minimal. Hornblower, in *Smithsonian*, points out that of Alaska's 375 million acres, "about 160,000 acres have been cleared, settled, and altered by man — less than .001 of a percent of the total acreage." Alaska residents number fewer than 450,000, and half live in or near Anchorage. Given a mere 3,000 miles of paved road, Alaskans rely largely upon air and sea transport. Between isolated communities sweep virtually untouched forest and tundra, crag and fjord, lake and river.

Not only is Alaska all but unchanged, much remains unexplored. In particular, little is known of what reposes beneath the surface of Alaska's several massive mountain ranges, its generally shallow offshore continental shelves, and its 14 broad inland basins. With so little information to go on, resource experts can only guess about prospects and reserves of fossil fuels and other minerals.

Twice in the past, Congress has subdivided Alaska on a grand scale. Before

Alaskan statehood, the federal government held title to nearly all the land. As an economic base in 1959, the 49th state was awarded rights to select more than 103 million acres of public lands in Alaska. Rights awarded in the Submerged Lands Act of 1953 added some 45 million more acres of tidelands and coastal shelf.

In 1971, passage of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act gave selection or allotment rights for another 44 million acres to Alaska's 60,000 Eskimos, Aleuts, and Indians. Within certain limitations, the Act directed the Secretary of the Interior, in Section 17(d)(2), to withdraw as much as 80 million acres of unreserved public lands in Alaska for possible designation as new or additions to existing units of the National Park, Forest, Wildlife Refuge and Wild and Scenic River Systems. Under this law, Congress has five years to act upon the Secretary's recommendation concerning the land withdrawals. The five-year period ends December 18, 1978.

Of various measures now before Congress, the most ambitious bill, H.R. 39, would conserve nearly 100 million acres as new or expanded national parks, wildlife refuges, wild and scenic river systems, and various other protectories. If enacted, some observers note, the bill would add so much acreage to existing parklands and preserves that 40 percent of Alaska would be locked up indefinitely. If such a proportion of public land had been withdrawn from the other 49 states, one could image all

the area east of the Mississippi and Missouri rivers today as a national park — unsettled and undeveloped.

For a spectrum of opinion, Exxon USA invited comment from a diversity of interested people — from the halls of Congress to the homes of Anchorage. Here, briefly stated, is what they had to say:

MORRIS K. UDALL:
"I object to the term, 'lockup'..."



Morris K. Udall

Author and cosponsor (with 80 colleagues) of H.R. 39 is Congressman Morris K. Udall, D-Arizona. He has the backing of the Alaska Coalition, including most of the nation's major environmental groups.

They contend that Alaska encompasses the finest frontier left in America; that the best of Alaska belongs to all Americans, not just Alaskans; that expansiveness is a treasure in itself, and as outdoor writer Michael Frome pleads, "There is no such thing as saving too much."

Says Rep. Udall, "In all American history, there has been only one resource decision even close to this one in magnitude. That was Teddy Roosevelt's action some 70 years ago to create the national forests — carve them out of the public land — reserve their watersheds, their trees, their minerals, their scenery for all time, for all the people.

"The opportunity now is ours to set aside at small cost what essentially is a virgin region. Entire ecosystems, entire ranges of wildlife species can be preserved by this legislation.

"This year the American taxpayers will pay \$400 million to protect red wood

trees that were alive at the time of Christ. Think of the magnificent Redwood National Park we might have today, free, if 150 years ago our forefathers had the vision to establish it right the first time around.

"Alaska is as big as the Rocky Mountain states combined. Isn't it a pity that there wasn't foresight 150 years ago to preserve 115 million acres of the Rocky Mountain states as parks and wild areas?"

"I object to the term, 'lockup,' for what my bill will do. Few would disagree that there are certain crown jewels of Alaskan landscape which should receive the highest priority of preservation — the Brooks Range in the Arctic, the Wrangell-St. Elias wilderness on the Gulf of Alaska, the lakes country west of Anchorage. But it's not as if we're locking up the whole state. Rights of selection have been awarded to the state of Alaska and to Alaska's natives amounting to some 150 million acres. That's the most generous land grant in our history. 'Lockup' is a phony term. H.R. 39 will increase Alaska's national parks and wilderness areas — those receiving the highest degree of protection — to less than one-third of the state. And if ever there comes a time of dire national need for Alaska's natural resources, Congress will always have the right to open areas for development."

BILL TOBIN:
"The hell it isn't a lockup!"

Bill Tobin is general manager and former managing editor of the *Anchorage Times*, an Alaska resident for 20 years, and a father whose first of three sons was born in Alaska Territory. Says Tobin:

"I was here when Alaska was a territory, a neglected stepchild of the federal government. I vividly recall when Congress passed the statehood bill by votes of 210 to 166 in the House and 64 to 20 in the Senate. And when Alaskans later voted in a landslide of nearly 6 to 1 to accept the provisions of the act.

