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Conscientious Resource
Development**

The United States needs a realistic wetlands policy. The United States needs ANWR. We believe the formula for Alaska's economic future can be crafted with legislation opening the coastal plain of ANWR for oil and gas development and a realistic approach to the wetland issues as they affect the state. The formula is at hand and requires action to guarantee Alaska's future success.

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May 1990

Is logging the answer?

Foresters say moose starvation, beetle epidemic could be controlled through forest management

The death of thousands of moose by starvation in the Susitna Valley last winter and the demise of some 3.5 million board feet of timber in Southcentral Alaska from the spruce bark beetle epidemic is not a natural occurrence that needs to happen, according to foresters who gathered in Anchorage last month at a forestry resource management symposium.

Both tragedies could have been controlled and the animals and trees that have perished could have been used to stimulate the economy if the forested lands were managed for growth and vitality, according to the private and public foresters attending the symposium. They stressed that the current "hands off" attitude to forest management and the creation of new recreation

areas which encourage unmanaged wilderness zones will only add to the problem and result in an ecological slum across much of Southcentral Alaska.

A more carefully managed forest industry could provide jobs and more wildlife habitat and allow for the use of a renewable resource that would otherwise go to waste, said Dr. Edmund Packee, a forestry professor at the University of Alaska at Fairbanks. "We can log

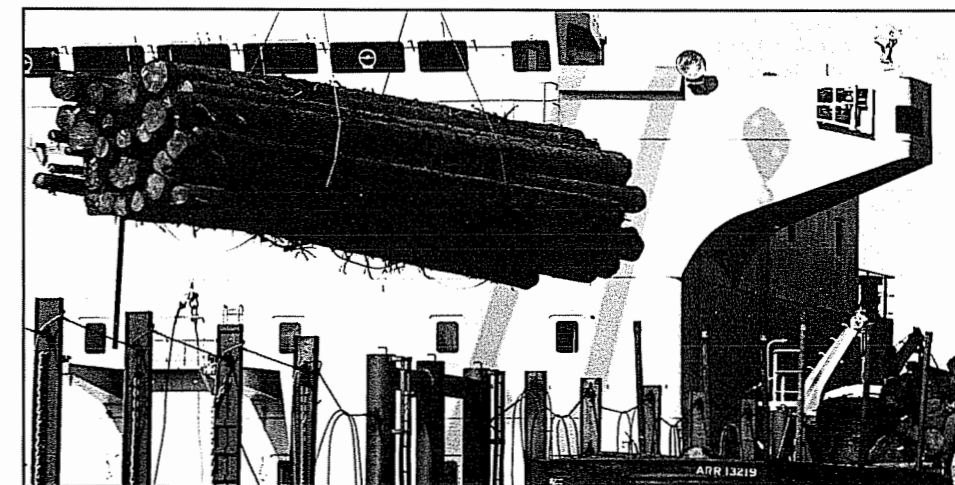
(Continued on page 4)

Susitna Valley Timber

| | |
|--|-------------------|
| Commercial timber land..... | 1.8 million acres |
| State timber land..... | 490,000 acres |
| State timber land (closed to logging)... | 500,000 acres |
| Proposed sale area... | 22,520 acres |
| Actual harvest area.... | 6,500 acres |

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Intensive forest management could provide jobs, more wildlife habitat and allow for the use of a renewable resource that would otherwise go to waste.



Message from the Executive Director

by
Becky L. Gay

1975 -1990: Fifteen years of shaping Alaska's future

This month RDC salutes the people who have made the organization all it is today. Through its membership and statewide board of directors, RDC has taken great strides due to the strength of volunteerism, leadership and commitment demonstrated by those individual citizens.

RDC's current President, Ethel H. "Pete" Nelson, is no exception, especially since she stepped forward and took the helm in the year of the oil spill, a difficult time at best.

RDC was initially incorporated as the Organization for the Management of Alaska Resources (OMAR) in 1975. Originally created to work for an all-Alaska gas line, RDC has broadened its scope into all resource sectors, community economic development and educational programs which elevate the public's awareness of Alaska's fundamental economic relationship with resources and quality of life.

