



ALASKA QUIET RIGHTS COALITION

P.O. Box 202592 Anchorage, AK 99520 www.alaskaquietrights.org Est. 1996 Non-Profit 92-0166011 Fall 2022

News from the President: RENEWAL!

by Cliff Eames

As the only statewide organization devoted to conserving Alaska's natural soundscape, AQRC has served as advocate and educator, in several contentious issues this past year. We were involved early on, and continue to be involved in (see page 4), challenging the repeal of the jet ski ban in the Kachemak Bay and Fox River Flats Critical Habitat Areas. We signed on to a Lynn Canal Conservation letter to BLM opposing a nearly 10-fold increase in helicopter tourism in the Haines area. We continued to monitor, with the help of the Winter Wildlands Alliance (WWA), implementation of the Chugach National Forest management plan. We formed a network, Quiet Alaska, of 10 organizations that share an interest in natural quiet and natural sounds. And we again hosted the popular WWA backcountry film festival (see page 8).

But AQRC, an all-volunteer organization, is 26 years old. Several of the current board members have served for all or most of those 26 years. And the personal 26th birthdays of a majority of our board members are only a distant memory. Despite the addition of new, younger (or somewhat younger), very good board members, we feel it is time to re-invigorate our organization.

To that end, we held a very successful board retreat in early October. Facilitated by Kevin Dee, who was a huge help, we came up with a condensed, punchier mission statement that limits our work to the effects of unnatural noise on public, but not private, lands; a new list of values; and a vision statement. The retreat also generated several recommendations which were subsequently adopted by the board. They include a decision to employ more positive messaging—to increase our focus on the many positive benefits of natural quiet and natural sounds, and not just the negative impacts of motorized recreation.

The most significant initiative that came out of our retreat is to seek funding for a part-time executive director. While board members would continue to submit well-researched and thought-out comments to agencies on important natural soundscape issues, the director would seek to increase our membership; recruit new, younger board members with new ideas and new energy; raise public awareness of both the importance of protecting natural quiet and natural sounds, and the threats they face; and help us become more effective in protecting the soundscape.

Did I mention membership? This newsletter is our vehicle for a major membership push. If you're already a member, please renew. If you're not, please join. And if you'd like to join our board, we would very much like to hear from you. Our mission to maintain and restore natural sounds and natural quiet on the public lands is as important as ever in our increasingly noisy world—but we won't be successful without your help.

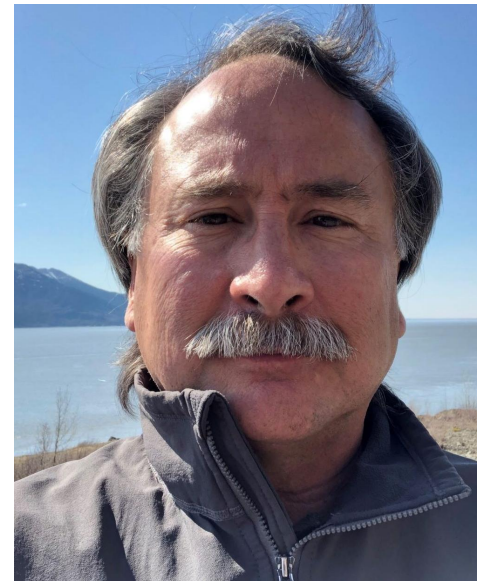
Thank you for your engagement and support.

Meet Our Board Members



Cliff Eames was a founding board member of AQRC 26 years ago and is the current president. He worked in Anchorage as a Vista Volunteer for Trustees for Alaska, and after that for the National Wildlife Federation. He subsequently worked for the Alaska Center for the Environment for nearly 20 years, retiring to Kenny Lake in the spring of 2004. At ACE he devoted a substantial percentage of his time to natural quiet and natural sounds. In addition to AQRC, he has served on the boards of the Alaska Conservation Foundation and the Copper County Alliance. He was the board chair of the latter for a number of years and is still on its board. Cliff received ACF's Olaus Murie Award for Outstanding Professional Contributions in 1988.

