2020 NEWS from the PRESIDENT
by Brian Okonek

During the course of the terrible pandemic sweeping around the world many people have commented on how much quieter their surroundings have become and that they can hear the sounds of nature around them. It is regrettable that it takes a life threatening virus to enhance the natural soundscape. AQRC is continuing to work with public land managers to ensure that natural quiet and the ability to enjoy natural sounds will be protected on public lands.

In January we commented on a request from several helicopter companies to increase the number of helicopter landings on the Spencer and Twenty-Mile Glaciers in the Chugach National Forest. We also sent a letter to the Division of Natural Resources (DNR) expressing our disappointment in how little priority was given to noise produced by helicopter operations when they issued a permit for heliskiing in the Hatcher Pass area.

We also commented on the Montana Creek non-motorized trail in Juneau in favor of continuing to manage it as such and keep it closed to motorized recreation. We signed on with Trustees for Alaska concerning National Park Service (NPS) regulations stemming from a law suit about access on the Nation River by hovercraft that we believe are too broad. More recently, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) is proposing to allow electric bikes on non-motorized trails. AQRC strongly opposes BLM’s proposal and has commented that such trails should not be opened to e-bikes.

Lastly, the noise from the shooting range in the Knik River Public Use Area is very disruptive to anyone desiring to take part in any non-motorized activity in the area. AQRC supports having several consecutive days that the range is closed to accommodate those seeking quiet day activities or an overnight trip to the region.

All these issues are about excessive noise and how it detrimentally affects those in search of muscle powered activity in a natural soundscape and wildlife on public lands.
NOISE and WILDLIFE

by Thom Ely

In 2013 the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) drafted the Ring of Fire Plan (ROF) and proposed alternatives for Federal land within the Haines Borough. In their Northern Block of lands they had previously set aside a Mountain Goat Monitoring and Control Area free of recreational helicopter activity. The ROF preferred alternative failed to address the potential helicopter recreation impacts to the genetically unique species of goats in the area and Lynn Canal Conservation appealed the decision. BLM had to go back and produce a Haines area addendum to the ROF.

The recreational helicopter industry has ample access to most of the BLM managed lands within the Haines Borough. It is extremely important to maintain some helicopter free areas that will never be impacted by these highly invasive and noisy aircraft. The ability of a helicopter to fly and land almost anywhere sets it apart from other machines.

BLM should adopt mitigation measures recommended by the Northern Wild Sheep and Goat Council and the Alaska Department of Fish and Game to protect mountain goats from adverse impacts of helicopter flight-seeing and recreation. The allotted helicopter landings should reflect actual use trends rather than unrealistic industry requests and implied future need.

In 2019 BLM’s Record of Decision on the ROF picked an Alternative that would potentially allow over 11,000 helicopter landings in the Northern Block of the Haines Borough and do away with the Mountain Goat Monitoring and Control Area. Lynn Canal Conservation is currently appealing this decision.

QUIET TRAILS by Will Elliott

The Quiet Rights Coalition has a solution to an emerging problem in our parks. As you know, AQRC advocates on behalf of users who value natural soundscapes and natural quiet in their outdoor recreation. Increasingly, our members have encountered other park users playing music on the trails, with a new generation of portable speakers and smartphones. We view this as an opportunity for education, not an enforcement issue, and therefore a user conflict that can be addressed easily.

It’s no surprise that young people, especially, are bringing portable speakers into the backcountry. Signs at nearly every trailhead proclaim “Make noise!” in the interest of bear safety. Today, with our always-on relationship to technology, young people dutifully follow this advice, cranking up the music on their smartphones as loud as it will go.

The striking thing about this behavior is that it’s illegal in other public spaces. For example, the Anchorage code mandates a $100 fine for the first violation, and $1000 for the third violation, for music that can be heard more than 25 feet away, in the case of car stereos. Music from smartphones and portable speakers is easily heard more than 25 feet away on the trail, partly because smartphones’ internal speakers today can produce up to 80 decibels of sound. That number is no accident; it’s OSHA’s threshold for hearing conservation.

Other park users, from hunters to birdwatchers, have a right to enjoy natural sights and sounds of Alaska without the interference of an external soundtrack. Luckily, one way to address this issue falls in the course of regular trailhead maintenance. When old signage needs to be retired, we suggest that new signs include the following changes. First, “Make noise!” should be replaced with language like “Let bears know you are coming. Talk loudly, especially near brush or streams.” Second, signage should also remind users to “Be considerate. Loud music can disturb wildlife and other users.” These changes respect everyone’s rights to recreate differently.
Become a Part of the ALASKA QUIET RIGHTS COALITION and Help Continue Our Efforts

Memberships & donations are tax deductible. Make checks payable to Alaska Quiet Rights Coalition or use a credit card to pay online at www.quietrights.org. As a supporter you will receive news about our efforts in preserving quiet places on our public lands. Can’t afford a monetary donation, but interested in our mission or would like more information? We’d love to hear from you! Contact president@alaskaquietrights.org

Annual dues: $25.00 Donations: $ _________________

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Quiet Parks International is seeking an Alaska Representative. Our mission is to save quiet for the benefit of all life by awarding Wilderness Quiet Park, Urban Quiet Park, Quiet Trails and Quiet Marine Sanctuary status to qualifying locations. Duties include data gathering and informal discussions for identifying future Quiet Parks in the state of Alaska. This is an unpaid volunteer position. Visit: www.QuietParks.org for more information. If interested, please contact Matt@quietparks.org to schedule an online interview.