In thanks for their many contributions, RDC applauds its Past Presidents:

- 1975-76 Robert C. Penney and Robert W. Fleming
- 1976-77 Robert C. Penney
- 1977-78 Robert W. Fleming
- 1978-79 Lee E. Fisher
- 1979-80 James G. "Bud" Dye
- 1980-81 Tom Fink
- 1981-82 Charles F. Herbert
- 1982-83 Mano Frey
- 1983-85 Charles R. Webber (served three terms)
- 1986-87 Boyd Brownfield
- 1987-88 Joseph R. Henri
- 1988-89 J. Shelby Stastny

RDC has become stronger and better over time, just like the people who make it work. RDC has a wealth of expertise in its membership and statewide board of directors, many who have served over 30 years in Alaska resource arenas.

RDC has also been blessed with great staff. OMAR's first executive director was Bev Isenson, still doing association work in the Pacific Northwest. RDC's longest serving executive director, Paula Easley, brought the organization front and center on issues and made sure it was a force to be reckoned with at any level. Another staffer deserving special recognition is Communications Director Carl Portman who has been with RDC since 1981. Raised and educated in Fairbanks, he brings a great deal to RDC, including a lifetime love for Alaska.

RDC is many things to many people. By being in RDC's membership, you have helped it gain strength and momentum to perpetuate a sound resource economy for Alaska's future. The challenge is bigger than any of us individually, but together we have made a difference. Please continue your support.

EPA reverses Quartz Hill permit decision

RDC urges its members to respond

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has reversed an earlier tentative decision to allow mill tailings from the proposed Quartz Hill Molybdenum project near Ketchikan to be placed in Smeaton Bay/Wilson Arm.

EPA had issued a draft discharge permit based on a Forest Service Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) which evaluated the mine tailings impacts and selected the Smeaton Bay/Wilson Arm site over an alternative location in Boca de Quadra. Based on public comments received on a 1988 draft discharge permit, EPA now proposes to deny the application from the mine developer, U.S. Borax.

Regional Forester Mike Barton said that "the selection of Smeaton Bay/Wilson Arm for marine disposal of tailings best met the criteria after evaluating the full range of issues including fisheries values, protection of the wilderness character within Misty Fiords (National Monument), and the economic viability of the mine." Barton noted, "The choice between marine tailings disposal sites is a trade-off among competing issues. Should the EPA have information that has not already been evaluated through the environmental review process, we would be most pleased to take a look at it."

(Continued on page 6)

The Resource Development Council (RDC) is Alaska's largest privately funded nonprofit economic development organization working to develop Alaska's natural resources in an orderly manner and to create a broad-based, diversified economy while protecting and enhancing the environment.

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Writer & Editor



Capitol Concerns

by
Debbie Reinwand
Deputy Director

1990 legislative session has a brighter ending

One year ago in this column, the tone was more somber as we reviewed the anti-development bills passed by the 16th Alaska Legislature - most of which are too depressing to mention.

This year, it seems the legislature may be remembered for what they could have done and didn't - some of which was good, while some was bad.

I'm pleased to report that the 1990 session had a brighter ending - primarily the result of pro-business and pro-development groups banding together and working to point out the flaws in some of the negative legislation that received so much public attention this year.

Notably, RDC worked with other resource groups to mobilize members against House Bill 409 introduced by Rep. Mike Davis, D-Fairbanks, which would have dramatically increased the Department of Environmental Conservation's authority. The bill would have allowed warrantless searches of certain regulated facilities; mandated \$15,000 daily fines for alleged offenders; reduced the amount of time under which appeals could be filed by those accused of breaking pollution laws; and would not have stayed DEC compliance orders during the appeal process.

The bill barely passed the Alaska House of Representatives, 21-19, following a flood of testimony regarding the negative impact HB 409 would have on businesses in the state. It should be noted that while some House member have accused the Senate of stalling and/or killing oil spill legislation, this bill and several other so-called critical oil spill bills did not even pass the House until several weeks before adjournment.