Dr. John Morton (*right*) retired from the US Fish and Wildlife Service after 32 years. He has studied the effects of auditory and visual human disturbances on the behavior and energetics of sanderlings, snow geese, American black ducks and Mariana crows. He has monitored and modeled the winter soundscape over the Kenai Wilderness, including the degradation of quietness from snowmachines. John has lived on the Kenai Peninsula for over 20 years and has served on the AQRC board since 2020. He's currently the board vice president.



Brian Okonek (*left*) has sought out Alaska's wilderness on foot, skis and crampons and crossed large regions of the state by dog sled and raft. He guided people from around the world on wilderness trips for 20 years. His own experiences and those of his clients enhanced his appreciation of the treasure, and fragility, of the natural soundscape. Brian has witnessed the loss of areas that were once free of motorized noise. He has been on the AQRC board since 2007 and served as president for many years.

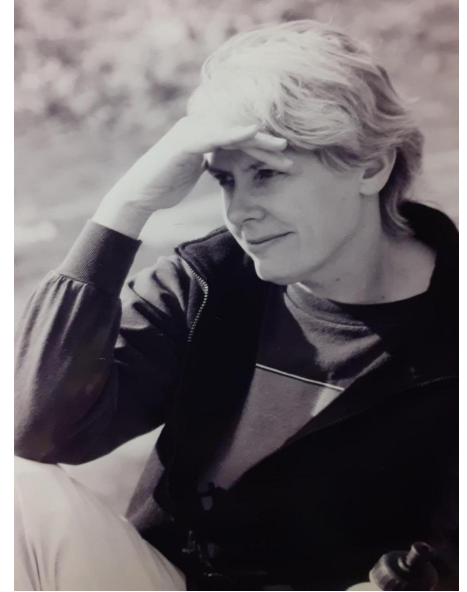
Mike Boylan's 36-year career with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service included serving as Supervisory Park Ranger at Kenai Refuge and Refuge Manager for the Aleutian Islands Unit of Alaska Maritime Refuge. He was Chief of Visitor Services for the National Wildlife Refuge System in Washington, DC before returning as Alaska Refuges' Supervisor to craft conservation strategies protecting iconic landscapes like Arctic, Izembek, Kodiak and Kenai Refuges from oil and gas development, roads and utility corridors, and predator control. Retired since 2013, Mike remains Alaska representative for the National Wildlife Refuge Association and an AQRC board member since 2018.

Meet Our Board Members

Dan Elliott has been a long-time member of AQRC and supporter of the group's goals. He has had a varied career in Alaska having been a commercial fisherman, union construction worker, registered game guide, trapper, remote cabin resident, and husband and father. Of a civic nature, he has belonged to a number of gardening clubs and served on numerous State and Mat-Su Borough Advisory Boards. From his home in Wasilla he enjoys views of the Palmer Hay Flats and Chugach Mountains.

Will Elliott is Visiting Assistant Professor of Writing at Alaska Pacific University in Anchorage. Prior to this, he taught writing, literature, and outdoor studies at the University of Alaska, Southeast, in Juneau, where he also guided bear watching trips in the Kootznoowoo Wilderness and Tongass National Forest.

Asta Spurgis co-founded Friends of Eagle River Nature Center in 1995 and has served as the Executive Director of the Eagle River Nature Center since 2007. Asta enjoys quiet places in the outdoors because they provide greater opportunities for wildlife viewing, birding and getting away from the man-made noises inherent in today's world. She is the treasurer of AQRC and has served on the board since 2018



Eric Schaetzle is originally from the Kenai Peninsula but now lives in Fairbanks where he works within the social services field. He and his family enjoy a wide variety of sports and outdoor activities, including hiking, skiing, swimming, and cycling. Eric maintains an active interest in the intersection between philosophy, social justice, and the challenge of mitigating the effects of climate disruption. Eric joined AQRC in 2022.