"Now, that was as an irrevocable a compact as this nation can make with its citizens. Alaska agreed to take on the responsibility of statehood, to run its own government, to develop its own economy, to become a full-fledged member of the Union, along with New York, Minnesota, and Oregon. In exchange, the government granted Alaska the right to select lands upon which to build an economic base. Bear in mind that because of its great dis-

tance from markets, Alaska's only hope for economic independence has always been the development of its natural resources.

"It didn't work out that way. Because so little was known of potential resources, the new state was promised 25 years to select its lands. But thus far Alaska has been able to select only 70 million acres, with only 21 million patented to the state.

"So today, Congress is renegeing on the deal. It is debating a bill which once again treats Alaska as a ward of Washington, as a fiefdom to be dictated to by the federal government. Alaska has become subject to the special, narrow interests of people who don't live here, who have not invested their lives and futures here, yet whose arrogant claim is that they know what is best for the people of Alaska.

"This is at a time when poverty blights Alaskan society. The plain truth is that Congress now is considering going back on a solemn bargain struck with the people of this state.

"And let's make no mistake about H.R. 39. The hell it isn't a lockup. What the bill doesn't specifically lock away in parks and refuges, you can be certain the bureaucrats will effectively tie up with multiplying rules and regulations.

"Alaskans have this nightmare: The beauty of our state is locked up until children begin freezing in the dark in Chicago. Then, look out! At the insistence of 220 million energy-hungry Americans, here comes the federal government to rip into the energy resources of Alaska, whatever the cost to the land."

Bill Tobin



WILLIAM TOWELL:
"Why prostitute the wilderness philosophy?"



William Towell

Executive Vice President William E. Towell of the American Forestry Association, one of the nation's highly respected foresters, speaks for 80,000 subscribers to *American Forests* magazine.

"The Forest Service," Towell maintains, "is getting the short end of the stick in Alaska. Under proposed legislation only a few million acres would be added to existing national forest acreage. The bulk of the withdrawals will be for national parks, refuges, and wilderness managed areas. Who can be against parks, refuges, and scenic rivers? Certainly not the American Forestry Association!"

"But there are other issues the public should consider. Alaska is economically depressed. Wilderness and parks, and to a certain extent, refuges, rule out most commodity use and commercial development. Multiple use management, as provided by the Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management on lands under their jurisdiction, is what Alaska needs most. We in the Lower 48 may be guilty of looking at our own preferences, not Alaska's needs."

"The greatest fault with d-2 proposals is a departure from traditional park and wilderness management. Elsewhere, with rare exceptions, hunting, mining, and offroad motoring are not permitted in national parks. But in order to establish such parks in Alaska, the proponents of H.R. 39 seem willing to allow



Proposed additions would increase the size of the Tongass National Forest by 1,450,000 acres.



More than 90,000,000 acres of Alaska would be set aside in the areas shown. In this proposal, new National Wildlife Refuge Systems are indicated by the dark green circles; additions to the National Park System and the National Forest System are shown in light green; additions to the National Wild and Scenic River System are shown in blue.

hunting and other activities. Why preclude national park and wilderness philosophy when it is so unnecessary? Multiple use is a long-established concept. Multiple use agencies exist.

"If Congress acts on the basis of logic and needs, Alaska will have more national forests and fewer national parks and wilderness areas."

FRANK IKARD:

"Can America afford the price?"

Frank Ikard, former trial judge and current president of the American Petroleum Institute, contends:

"We in the oil industry and other industries charged with the responsibility of finding and producing the energy and raw materials for a prospering nation, are most concerned about putting aside into park status huge provinces of pub-

lic land before substantial exploration can occur.

has a 'keep out' sign posted for oil, gas, and other mineral exploration.

"Can America afford the price of writing off potential mineral reserves? The price we may pay may be very high, indeed. Because if we maintain the present course, this country soon will be importing more than half of its oil requirements. What we import increasingly is coming from the Middle East and Africa, two of the most politically unstable places in the world. Each day we delay reducing our dependence on foreign oil heightens the danger of severe economic consequences here at home.

"Concern for the environment is deeply ingrained within oil industry operations. Contrary to the emotional fears expressed by poorly informed preservationists, modern technology al-



Frank Ikard

lowers petroleum exploration to occur with very little adverse impact upon the land. If there are more Prudhoe Bay oilfields in Alaska, we ought to know it. If not, we ought to know that, too, before slamming shut the door."

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JAY HAMMOND:

"... oil barrel for America, national park for the world."