In the Senate, Anchorage Republican Jan Faiks, chairwoman of the Judiciary committee, did an outstanding job of reviewing the bill, asking tough questions of DEC, and pointing out that many of the provisions in HB 409 are unnecessary. Faiks took extensive statewide testimony on the measure and grilled the Department of Law and DEC with regard to the authority the state already possesses. Pro-business organizations worked long and hard - until the final gavel signaled adjournment - to make sure HB 409 was corrected prior to moving to the Senate floor. Many interested parties contended the bill contained too many flaws to warrant further work and once in the Senate Resources committee, chaired by Fairbanks Democrat Bettye Fahrenkamp, the measure was unable to be sufficiently revamped prior to adjournment. A special thank you to all RDC members and other business organizations that took an interest in this bill and testified against the onerous sections of HB 409.



RDC Deputy Director Debbie Reinwand with legislative aides Sheri Schlottfeldt and Gail Phillips. Gail Phillips is also an RDC board member.

As a side note, Fahrenkamp deserves applause for her interest in RDC issues and pro-development measures throughout the past two years. She has worked hard to ensure that multiple use and resource development values are a part of bills that emerge from her committee.

Two appropriation measures that RDC supported were passed in the closing hours of the session. Approximately \$1 million was appropriated to DNR for the construction of fire breaks in the Cooper Landing area, and other portions of the Kenai Peninsula. RDC has been preaching about the bark beetle problem in that area for years, and hopes future legislators can work to correct the problem before more timber is destroyed by the bug. In addition, the legislature appropriated \$1.7 million to the reforestation fund.

An attempt by the Susitna Valley Association and the Alaska Center for the Environment to set aside 2 million acres in the Susitna Valley as a remote recreation and roadless area failed this session. The sponsor of the bill, Anchorage Democrat Pat Rodey, and his staff, worked with Fahrenkamp and others to reach a compromise on the bill. The final version broadened the definition of multiple use and eliminated the land lock-up provisions. The bill died this year, but is expected to resurface next session. RDC opposed the original measure due to the excessive designation of remote recreation and roadless areas, as well as the elimination of local input in the planning process.

On the final day of the session, the Senate approved a House bill setting aside approximately 115,000 acres as the Yakataga Game Refuge if there are no future lawsuits filed to halt timber sales on adjacent state land. RDC worked with other groups opposing the measure, which ultimately ended in a compromise approved by several parties interested in the bill. RDC still maintains the bill represents poor public policy through the so-called blackmail provisions that negate the game refuge if lawsuits are filed.

Although numerous entities were in favor of legislation ratifying the Camden Bay oil-lease sale, one of the three bills dealing with the state's coastal zone management laws did not pass - that which would have approved the sale retroactively. However, the other two bills introduced by Governor Steve Cowper did pass, and latest reports indicate the failure to ratify the Camden Bay sale will not invalidate the sale, but will require additional review before it proceeds. RDC supported Cowper's legislation, including the Camden Bay bill, which died in the House.

There are dozens of other bills RDC worked on and a status report is currently in the hopper for distribution to members soon. If you have other inquiries, please call the office.

Finally, I'd like to thank those who worked closely with RDC during the 16th Alaska Legislature.

EPA denies Quartz Hill permit

(Continued from page 2)

Barton pointed out that the Forest Service, as lead agency for the Quartz Hill project, documented the in-depth analysis of environmental, social, and economic impacts associated with the proposed mine development in the FEIS and Record of Decision in October 1988. The analysis showed that many of the environmental consequences of disposal in Wilson Arm and Boca de Quadra fjords were about equal, while the economic benefits of disposal in Wilson Arm were much greater. In addition, the analysis showed that the selection of the Boca de Quadra alternative would have direct impacts to the wilderness portion of Misty Fjords since it would require the construction of tunnel, portal and support facilities in an additional wilderness drainage.

Of those alternatives analyzed, the highest costs are generated by disposal of tailings in Boca de Quadra. It would require the construction of up to 35,000 feet of tunnel, portal facilities on both Tunnel Creek and Boca de Quadra, disposal of waste rock, and other facilities estimated by the Forest Service to cost from \$54.5 to \$67 million. When initial construction costs are added to the cost of acquiring capital, U.S. Borax estimates that the utilization of Boca de Quadra for disposal of tailings will add about 55 cents per pound to the product selling price. The added cost of production would likely result in temporary mine closures when world commodity prices are down.