AQRC Board of Directors

Cliff Eames, *President*
John Morton, *Vice President*
Will Elliott, *Secretary*
Asta Spurgis, *Treasurer*
Dale Bingham
Mike Boylan
Dan Elliott
Thom Ely
Brian Okonek
Eric Schaetzle

www.alaskaquietrights.org



2023-24 AQRC BOARD ELECTIONS

AQRC members who were unable to participate in this year's teleconference Annual Meeting on November 9, 2022, please return this ballot by December 15, 2022 to the return address listed on the last page. Thank you!

Vote for four:

Cliff Eames Yes___ No___

John Morton Yes___ No___

Will Elliott Yes___ No___

Eric Schaetzle Yes___ No___

AQRC ONE OF THREE PLAINTIFFS IN KACHEMAK BAY AND FOX RIVER FLATS STATE CRITICAL HABITAT AREAS JET SKI LITIGATION

Kachemak Bay and Fox River Flats Critical Habitat Areas, established by the legislature more than 45 years ago, are exactly what they sound like: critical habitat for the Bay's rich fish and wildlife resources. That's why, in 2001, after a substantial literature review, public hearings, and public comments taken over a two-year period, the Alaska Department of Fish and Game prohibited the use of jet skis in the CHAs (other types of water access were unaffected by the ban). Jet skis are small, powerful and highly maneuverable watercraft—some say thrillcraft—that pose unreasonable threats to fish and wildlife.

Fast forward almost 20 years. The Dunleavy administration, responding to requests from jet ski advocates, decides to repeal the prohibition--in spite of those who understood that nothing had changed to make the ban any less important. A sham public comment period followed, and the ban, over the objections of hundreds of advocates for the fish and wildlife in the two CHAs, was repealed.

Wasting little time, several conservation groups came together to challenge the administration's arbitrary decision to repeal the ban. Leading the challenge was Cook Inletkeeper (thanks, Keeper). They were joined by AQRC, Kachemak Bay Conservation Society, and Friends of Kachemak Bay State Park. When all else failed, the first three groups, represented by our excellent attorneys Scott Kendall and Sam Gottstein, filed a lawsuit challenging the decision in state court. That suit is slowly (the default speed for litigation) wending its way through the system.

- **Cliff Eames**



**My heart is tuned to
the quietness that
the stillness of
nature inspires.**

- Hazrat Inayat Khan

Sounds in Nature: Why They Matter to Alaska & How They Are Measured

***The soundscape is simultaneously a physical environment
and a way of perceiving that environment; it is both a world
and a culture constructed to make sense of that world.***

- Emily Thompson, The Soundscape of Modernity, 2002

But we are changing the natural soundscape by introducing machine-generated noise. Did you know that our soundscape now includes anthrophony in addition to biophony (e.g., birds) and geophony (e.g., wind)? Did you know that the Anchorage Museum has been featuring soundscapes sampled throughout Alaska since 2018? Did you know that human-generated noise can stress wildlife, displace them, and even reduce their reproductive fitness?

These were some of the topics discussed during a 3-hour virtual workshop on February 6, 2021 hosted by the Anchorage Museum in partnership with the Alaska Wildlife Alliance, National Park Service, Cooperative Institute for Climate, Ocean and Ecosystem Studies, International Society of Ecoacoustics, and the Alaska Quiet Rights Coalition. Titled “Sounds in Nature: Why they matter to Alaska and how they are measured”, the workshop featured presentations from several experts in different aspects of sound.

Our own Brian Okonek, former AQRC board president, opened the workshop with his seasoned words on the value of quietness in Nature. Dr. Tim Mullet, ecologist at the Kenai Fjords National Park, presented on ecoacoustics theory and soundscape ecology in Alaska. Davyd Betchkal, from the National Park Service’s Natural Sounds and Night Skies Division, discussed ways of measuring sounds. Erin Marbarger talked about her work with students to highlight recorded soundscapes throughout Alaska at the Anchorage Museum. Dr. Manuel Castellote, behavioral ecologist at the University of Washington and NOAA’s Marine Mammal Laboratory, discussed why beluga and killer whales are so sensitive to underwater noise. And Dr. John Morton, AQRC vice president, closed out the workshop with case studies of how human-generated noise affects other wildlife.

