

## **ALASKAN ALLIANCE FORMS TO PROTECT RECREATIONAL ACCESS**

*Editorial by Todd Clark*

Alaska has a myriad of organizations for outdoor enthusiasts representing almost any means of access. Their domains range from snow, water, dry ground and everything in between. One issue all these groups holds in common is access to Alaska's public lands and waters. Over the years, each of these organizations has lost public access due to restrictions imposed by all levels of government.

Jake Wade, Alaska, on the way to the Canadian border via the "Top of the World" highway. The building in the background is an old gold mining dredge. --photo by Todd Clark

Millions of acres of public lands have already been lost, and there is danger of losing more. For starters, access from the Denali Highway, Richardson Highway, Glenn Highway, Crescent and Carter Lakes and the Knik River are all in peril. Legislation and regulations enacting these restrictions and closures are initiated and driven by preservationist special interest organizations that have a high profile unified voice. In polite conversations these groups are called "The Opposition." The Opposition has been very successful whittling away our access a little at a time.

One significant reason The Opposition is so successful is that our individual groups are not sticking up for each other. As Benjamin Franklin said, "If we don't hang together, we most assuredly will hang separately." For instance, airboat owners need to stick up for snowmobile riders, ATV riders, personal watercraft (PWC) owners, etc. . .

That is why, in 2004, a group of active recreationists decided to form the Alaska Outdoor Access Alliance (AOAA). The purpose of the Alliance is to provide a unified effort for all organizations attempting to protect, maximize, broaden and reclaim motorized and non-motorized access to Alaska's public lands and waters. Our mission is to promote access to Alaska's public lands and waters for recreational and commercial purposes; work for fair and equitable access laws; promote development and maintenance of trails, launching and docking facilities and other access related improvements; provide education and promote good stewardship of the environment relating to access issues.

When we formed the Alliance, we recognized the need to tap into the

already active motorized groups. Rather than try to energize people not already involved, we decided to unite already involved activists. As a result, we've developed a synergy that is now attracting new users to the entire group. When someone asks how to get involved, we suggest they join the Alliance as an individual or better yet, join one of our member organizations and be involved at both levels. The Alliance doesn't take credit for the accomplishments of its members; we're more interested in helping our member organizations work together to achieve goals they couldn't on their own.

Occasionally an individual from one of our member organizations will suggest that their group doesn't want to be involved with some other motorized group. The fear is that by siding with a group that's taking heat from the anti-access crowd, some of that heat will somehow bleed over. We point out that all motorized access groups will at some time take heat. After all, we're fighting a common enemy. That enemy is united in their efforts to close access. If we don't stick together, divided we'll fall. One basic principle of the Alliance is that no one motorized access group will be excluded over any issue. Even during the formation on the Knik River Public Use Area legislation there was talk of sacrificing certain forms of access. The Alliance was successful in promoting the idea that no form of access should be excluded from the protection the legislation provides to motorized users.

The Alliance meetings have been well attended by members of the following groups: Alaska ATV Club, Alaska Backcountry Adventure Tours, Alaska Boating Association, Alaska Extreme Four Wheelers, Alaska State Snowmobile Association, AOC-AC BlueRibbon Commission and the PWC Club of Alaska. There's a high potential for many more organizations to be involved. In fact, the associated membership of the Alliance will probably exceed three thousand members in the very short-term.

The Alliance has made significant progress on several important access issues, including the revision of the Bureau of Land Management's East Alaska Resource Management Plan governing 7.6 million acres from the southern slopes of the Alaska Range to the Chugach Mountains and from the Talkeetna Mountains to the Wrangell Mountains.

The Alliance is also working to protect recreational access to the Knik River region; in particular the area around Jim Creek and the connected lakes targeted for closure by anti-access groups. The Alliance is also working on protecting PWC access to lakes within the Mat-Su Borough.

The Alliance meets every second Tuesday of the month at the North Slope Restaurant in Eagle River. The Advisory Council meets at 6:30 P.M. and the Board meets at 7:30 P.M. The Alliance focuses on affiliate memberships from compatible organizations but also offers individual, family and business memberships.

## THE MORE ACTIVE CLUBS IN THE ALASKA OUTDOOR ACCESS ALLIANCE

### **A.B.A.T.E. of Alaska**

<http://www.abateofalaska.net>

### **Alaska ATV Club**

<http://www.alaskaatvclub.org>

### **Alaska Backcountry Adventure Tours**

[youralaskavacation.com](http://youralaskavacation.com)

### **Alaska Boating Association**

<http://www.akboating.org>

### **Alaska Extreme Four Wheelers**

<http://www.akextreme4x4.com>

### **Alaska State Snowmobile Association**

<http://www.aksnow.org>

### **Anchorage Snowmobile Club, Inc.**

<http://www.anchoragesnowmobileclub.com>

### **Hovercraft Club of Alaska**

<http://www.hovercraftalaska.com>

### **Matanuska Valley Sportsmen, Inc.**

[clubs.odcmp.com/cgi-bin/clubInfo.cgi?clubID=12](http://clubs.odcmp.com/cgi-bin/clubInfo.cgi?clubID=12)

### **PWC Club of Alaska**

<http://www.pwcalaska.org>

### **South Central Chapter Alaska Trappers Association**

<http://www.alaskatrappers.org>

*--For questions or comments on this article or related issues, Todd Clark*

*may be contacted by phone: 907-222-9833 or email:  
<[info@alaskaaccess.org](mailto:info@alaskaaccess.org)>.*

*BlueRibbon Magazine, December, 2005*