A public hearing on the EPA's decision to deny the Quartz Hill application is tentatively set for Wednesday, June 6 in Ketchikan. However, if insufficient interest is expressed for a hearing, it will be cancelled.

RDC strongly urges its members to send a brief note to the EPA urging it to hold a public hearing in Ketchikan. The request should be sent to Jim Corpuz, Water Permits and Compliance Board, WD-134, Environmental Protection Agency, 1200 Sixth Avenue, Seattle, WA 98101.

Although the deadline for requesting a public hearing is May 25, the EPA will accept written comments on the project and application denial until June 15.

Wetlands: Community interests at stake

(Continued from page 3)

A case in point is the Municipality of Anchorage's frustrated efforts to secure the needed permits to fill in 14 acres of land adjacent to its port for infrastructure expansion. Additionally, the city plans to fill in about 50 acres immediately south of the port at Ship Creek. The permits have been pending since last year. The "alphabet soup" of state and federal agencies participating in the exhaustive permit process all agree that use of the land for port facilities is appropriate. However, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Alaska Department of Fish and Game, the National Marine Fisheries Service and the Environmental Protection Agency are demanding that Anchorage do substantial offsite mitigation. All agree that no mitigation is possible within the 14-acre area, but the agencies want the city to dedicate funds for the creation or enhancement of wetlands in some other areas—compensatory offsite mitigation.

Although an agreement is pending on the 14 acres, off-site mitigation on the 50-acre Ship Creek project could prove too costly for the Municipality.

About 45% of Alaska is covered by wetlands and of the non-mountainous area wetlands account for 74% of the state. Wetlands of many types and descriptions form the bulk of the developable land in Alaska.

This is a marked contrast from many East and West Coast areas. In most cases the MOA mandates an acre-for-acre compensation for every acre of wetlands disturbed. This is particularly alarming for Alaskans because compensatory mitigation is extremely difficult to execute in Alaska. There are virtually no degraded or damaged wetlands to restore.

This means having to go outside of Alaska to restore wetlands in another state before being allowed to proceed with land use activities here.

"The very thought of Alaska projects being held hostage, while suitable wetlands compensation proposals and locations are debated in other states' political arenas, is almost beyond comprehension," said Easley.

Currently, in the Alaska context, compensatory mitigation is not a frequently used tool. "Much of the land affected by Section 404 activities of the Clean Water Act consists of 'wetlands' that are low in value and highly abundant," stated Bill Horn, the Alaska Wetlands Coalition technical advisor.

"However, authorizing agencies to compel distant off-site mitigation is likely to be an irresistible incentive for them to use Alaskan permittees (and others too) to pursue Lower 48 policy goals," Horn added.

For instance, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service wants the Air Force to do distant offsite mitigation for its \$345 million backscatter radar in Interior Alaska. To offset a projected loss of swans at the proposed backscatter site near Gulkana, Fish and Wildlife wants the Air Force to buy as many as 2,000 acres of farm land and water bodies in Washington's Skagit Valley north of Seattle. That could cost up to \$3.2 million and management costs would add another \$1 million. The military might have to spend about \$5.4 million to provide extra habitat for the birds in Alaska and Washington.

Most coastal communities in Alaska are undertaking port and harbor development and expanding marine repair facilities. Most have to rely on water-based transportation for fishing, processing, recreation and tourism. The infrastructure must be built for the most part across wetlands.

From the many Alaska communities affected by the policy, the same complaint is voiced. The MOA does not allow for the consideration of community and societal values of the proposed project when the Corps or EPA decides whether a permit should be issued. Instead the MOA mandates that the permit "shall be based solely on the values and functions of the aquatic resource."

If a community must use a wetland to build homes, new facilities or businesses (even if of critical value to the community), the Corps and EPA now must ignore all factors except the aquatic resources in determining the nature of the permit. The impact on jobs, affordable housing, food production, and the national deficit are no longer considerations in developing land use policies.