The take-home message from this workshop is that human-generated sounds are complex in both their measurement and in their ecological effects. A recording of the workshop and the presentations can be found on the AQRC website:

<https://www.alaskaquietrights.org/soundscape-sounds-in-nature/>.

- John Morton



Philosophical Aspects of Quietness

What can be said about quietness? The Alaska Quiet Rights Coalition certainly isn't the first to have directed its attention to this subject. We've all seen how the world is becoming increasingly full of distractions and disruptions. It's harder to "get away from it all". As someone who grew up watching Looney Tunes, I can still hear Mel Blanc's "Quiet!" The irony isn't lost. We live in the 'Age of Accelerationism' in contrast to the less energy intensive (and slower) patterns that defined life in the not-so-distant past. But acceleration toward what and why, I don't know. It's a schizophrenic existence, and escaping from the hustle and bustle can seem like a small act of rebellion.

How did we get to this point? How have cultural perspectives on the role of quietness, of silence, shaped our changing culture and thought? As A.N. Whitehead noted, "the sort of ideas we attend to, and the sort of ideas which we push into the negligible background, govern our hopes, our fears, our control of behaviour. **As we think, we live.** This is why the assemblage of philosophic ideas is more than a specialist study. It molds civilization." He also added, perhaps as a cautionary note, "the difficulty of philosophy is the expression of what is self-evident. Our understanding outruns the ordinary usage of words". Given how self-evident the value of quietness is to those of us in this organization, we are perhaps doomed from the outset to provide an adequate description!

One may describe how acoustic waves propagate through a medium. And for many people the presence or absence of such features would sufficiently define the opposing qualities of quietness and noise. But this leaves out **how different sounds are interpreted**, how they affect us and other meaning-making members of the environment, and what we think when we hear different sounds. Such higher order effects are impacted by the sensual quality of a place, making its measurement a complex calculation. These acoustic-environmental relationships have been studied by people concerned with biosemiotics or ecosemiotics, which are processes that involve signs and the communication of meaning. Signs can be received by any of our five senses. When we step outside and listen to an environment that is not dominated by human-made sounds (anthrophony), we enter a world rich with meaning to other organisms with whom we share the planet. Terence McKenna underscored this point, saying "Nature is not mute; it is man who is deaf".

According to cultural anthropologist and Indigenous rights activist Eduardo Kohn, author of *How Trees Think*, what we share with nonhuman living creatures is not just our physical bodies, but also that we all live with and through signs. Because we are not the only ones who think, human language is just one kind of sign system. Understanding other forms used by nonhuman living creatures can open up an entire "semiosphere" of meaning where processes form increasingly complex "semiotic webs". Kohn's work with the Runa in Ecuador taught him that forests and the many beings that live in them — animals, plants, and perhaps even spirits — also think, and so "we need to cultivate our attunement to the world." If sounds are part of a semiosphere, then disrupting this web of meaning, through noises that do not communicate meaningful information to others or otherwise prevent normal interactions, can have broader impacts on ecologies. Could this be why quietness is valued across cultures?

Although apparent quietness is the outward manifestation, what is really being selected for is optimization of **experiential quality and wider resonance** with the environmental milieu. Filmmakers also try to achieve a synchronization between film and audience, understanding that a soundtrack can convey too much information and so should strive for just enough. As Iain McGilchrist writes in *The Matter with Things*:

"The imagination thrives on the implicit, and is deadened by the explicit. The explicit is single: the implicit is a coming together of opposites, and requires the simultaneous presence and absence of whatever is being gestured towards. We may become more aware of something if it is partially eclipsed, while a pure manifestation would not have achieved its end. If you are making a film, and wish to evoke the stillness of a warm day in the country, do you leave the soundtrack completely blank? No, you introduce the faint and intermittent buzzing of a fly. In an interior scene of tranquillity, the faint, slow, deep tick-tock of a grandfather clock intensifies both the peace and, as may seem oddly, the sense that time has come to a standstill...Limitation can intensify the sense of infinity."