Himself a former commercial fisherman, guide, fur trapper, and bush pilot, Republican Governor Jay S. Hammond was elected on a strong conservationist platform. For several years he has proposed a system of cooperative management of lands as ecological units, whatever the kind of ownership. He envisions a joint federal-state planning commission with powers to determine



Jay Hammond

the best uses of federal, state, and private holdings in Alaska. Hammond argues:

"America's 220 million other citizens see 450,000 Alaskans as suspect stewards of a great energy wealth, as well as interlopers on America's last wilderness. Our dilemma is that at once we are called upon to be the oil barrel for America and the national park for the world.

"Alaska's situation is unique; it requires a unique approach.

"The weakness of H.R. 39 is that it would crisscross Alaska with a web of artificial and arbitrary boundaries. But fish and wildlife do not respect boundaries. Scenery reaches from mountain top to mountain top. Unknown valuable minerals will not neatly arrange them-

John Shively



selves along lines drawn in Congress. Trees do not necessarily stop abruptly at the edge of a national park.

"What about the lands that will surround these isolated, federal enclaves? What about private land surrounded by parklands? It's imperative that we also manage these land units on a rational and comprehensive cooperative basis. What happens on one portion can dramatically effect, adversely or beneficially, another.

"A commission such as that I propose could look at each resource unit and decide what is best. There could be adequate safeguards. That makes more sense than wrapping chunks of land into protective cocoons permitting no secondary uses.

"I'd make a plea also for just treatment of Alaska as a duly proclaimed state of the Union. Congress must not revoke Alaska's state rights. The federal government shouldn't take away Alaska's right to manage fish and game resources, for example, wherever they exist. And Alaska deserves rapid conveyance of its entitled lands."

JOHN SHIVELY:

"The system of access is cumbersome."

Regarding d-2 lands, who speaks for Alaska's 60,000 native citizens and 18,000 nonresidents? Anyone who tries must first caution that independent thinking remains a cherished tradition among natives in Alaska's villages and cities. Some native groups lobby for resource development; more conservative neighboring villages opt for game refuges. Disagreements abound over wilderness classifications and boundaries.

That said, John Shively, vice president of operations for the native-owned NANA Regional Corporation, observes:

"The bulk of Alaskan natives live in remote rural areas. Hunting is not a romantic, outmoded way of life for them. It's survival. Most of the people obtain part or all of their protein needs through the hunting of sea and land mammals. There is no alternative diet, other than one that might be provided as an extremely costly government welfare program, and there's not much sentiment for that among the natives.

"So certainly an important goal for Alaskan natives has been a means to continue subsistence hunting on d-2 lands. Generally on this point the writers of H.R. 39 have been sympathetic.

"One of the greatest remaining native grievances is that the original claims act of 1971 called for immediate



To the Kenai National Moose Refuge another 280,000 acres would be added.



Additions to the Denali National Park would enlarge it by 3,863,000 acres.



A new Becharof National Wildlife Refuge would be created with 1,000,000 acres.



The proposed Glacier Bay National Park would set aside 588,000 acres.

conveyance of title to native lands. Thus far title has been conveyed to only about 10 percent of the native land selections. It costs the people money not to own their land.

"Another priority (which varies in rank among corporations) is that of access. As currently being proposed, the system of access is cumbersome, maybe unworkable. Native leaders are worried that if their corporation lands are found to contain commercially attractive resources, there may be no practical way of transportation through stringently protected national interest lands.

"These questions are crucial to the wellbeing of Alaskan natives. We've been told to run businesses at a profit, and that's the most difficult thing to do in this country. Meanwhile, for the two-thirds of the natives still tied to the land, income is lower; life expectancy, shorter; housing standards, sub; medical care, limited. What's higher for the Alaskan natives, ironically, is the cost of living."

DON YOUNG:

"Why a wilderness Alaska? Why not Arizona?"

Outspoken critic of H.R. 39 is Alaska's sole member of the House of Representatives, Don Young. He accuses his colleagues of applying a double standard to their own states and to Alaska on environmental legislation.

"Not three members out of 44 on the House subcommittee would support an H.R. 39 type of legislation for their own states. Why a wilderness Alaska? Why not Arizona? The people back home wouldn't stand for it, that's why. In this sense then, voting to lock up Alaska is a politically easy way for a member to gain an environmental record — but at the expense of the people of Alaska and the nation.

"I know that the 148 million acres

Don Young



Tony Motley

promised to the state and natives looks generous, at least on paper. But to date, only 700,000 acres of Alaska have come into private ownership. Twenty years after statehood nearly all Alaska continues to be held by some government entity. The passage of H.R. 39 will circumvent the Alaska Statehood Act, the first time in American history that a Congress has grossly altered such an act.