"Alaska is operating under a major handicap going into the no net loss playing field," noted Becky Gay, RDC Executive Director. "Since much of Alaska was developed primarily after the Clean Water Act, the National Environmental Protection Act and the Wilderness Preservation Act, the state has consistently performed to a higher standard and consequently has not damaged many wetlands," Gay added. "It is ironic that the greatest impact of this national policy will be in the one state which has contributed least to the problem."

Recovery well underway in Prince William Sound



Thoughts from the President

by
Pete Nelson

Beneath a deep blue sky and a warm spring sun, one could almost forget that one year ago Prince William Sound was the site of the nation's largest oil spill. One year after the Exxon Valdez ran aground on Bligh Reef, dumping some 10.8 million gallons of oil into the Sound, the waters appear as pristine as ever, supporting a healthy array of sea life.

As the 1990 cleanup season begins, recovery appears well underway. Oil does remain on some beaches, but the brutal winter surf combined with Exxon's multi-billion dollar cleanup effort last summer, has cleaned much of the oil from affected beaches.

Despite the closure of some fishing grounds, the overall salmon harvest last summer was one of the best ever. And this spring millions of herring returned to Prince William Sound to spawn in the

shallow kelp beds. Hundreds of local fishermen netted a phenomenal 7,700 tons of prized roe herring worth more than \$6 million.

One year after the oil spill, it now appears unlikely that hydrocarbon concentrations resulting from the spilled oil will have any adverse effects on plants and sea life living below the surface in the water column of Prince William Sound. A recent report entitled, "Water Quality in Prince William Sound," concluded there is no reason to anticipate any harmful effects in 1990 and beyond of the remaining spilled oil on water column organisms, including commercial herring and salmon populations.

In one of the most comprehensive studies of its kind, the Battelle Ocean Sciences study found that for a brief period in the spring of 1989 there was an increase in the upper water column in the average concentration of aromatic hydrocarbons — the potentially toxic components of crude oil. However, these elevated average concentrations were always well below the State of Alaska standard for aromatic hydrocarbons in marine waters.

There is no denying the fact that the oil spill was a terrible accident which not only oiled beautiful shorelines, but took a tragic toll among sea birds and other wildlife. More cleanup work remains to be done and Exxon is sending hundreds back out to the Sound to finish the job. But the oil spill did not wipe out these populations nor did we lose Prince William Sound. Putting the emotional and political rhetoric aside, the facts show large wildlife and bird populations and pristine waters supporting a rich fishery.

Wetlands

Community interests at stake

by Michele Hendrickson
Alaska Wetlands Coalition
Staff Assistant

More than just Alaska development groups and businesses will suffer under the federal wetlands permitting agreement between the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). Alaska communities are finding that local expansion and development are also threatened by the Memorandum of Agreement (MOA).

Sitka and Craig, two Southeast Alaska communities with large amount of wetlands, have joined two native corporations, the State of Alaska, the Municipality of Anchorage, and an oil company in filing lawsuits against the MOA.

The topography in Sitka and Craig is characterized by a predominance of very steep and rocky slopes and muskeg type wetlands. Almost all of the flat land available for building is covered by wetland making it impossible for community development to occur without using wetlands.

The requirement that new wetlands be created to compensate the loss of existing wetlands is not possible because Sitka and Craig lack any flat upland suitable for conversion into new wetlands. The restrictive new federal wetlands regulations will make economic growth in Sitka and Craig extremely difficult.

Another community affected by the MOA is the City and Borough of Juneau, which covers 3,100 square miles. Only a small

portion of this area has been developed, leaving 22,300 acres opened to multiple uses. But when wetlands and federal lands area are subtracted out, there are only 3,200 acres available for development.

In testimony before the House of Representatives Subcommittee on Water Resources, Juneau officials noted that costs for utilities would soar under the new wetlands policy. The city is completing a \$45 million water system, but it might serve lots which will remain vacant due to the fact no one knows which wetlands, if any, might be developed in the future.