(continued on next page)

Philosophical Aspects of Quietness (continued from previous page)

The Japanese cultural aesthetic of 間 (ma), means 'betweenness', a gap, space, pause, or the perception of an interval in time or space where dissimilar things can freely co-exist. It is the opposite of empty, and more the place where a dynamic dance can occur. It is the relations between things, the tension between sound and silence, that is of primary importance. The composer John Cage, who studied Zen Buddhism, decided to visit an anechoic chamber. He expected to hear silence but he could still hear the rush of his blood circulating through his body. His realization of the impossibility of silence led to the composition of 4'33" three years later. This has been described as "four minutes and thirty-three seconds of silence", but what it really consists of are the sounds of the environment that the audience hears during its performance.

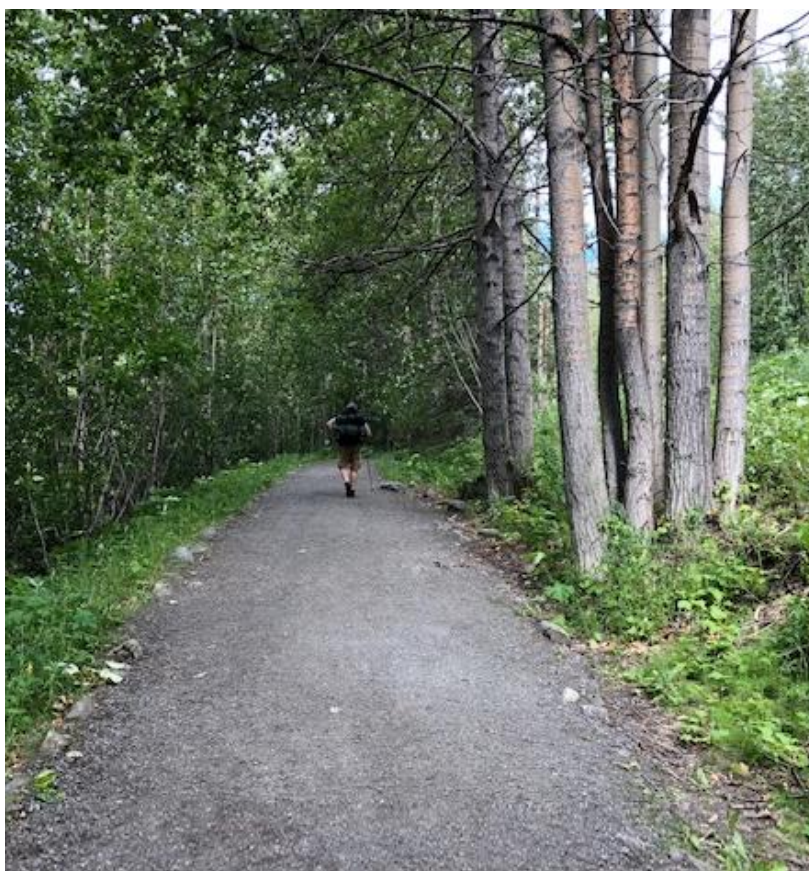
In his book, "A Short History of Chinese Philosophy", Fung Yulan wrote "the combination of Taoism and Buddhism resulted in Ch'anism [Zen], which I should like to call a philosophy of silence. If one understands and realizes the meaning and significance of silence, one gains something of the object of metaphysics... There were Ch'an Masters who used silence to express the idea of Wu or the First Principle. For example, when Hui-chung was to debate with another monk, he simply mounted his chair and remained silent. The other monk then said: "Please propose your thesis so I can argue." Hui-chung replied: "I have already proposed my thesis." The monk asked: "What is it?" Hui-chung said: "I know it is beyond your understanding," and with this left his chair. The thesis Hui-chung proposed was that of silence. Since the First Principle is not something about which anything can be said, the best way to expound it is to remain silent."

