

Opinion

Commentary

Bush could destroy America's final frontier

By BRENT FOOTE
Staff Writer

It is America as it was -- original. Five percent of Alaska's Arctic Coast, by law, remains untouched by humans. It is the forbidden frontier.

At a remote reserve, 60 miles above the Arctic Circle, the snow-covered tundra is frozen solid in winter. It has so many shades of pale that natives here have 28 different words for white.

It is a wilderness that each spring bursts with life.

"It makes as much sense to develop this area, this wilderness and wildlife treasure," said Allen Smith of the Wilderness Society, "as it does to burn a Van Gogh to heat your home."

This is the heart of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. At about 19 million acres, the refuge is nearly the size of South Carolina. The human population is zero, but 45 animal species call it home. In the dead of winter, when temperatures are often way below zero, it's completely silent. That's because there are no roads and no airports. The only way to get here is by ski plane.

Even though every American owns a piece of this

place, almost no Americans ever visit here. Less than 1,000 each year hike or fly in to see the moose, musk ox, arctic fox, and caribou migrations -- animals by the 10,000s rushing towards the Arctic Sea on what naturalists call "America's Serrenghetti".

"This is a spectacle that you can not find elsewhere anymore in North America," says Fran Mauer of the Arctic Wildlife Refuge. "This spectacle of large herds of animals with a mountain backdrop bar-none on the brink of the Arctic Ocean. And this setting is spectacular to say the least."

But Alaska's North Slope Refuge, called ANWAR for short, is home to another spectacle. Beneath the permanently frozen surface there is oil. No one is sure just how much yet, but limited tests show reserves of from three to 16 billion barrels. Environmentalists say it's only a six-month supply. Oil companies say it's enough to turn off the Saudi spigots for three decades.

"The North Slope is the best place in America to be looking for oil," said Cam Toothy of Arctic Power, "and ANWR is one of the prizes of that exploration of the future."

BUSH'S CAMPAIGN PROMISE

For 20 years the oil companies on neighboring tundra have coveted that prize. Now they may get it. President Bush made wells in this wilderness a campaign promise, with the backing of the Alaska state government, which depends upon oil revenue to survive.

"We're absolutely dependent on that oil," said Mark Myers of the Alaska division of Oil and Gas.

In fact, Alaskans pay no income tax, or sales tax, and each man, woman and child is paid a yearly oil dividend of \$2,000. Most of it is financed by North Slope oil -- Prudhoe Bay, the largest field in North America.

But the massive 16-billion barrel field is now two-thirds drained. The Trans-Alaska pipeline is pumping one million barrels a day rather than the original two million. Its shelf life is estimated at another 15 years.

"That field is declining at a rate of eight to 10 percent a year," Myers said.

That's setting the state for the Bush administration's first frontline fistfight over the environment. At stake is original America and it's, until now, forbidden frontier.

Brent Foote is a staff writer for the Lion's Eye. Other opinions are welcome.

When fare isn't fair: SEPTA's struggle

By CONNIE RINGGOLD
Staff Writer

How in the world does SEPTA have the nerve to fix their greedy mouths and hold out their money grubbing hands to ask for more money. What could they possibly need the money for?

I know for a fact that the increase in SEPTA fare is not going towards maintenance. The SEPTA vehicles are dirty

with trash everywhere.

Don't even get me started on the subway tunnels; it smells of piss, trash everywhere and at 30th street the mice population is out of control.

SEPTA needs to buy time with the money that they are stealing from us, because the drivers are never on time and when they finally get there they get major attitudes with the riders for no apparent reason. Half of the drivers have worked for

SEPTA for 20 or more years and when you ask them about a direct location they play dumb like they can't comprehend.

SEPTA's management reminds me a lot like Robin Hood and his merry men, except SEPTA is robbing from the poor to give to the rich. I pay \$24.50 every week to get to school, SEPTA fares are going up 6-9 percent, which means that I will be paying at least \$34.50 minimum.

This whole SEPTA situation is all

about greed. My grandmother always said money is the root of all evil and SEPTA is proving her point every day.

If SEPTA's management would spend two months in my shoes they would see how it feels to be robbed weekly, they would agree with me whole heartedly. I think that SEPTA's riders would join me in saying: SEPTA SUCKS!!!!

Connie Ringgold is a staff writer for the Lion's Eye. Conflicting opinions welcome.

"Do you agree with

Bong?"

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