

HISTORY OF THE ALASKA QUIET RIGHTS COALITION

In November of 1996 a group of Alaskans met to discuss our common concern with the increasing loss of natural quiet on public lands. Many of our favorite places were being overrun with recreational machines. Noise from flightseeing helicopters and planes in the air, snowmachines and ATVs on land, and jet skis in the water invaded and destroyed our once peaceful experiences. Home owners, cabin owners, small backcountry tourism businesses, wildlife enthusiasts and quiet outdoor recreationists all joined in a common cause: to seek a fair share of public lands for quiet users and to maintain that share for future generations.

We soon became aware that only a small percentage of public lands were protected from noise and available for quiet recreation. We also learned that various surveys showed that a large percentage of both Alaskans and visitors value peace and quiet and want more non-motorized recreational opportunities. A wealth of information was available supporting wildlife needs for natural quiet where natural sounds could be heard. It became clear that state and federal agencies needed education on these issues.

We formed an all volunteer Board of Directors recruited from the Southcentral Alaska area, established a network of volunteer individuals willing to be Regional Contacts from around the state, wrote bylaws, became a 501(c)3 organization, developed statewide member and supporter lists (now numbering about 500), produced a brochure, and proceeded to educate ourselves about noise issues by inviting various agency, land management, and legislative representatives to speak. In recent years we have added board members from other parts of the state and conduct meetings by teleconference.

During the first five years of AQRC activity, with help from an Alaska Conservation Foundation start up grant, we produced educational newsletters including a Snowmachine Information Packet, Air Noise Information Packet, Watercraft Noise Information Packet and the Costs of Tourism Information Packet. In addition we published a study, "ANILCA and Your Right to Quiet."

In 2006, with a grant from ACF, we hired consultants who produced a major publication on "Helicopter Supported Commercial Recreation Activities in Alaska," distributed widely to agencies and legislators. In addition AQRC has compiled state and federal regulations regulating the use of recreational machines on public lands. AQRC is currently in the process of assembling information on public land areas protected for

quiet recreation for the purpose of having generated a GIS map showing areas closed to snowmachines.

Other activities included sponsoring a number of “Day of Listening” events, an exercise designed to make participants more aware of listening to the wild. AQRC also developed a “Conflict Form,” helping quiet recreationists report motorized vehicles in restricted areas. Films emphasizing quiet recreation have been obtained through our Winter Wildlands membership and have had good public attendance in Homer and Talkeetna. Our public annual meetings have varied from inspirational talks and slide shows, to informative presentations by agency heads on current issues, to educational lectures on noise measurement. Our web site contains up to date copies of our current position papers and comment letters. AQRC recently participated in a winter recreation day at BLM’s Campbell Tract and intends to continue to participate in these kinds of public events.

Addressing noise and quiet recreation issues as they occur by attending hearings and writing comment on land use planning efforts has been and is AQRC’s main activity. AQRC has been a successful influence in educating land managers about the need to protect areas for natural quiet. For example, the AQRC Board and our members/ supporters were instrumental in protecting homeowners from an Anchorage to Eagle River snowmachine trail, and a DOT Parks highway “Winter Trails” snowmachine corridor. AQRC members helped to protect some Mat-Su lakes, Palmer Hay Flats, Katchemak Bay, Tenekee Springs, and the Kenai River Special Management Area from various water noise threats. We have supported non-motorized designation for BLM’s Campbell Tract and other BLM administrated lands. Our comment letters have addressed noise concerns from the Gates of the Arctic, to the Copper River, to Haines and Juneau and the terrible recreational flightseeing problems endured by southeast Alaskans.

AQRC was a major player in the various Chugach National Forest Management planning efforts and participated in litigation to protect quiet places in CNF. We have also been and continue to be strong advocates for quiet rights in an ongoing variety of Denali State and National Park issues as well in southcentral Hatcher Pass and Chugach State Park quiet recreation issues .

Largely due to AQRC efforts, natural quiet is now recognized as a natural resource in Chugach National Forest plans, state and national wildlife refuges, BLM plans, national park plans, and some state park areas.

We, the quiet majority of the general public, have been displaced from our rightful share of enjoyment of our public lands. Stories of that displacement are found on our web site. In the most spectacular, wild state in the country, it is difficult and often impossible to find “the stillness that fills me with peace” that Robert Service was able to find in the Yukon in another time. AQRC will continue to be a voice for you, the quiet majority, and for our future generations and wildlife.