Alan Watts, who decades ago provided many Westerners with their first introduction to Eastern philosophy, said "To be silent is not to lose your tongue. On the contrary, it is only through silence that one can discover something new to talk about." There is an acute awareness of a tension that exists between what may be best described as opposites.

Philosophical schools needed a solution to the paradox of describing the indescribable. Hegel held that antinomies appear in all conceptions, and that "every actual thing involves a coexistence of opposed elements. Consequently, to know [or to] comprehend an object is equivalent to being conscious of it as a concrete unity of opposed determinations." And so we oppose noise with quietness.

Applied to the interactions within Eduardo Kohn's semiosphere, it can serve as part of the foundation for a fully relational perspective, one that could eventually lead to a context-sensitive attunement that supports ecological health and well-being. But one thing is certain: cultural values combined with contemporary levels of social stress and our desire for peace and quiet are all urging us to reconsider our relationship with excessive noise.

- **Eric Schaetzle**



**Nature is not mute;
it is man who is deaf.**

-Terence McKenna

Doing Our Part

I get great satisfaction from hearing the natural soundscape. The calls coming from high flying V's of Tundra swans returning in the Spring, the songbirds establishing their nesting territories in the boreal forest, the rustle of a vole hidden in the grass, the splashing of salmon in a shallow stream, a summer breeze shaking the leaves or the rain lightly drumming on the forest floor. I'm sure that you enjoy such sounds and are both relaxed and energized by them. Mechanized noise is muffling the soundscape stripping us of the joys of this resource like polluted air obscures views of majestic peaks and seers the lungs or polluted waters kills a streams fish and makes the water uninviting to enter. At the height of pandemic shutdowns came reports from around the world of people hearing the birds in their neighborhood for the first time. And they liked those songs. Suddenly they realized what they had been missing all along. More and more people are finding out how important the natural soundscape is to them.

AQRC was founded in 1996 by people who realized that Alaska was not immune to losing its' wild soundscape. They could hear the change taking place. Natural sounds overwhelmed by mechanical noise. Articles appear regularly about the stress of noise that today's society puts on humans and how it is affecting our health and well-being. For wildlife noise can reduce their ability to find a mate, defend a territory, evade a predator, locate a meal or conserve energy through a cold spell. The basic functions for their survival.

AQRC has worked tirelessly to protect Alaska's soundscape on public lands and waters for the benefit of people and wildlife. Most agencies that manage lands now recognize the soundscape in their management plans. To this day, however, relatively little public land is actually managed to protect the natural soundscape. Managed in such a way that will provide for people to recreate away from the sounds of motors whether they are hiking, cross country skiing, paddling or bird watching. Managed in way that will protect wildlife from being stressed by noise. These goals are obtainable with public support.

- **Brian Okonek**



Winter Wildlands Alliance Backcountry Film Festival is Back!

Mark your Calendars to stream the films in March 2023 & support AQRC

This popular film festival highlights muscle powered winter sports and activities and conservation and protection of the winter landscape. It has served as a fundraising venue for AQRC for many years. Go to www.winterwildlands.org/backcountry-film-festival/ for more information. Thank you for your support.

Quiet Rights: Natural Soundscapes and Human-Powered Adventure

I'm intrigued by the ways we share stories about Alaska, wilderness, and human-powered adventure. From ski movies to social media, Alaskan wildlands have never been so visible, and the ubiquity of smartphones as a wilderness 'essential' has helped make photography the dominant medium through which we share our experiences. As a photographer and guide, I benefit from this trend. However, I also recognize there's something that photos can't capture. I'm talking about the soundscape, the natural interplay of sounds and silence that helps define what we call wilderness.