Utility planning and construction is not the only concern in Juneau when wetlands policy is considered. Although Juneau voters approved a general obligation bond for school construction on a site owned by the city, there is no access to the site unless a road is constructed along the edge of a wetland. As a result, Juneau can't access its own property and a suitable alternative site does not exist.

The Municipality of Anchorage, which filed suit late last year against the memorandum, also stands to suffer from the policy. "To imagine what this policy does to communities, had no net loss been in effect before now, Anchorage may not be here," said Paula Easley, Director of Economic Development and Planning for the Municipality of Anchorage. "There are some areas that could have been developed, but to reach them, roads would have had to been built across wetlands."

(Continued on page 6)

Susitna logging could hold solution

(Continued from cover)

the watersheds and still have the fish if we do it right.

"Packee and others pointed to Scandinavia as an example of similar land where a forest industry thrives and many more moose are harvested each year than in Alaska.

Sweden, a country smaller than the Matanuska-Susitna Borough, now harvests more than 100,000 moose annually. The entire Alaska harvest is 7,000 animals.

The difference results largely from the Swedes success in creating a huge moose population through intensive management, according to forester Richard Tindall. Logging is a vital part of the management formula in Sweden in that it is used to create moose browse, Tindall said. He said a lack of good moose habitat is the problem in Southcentral Alaska where much of the forest is overmature spruce trees which shade out and kill browse plants moose require for food. Logging to remove old trees and create a vibrant regrowth forest would help feed the moose, especially during winters of heavy snowfall, Tindall noted.

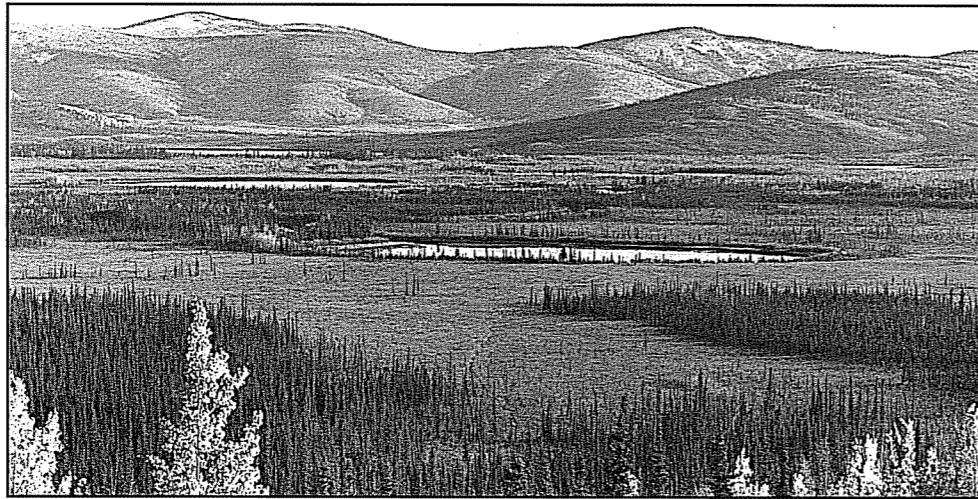
The Alaska Railroad's experience across 14 miles of track on Fort Richardson this winter provided strong evidence that forest management could greatly reduce moose kills on the state's rails, said the state's top railroad official.

"We didn't kill a single moose on that 14 miles of track, although there are as many moose there per mile as there are along the 60 miles between Willow and Talkeetna, where over 500 moose were killed," said Frank Turpin, president of the Alaska Railroad.

Turpin pointed out that Fort Richardson did some clear-cutting to provide moose browse in areas away from the railroad tracks. "This leads me to believe the problems we are experiencing with moose in the Mat-Su area is due to poor or too little habitat attention," Turpin said.

Other panelists agreed with Packee, Tindall and Turpin that combining modern forest practices with wildlife habitat management would be healthy for moose and other wildlife, but several leaders of the environmental community dissented from that view.

"We do not support stepped up logging as a means of raising more moose," said Jack Hession of the Sierra Club,



Timber sales in the Susitna Valley would encompass but a small fraction of the forested lands in the basin.

which opposes a proposed five-year state timber sale plan in the Susitna Valley.