2021-2023 AQRC BOARD ELECTIONS

All AQRC board members who are unable to participate in this year’s teleconference Annual Meeting on November 11, 2020, please return this ballot by December 1, 2020 to the return address listed on the front. Thank you!

Vote for four:
Cliff Eames    Yes__ No__    Thom Ely    Yes__ No__
Will Elliott    Yes__ No__    Asta Spurgis    Yes__ No__
CLOSE ENCOUNTERS OF THE WORST KIND?

In an effort to document the conflicts created on public lands by noise from off road vehicles, drones, radios, cell phones, aircraft, guns, and other sources, AQRC would like to hear from you. Your report will help AQRC stay abreast of issues that may need our attention. By documenting the level, nature and effects of noise on Alaska’s public lands, you will be providing valuable help to those who wish to restore quiet and have a fair opportunity to enjoy the sounds of nature. Feel free to email us at board@alaskaquietrights.org or complete this form and mail it to the address listed on the front of this newsletter. Thank you!

Name: ____________________________________________________________

Best way to reach you? Phone, Email, Address? Provide information below.
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________

What is the source of the conflict? ATV, snowmachine, aircraft, watercraft, drones, radio, cell phone use, guns, other? Please list here with a detailed description of the issue and the location. What happened? How did you react? How many people were involved? Is this a recurring issue (if known)? Please feel free to attach additional page(s) as necessary.
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A WORD FROM OUR TREASURER

by Meera Narayanan

I was introduced to Susan Olsen and Libby Hatton in 2010 through Cindy Schraer who also served on the Board of AQRC at that time. AQRC needed a treasurer to keep track of finances, pay the bills, pick up mail, etc. Through the ensuing years, I was lucky to work with several people including Susan, Libby, Brian Okonek, Cliff Eames, Dan Elliott, Dale Bingham and others. Quiet recreation and advocating for quiet recreation were new concepts to me. I learned much through the regular meetings and the letters that AQRC sent out to various agencies regarding issues related to human-powered recreation on public lands. I look forward to many more opportunities for non-motorized recreation in Alaska, thanks to the decades of efforts by this small group of dedicated outdoorsmen and women.

A big thank you to Meera Narayanan for the years of dedication as AQRC’s treasurer and to Asta Spurgis for taking on the role in May 2020. AQRC could not function without volunteers like you.

Brian Okonek, President
PRESIDENT OF AQRC RETIRING

Brian Okonek came to Alaska as a young boy with his parents and sister in 1964. The family took to the trails, the rivers and lakes, the mountains and forests awed by the wild beauty of the state. Brian’s work as a wilderness and mountaineering guide alongside Diane, his wife, gave him the opportunity to explore many remote regions of Alaska. It became apparent how important it was for people from around the world to be able to immerse themselves in landscapes free of mechanized noise.

Brian joined AQRC to help protect Alaska’s natural soundscape. He has served on the Board since 2007 and as President from 2013-2020. The Board of Directors of AQRC extend our most enthusiastic thanks to Brian for his many years of volunteer service advocating for quiet rights. With his retirement, AQRC would like to encourage our members to consider serving or nominating a person to fill Brian’s shoes. They are very large indeed!

AQRC BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Cliff Eames, Acting Director
Will Elliott, Secretary
Asta Spurgis, Treasurer
Dale Bingham
Mike Boylan
Dan Elliott
Thom Ely
Brian Okonek

AQRC ADVOCATES FOR WILDERNESS AND QUIET RECREATION ON THE CHUGACH NATIONAL FOREST

By Cliff Eames

AQRC participated at every phase of the Chugach National Forest’s plan revision process, most recently in writing and in person during their “Objections” procedure (this is like an appeal of the draft Record of Decision, Final Land Management Plan, and FEIS). At 5.4 million acres, the Chugach is the second largest National Forest in the nation, yet it contains not a single acre of congressionally designated Wilderness. AQRC advocated for a larger Wilderness recommendation for the Prince William Sound Wilderness Study Area, and for a recommendation on the Kenai Peninsula as well (the Forest Service made no recommendation for the Kenai). And--critically--we argued that on lands managed as Wilderness recreational snowmachining (which the Service allows) is illegal; that is, that the Wilderness Act is determinative and is not overridden by ANILCA. We were not successful, but continue to monitor the situation.

“Take a walk quiet with Mother Nature. It will nurture your mind, body, and soul.”

Anthony Douglas Williams

Cliff Eames is a founding board member of AQRC.
The Alaska Quiet Rights Coalition is an all-volunteer, non-profit organization dedicated to a fair and balanced allocation of Alaska’s public lands for both non-motorized and motorized use.