"But I ask my colleagues to look beyond Alaskan interests — to the economic health of their own districts. Unemployment these days in Minnesota and Ohio and other states can be directly attributed to depletion of resources. America is running short of a lot of things that Alaska has. Everything people use comes from Mother Earth. Food, clothing, shelter, fuel, metals, all come out of the ground.

"True, we should use resources wisely and frugally. But even if Alaska is 4,800 miles from Washington, it is the only large untapped source of the materials vital to all of America. Citizens of this country must question the wisdom of formulating these major national resource policies, in the name of environmental protection, before we even know what we are putting aside."

TONY MOTLEY:

"... the best environmental record in the Union."

If an up-to-date survey by the State Department of Commerce is accurate, nearly 70 percent of adult Alaskans oppose H.R. 39. Moreover, the only segment of the population favoring the d-2 bill are newcomers. The longer people have lived in Alaska, the more they oppose the legislation.

This contention is advanced by a broadly-based Alaskan group of business, real estate, industry, labor, and public service interests called the Committee for the Management of Alaskan Lands (CMAL). Executive secretary of CMAL with headquarters in Washington is Tony Motley, who states:

"The argument that a majority of Alaskans want the H.R. 39 disposition of d-2 lands has no basis in fact.

"And there is considerable opposition to this bill outside of Alaska. Organizations as diverse as the AFL-CIO and the National Chamber of Commerce have taken stands against H.R. 39. They recognize that this legislation will cause direct and indirect loss of jobs, in and out of Alaska, and is not in the best interests of the nation.

"CMAL asks, 'What's the big hurry, anyway?' Some people answer, 'We've got to save Alaska from Alaskans.' Well, it so happens that by far Alaska enjoys the best environmental record in the Union. Alaskans resent propaganda alleging that Alaskans are bent upon despoiling nature. To the contrary, Alaskans by and large have demonstrated an extraordinary willingness to protect natural values.

"CMAL also asks, 'Exactly who will ever see all the parklands and wilderness proposed in this measure? Are we setting aside huge playgrounds for the elite — those relatively few Americans

whose personal recreation requires unpeopled surroundings, and who are rich enough and strong enough and motivated enough to buy all the gear and air transport required for an adventure into a roadless wilderness?

"We insist that Alaska is not in imminent danger of being wrecked. There's plenty of time to protect d-2 lands properly and logically. The issue is not wilderness — but how much, and where?"

PAT KOSINSKI and MARGARET FORTIER:

"Our fate rests with uninformed dreamers."

Pat Kosinski and Margaret Fortier are 30-year friends. That's nearly as long as they have lived in Alaska. They've raised families there, traveled throughout The Great Land, embraced the outdoors as a prime recreation, and witnessed the emergence of the 49th state. In a modest home in an Anchorage suburb they presumed to speak for a majority of their fellow Alaskans.

Says Margaret Fortier:

"In my years as a schoolteacher, I'd go outside and make talks about Alaska. And my listeners then would ask, 'You mean Alaska isn't all Eskimos and igloos and snow and grizzly bears and dog teams?' Regrettably this sort of ignorance continues to prevail today. I just wish we could bring each and every congressman and senator here and show them the cultural, recreational,



Pat Kosinski and Margaret Fortier

and environmental plusses of Alaska. We're here because we wanted to get away from messed up places like New York and St. Louis and Phoenix. Sometimes I think the Lower 48 exhibits a guilt complex expressed as, 'Well, we've fouled our own nests, we've let all this happen to Colorado, so to atone for our sins, let's put Alaska into the deep-freeze.'

Pat Kosinski says:

"We've already got more parkland than any other state. Some of the first state land Alaska selected went into state parks. The rest of the land is still there. It hasn't gone anywhere. It isn't spoiled. Some propagandists would have everybody believe that 450,000

Alaskans own bulldozers and are poised to make an assault at dawn."

Fortier adds:

"Our fate rests with uninformed dreamers. Their unending fantasy is of a realm of wilderness where they imagine some day they will live out the ultimate in a hiking or camping adventure. But is that really what Americans want? More than 2 million people a year go to the Grand Canyon. How many hike 11 miles down to the Colorado River and back? About 300,000 visitors come to Alaska per year, and not many get off the tourist trails. Older people, the very young, the handicapped and most of the able-bodied tourists will never see much of the land being withdrawn as so-called national interests lands."

Kosinski adds:

"On the one hand Washington chides us, 'Why don't you Alaskans become self-sufficient, and pull your own weight along with the other states?' On the other, laws and rules are passed which make economic progress impossible. Our children, and probably their children after them, will be Alaskans — that is, if they can earn a living here."

DON DEDERA

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Don Dederer lives in Del Mar, California. Freelance assignments for many periodicals have taken him to Alaska repeatedly over the past decade.

Around 460,000 acres would be added to the Alaska Maritime National Wildlife Refuge.