The overmature forests of Southcentral Alaska are now under attack by the spruce bark beetles. Tens of thousands of acres of spruce have died from the infestation, posing serious fire hazards in many areas. A carefully managed forest could provide new jobs and the use of a resource that would otherwise go to waste.

The Division of Forestry of the Department of Natural Resources has proposed 18 timber sales in the Susitna Valley over a five-year period. The sales are modestly sized and most of the trees are overmature. Reforestation will be natural seeding.

These sales encompass but a small fraction of the Susitna Valley. The total sale area covers approximately 22,520 acres, but only a small portion of the timber sale area will be cut. The actual harvest, which will cover only 6,500 acres over a five-year period, targets 3.8 million board feet of spruce and 7.2 million board feet of cottonwood. There are approximately 490,000 acres of state timber lands in the Susitna Valley. The annual allowable cut on these state lands in the Susitna area is 21.6 million board feet. An additional 500,000 acres of state forest lands have been deleted from the timber base for various reasons, including buffer zones, recreation river corridors and other land uses.

When all land ownerships are considered, there are approximately 1.8 million acres of commercial forest land in the valley. The annual allowable cut on an 80-year rotation is 191 million board feet. The Susitna Valley itself sprawls out over 15.8 million acres. Hence, the proposed timber sales will leave little impression on the valley and its identified forested

lands.

State foresters stress that timber harvesting will occur in accordance with the timber sale regulations and also adhere to modern forest science practices. Massive clear-cutting will not occur. The controversial Kahiltna tracts in the proposed sale have been pulled by the Division of Forestry and will not be considered until 1993 or beyond. The Kahiltna sale was modestly sized at 2 million board feet and required no road construction. This particular sale would have applied mostly to overmature birch, but it faced stiff opposition from several citizen groups, including the Alaska Center for the Environment.

Many comparisons have been made to a large timber sale proposed in 1987. That sale would have harvested about 13,000 acres per year, compared to less than 2,000 acres under the present proposal. The 1987 sale would have been a 20-year contract negotiated to an individual or corporation, compared to the high-bid option process now proposed. Extensive permanent road construction would have taken place under the 1987 proposal, which does not take place under the new package.

The Division of Forestry will conduct a public hearing in Anchorage on Thursday, May 24 at 7:00 p.m. in the auditorium at the Anchorage Fine Arts Museum (7th and A Street) on the timber sale.

RDC encourages its members to attend the hearing and testify in support of the timber sale. Written comments should be directed to Jim Eleazer, Area Forester, Division of Forestry, Box 520455, Big Lake, AK 99652. The comments must be post-marked by June 15.

State grapples with beetle epidemic

by Robert Dick
State Forester

It's spring time, a time of good weather, outdoor activities and, for government agencies, a time of sorting out budgets and legislation. Fire season is around the corner and the Division of Forestry is gearing up for another season. It is also time to catch up on our friend, the spruce bark beetle.

Bark beetle populations continue to march through Alaska forests. They are appearing more than ever in Interior white spruce stands and in some areas they have nearly exhausted their food supply. Overall, populations are alive and well, despite two years of extended cold periods.