Think back to a trip of your own that changed you. What did you see?

Maybe birch trees; open sky; the gold and blue patchwork of sun and shadow on the snow in early spring; the way a valley opens up like the whole world unfolding when you crest a pass and carry on down the other side. Maybe tundra red, hazy in the summer heat, the shocking white of antler shed beside a rock. Alpenglow, incandescent sky, abyssal blue crevasse.

What did you hear?

For many people, the soundscape is a vital part of wilderness experience, a real terrain we explore every bit as intimately and avidly as the physical topography beneath our feet. The so-called "silent sports" of human-powered adventure have a special relationship with natural soundscapes: we listen to the snow to judge the safety of a line, or feel the commitment level deepen as the plane takes off and gives way to silence.

When it comes to issues like land management for outdoor recreation, however, natural soundscapes aren't always valued so highly. Policymakers usually consider the economic dimensions of an issue before cultural and ecological values like sound. For example, a helicopter tour or ATV dealership can quantify its value with a number immediately accessible to policymakers, like jobs created or taxes paid.

Less easy to quantify and thus more crucial to defend are those things, like natural soundscapes, important to us precisely because they exceed our anthropocentric value systems. What a disappointing hell it would be to live in a world entirely of our own making, no broader than the scope of a business plan, trapped forever talking to ourselves. By contrast, natural sounds and silence—the murmurs of a quiet forest, the white noise of a windy ridge—are powerful; they make space to step back from day-to-day distractions and reckon one's place at both the grandest and most intimate scales.

Isn't that why we go into the wild to begin with—for the opportunity to encounter something greater than ourselves?

- **Will Elliott**



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.alaskaquietrights.org. As a supporter you will receive news about our efforts in preserving quiet places on our public lands.

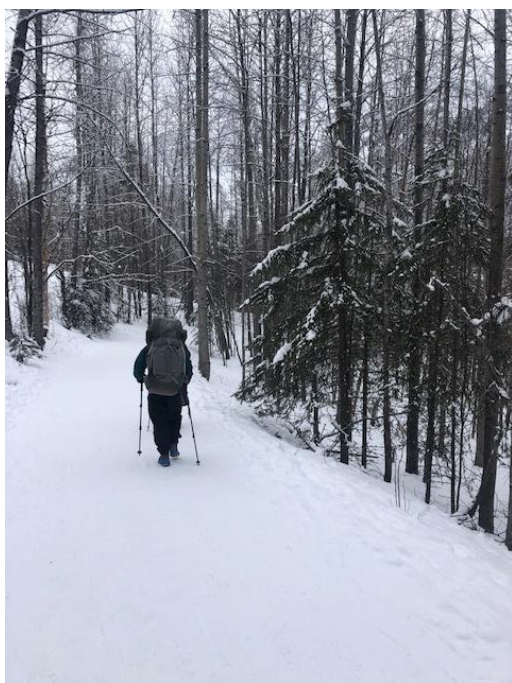
Can't afford a monetary donation, but interested in our mission or would like more information? We'd love to hear from you! Contact president@alaskaquietrights.org

Annual dues: \$25.00 Donations: \$ _____

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Alaska Quiet Rights Coalition
PO Box 202592
Anchorage, AK 99520

RENEW YOUR MEMBERSHIP OR ENCOURAGE A FRIEND TO JOIN AQRC

Despite Alaska's size and expansive wilderness there is a growing awareness of how fragile and finite the wild is. For present and future generations to have the opportunity to experience an unbroken soundscape takes the realization that it a resource in need of advocacy and engagement from the public and planning, management and protection from public land agencies. Protecting the natural soundscape enhances life in the front and backcountry for people and wildlife alike. Please join AQRC and add your voice in favor of Alaska's tremendous natural sounds and quiet spaces. You can renew or become a new member online at

www.alaskaquietrights.org or complete the form above and return to address at left. Thank you!

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.