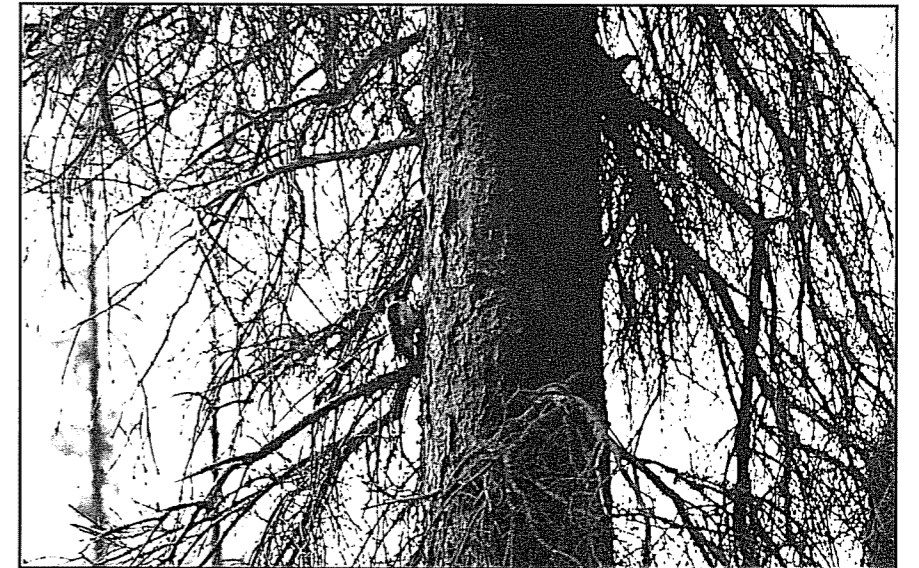
The legislature passed legislation that would fund the Division for two projects. A sum of \$670,000 has been appropriated from the general fund to build fire breaks and for prescribed burning operations in the Cooper Landing area of the Kenai Peninsula and on other state land to control the fire hazard created by the bark beetle infestation. The second project includes a \$100,000 appropriation to identify and develop a public consensus on how to treat state land in order to control the fire hazard created by the bark beetle infestation. Public input will be an important part of this process which the Division hopes to complete before the 1991 legislature convenes.

The Division has received many recommendations ranging from "don't do anything" to "put it all up for sale, tomorrow." Our intention is somewhere in between. We intend to salvage as much product and value as possible. We will be constrained by budget, environmental concern and market. Other constraints are reforestation problems, nursery stock availability and a lack of good inventory data among other things.

The beetle infestation has been several decades in the making. It is tempting to want to solve the beetle problem with quick and easy solutions, such as grand scale timber sales. Let me tell you of a recent experience that leads me to doubt the wisdom of even possibly doing that.

The Division of Forestry recently proposed a 1,350 acre timber sale in the Kahiltna area of the Susitna Valley. The proposed sale had little or no road construction required and was composed of mostly overmature birch. Proposed volume was 2.1 million board feet, a modest-sized sale at most. In Southcentral Alaska, public outcry was substantial. Public support was nil.

Spruce beetle epidemic spreads



Tens of thousands of spruce trees have died from the spruce bark beetle epidemic in Southcentral Alaska.

Beetles march into Interior Alaska

Foresters report that more than 90 percent of the white and Lutz spruce trees in the Cooper Landing area of the Kenai Peninsula have died from the spruce bark beetle epidemic. Overall, the beetle has destroyed more than 27,000 acres of spruce trees on the Kenai Peninsula, but the insect is spreading deep into Alaska's interior and is now thriving in unlikely areas such as the wet coastal forest of Southcentral Alaska.

In the first recorded epidemic in the Interior, some 140,000 acres are infected along the Yukon River south of Galena. The death toll among spruce trees is close to 50 percent along some areas of the Yukon. Thousands of trees have also died along the Kuskokwim River where 10,000 acres of white spruce trees have been hit. Another 10,000 acres of Sitka spruce have been hit south of Homer across Kachemak Bay.

Logging would slow the spread of the beetles and reduce fire danger while providing a boon to the local economy. However, environmentalists are strongly opposed to logging and have slowed efforts to thin out the beetle-ravaged forests.

Here's the message I drew from the above: People who harvest trees have little credibility with many Alaskans. Unfortunately, the Division of Forestry, other agency land managers, and private landowners also suffer from a lack of credibility.

In the Division's case, part of our job is to supply timber to the forest industry. We must do it, however, in a publicly acceptable manner.

To bring this back to the bark beetle infestation, the Division is under a micro-

scope. Actions perceived to be arbitrary or arrogant will be publicly unacceptable. We must move quickly, but carefully. That means not moving fast enough for some people and too fast for others. It's a tightrope with a pretty darn small safety net underneath. With the support of the industry and the public, we can make it work on the Kenai Peninsula. Better yet, we can make it work for the rest of the state. And that's a good deal for everybody.