

Matanuska Watershed View

Castle Mountain Coalition Newsletter

Promoting ecological integrity, economic sustainability, and quality of life in the Matanuska River watershed.

CMC Goes to Healy

CMC's Jamey Duhamel invited to Healy to speak on the future of coal in Alaska

An amazing class on Contemporary Conflicts at Tri-Valley High School in Healy hosted a forum January 28, originally entitled "The Truth about Coal: Is Coal the Future or Not." Apparently, at the request of UCM, it became "The Future of Energy." Our own Jamey Duhamel faced off against Joe Usibelli, Jr., in what was, in fact, a discussion about coal. According to a lengthy article in the Fairbanks Daily News-Miner, there were 75 people in attendance at the forum. Students organizing the event facilitated a civil community discussion on the future of coal.



All reports are that Jamey more than held her own. She outlined the rather dire looking economic future of coal, the external costs associated with coal, social license, and the power of communities to envision a future without coal. Joe seemed to see a rosy future for coal and,

apparently, as a demonstration of its harmlessness, licked a piece of coal and said he would eat it if he wouldn't choke on it!

The event revealed a diversity of opinion in Healy and that it is not impossible to discuss coal issues with the residents. During the question and answer period, a woman, who works at a coal-fired power plant in Healy but lives off Buffalo Mine Road, expressed her concern about the harmful effects of a possible Wishbone Hill Mine on her Buffalo Mine neighborhood.

Also during the trip to Healy, Liz Allard, Kirby Spangler, and Jamey met with two board members of the Denali Citizens Council as a way of reaching out to other grassroots organizations interested in issues similar to ours. We were pleased to see we have allies in Healy.

OUR STORY

Several years ago, a Chickaloon resident noticed a small ad in the local newspaper announcing a public hearing on a new coal mine proposal in the area. She called her neighbors and no one had heard this alarming news.

That moment was the catalyst that inspired a handful of determined citizens to form Castle Mountain Coalition. Today, CMC remains committed to protecting the quality of life in the Matanuska River watershed and preserving the long-term health of this beautiful place we call home.

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Interested in joining the board?
Email us at board@castlemountain.org.

IN THIS EDITION

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Salmon Enter Buffalo Creek

Article by CMC Member
Kendra Zamzow

Salmon are returning to upper Moose Creek, seeking out the waters above the old waterfall barriers created when a railroad spur was built for the coal industry. The Chickaloon Tribe restored the stream alignment around the waterfalls in 2005 and 2006, opening habitat blocked since railroad construction impacts of the 1920s.

Now salmon have moved into Buffalo Creek, and Buffalo Creek has moved into the anadromous waters catalog.

Usibelli wants to use Buffalo Creek to wash coal. That plan became a lot more difficult when Chinook and coho salmon were found living there.

Does this mean that Usibelli won't be able to use Buffalo Creek?

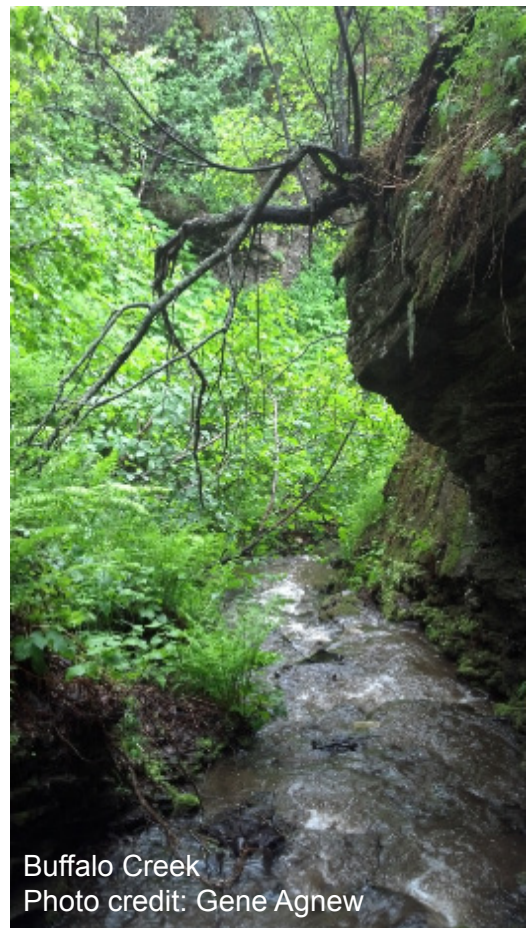
No. It does mean that they will need a Fish Habitat Permit from Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADFG). And ADFG might want to make sure that Usibelli leaves enough water for salmon. They might want flow data and more salmon surveys – information that takes time to collect.

Does this mean the project is stopped until Usibelli collects data on Buffalo?

Not necessarily. Usibelli could put in groundwater wells to pump up enough water to wash the coal.

An interactive map of current anadromous waters can be found at <http://extra.sf.adfg.state.ak.us/FishResourceMonitor/?mode=awc>. Zoom in to see Buffalo Creek and Moose Creek segments.

Salmon helping people helping salmon!



Buffalo Creek
Photo credit: Gene Agnew

2015 MineWatch Volunteers Needed



Mine Watch is our way of keeping an eye on activity—or inactivity—on the mine sites. Volunteers make observations of what is going on and note anything that might be in violation of a permit or that just seems wrong. Or, we hope, they might be able to report that nothing at all is happening.

A couple years ago, people living near the Riversdale mine site in Chickaloon observed turbid storm water runoff, erosion, and an absence of protective barriers during road work on the mine road. Resident Warren Keogh took photos and reported the matter to the Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation. Two days later ADEC inspectors arrived on the scene and issued notices of two violations to Riversdale Alaska and Hobbs Industries. This is the kind of activity mine-watch volunteers will be trained to spot and to report.

Mine Watch is crucial to our program and volunteers are vital to MineWatch. If you are interesting in pleasant hikes, during which you can also do a little sleuthing for a good cause, please contact Liz at director@castlemountain.org.

What does the downturn in the coal market really mean to Usibelli Coal Mine?

Despite Joe Usibelli, Jr.'s optimism about the economic future of coal, it appears that UCM is feeling the effects of lower coal prices and lower demand. Shortly after the event at Healy, the Fairbanks Daily News-Miner reported that the downturn in the coal market is, in fact, having an effect on Usibelli's Healy mine. Ten jobs have been lost in the last six months, not a negligible loss in a workforce of only 115 people. A spokesperson for UCM would not predict an upswing in employment despite a soon-to-be-opened additional coal-fired power plant in the area.

So it appears that despite what Joe Usibelli told the Tri-Valley High School students and other citizens, the economic future of coal in Healy is not entirely rosy.



Goodbye to Jamey, Hello to Liz

Our program director, Jamey Duhamel, is moving to Oregon *and* is having a baby girl in May! She has done amazing things for us in the last two years and we will miss her, especially her amazing presence with a microphone in her hand. She is handing the microphone along with all the many other details of our work, to the very capable hands of Liz Allard.

Liz has been the community organizer for the Mat Valley Coalition. We look forward to having Liz work to increase participation in our grassroots effort to protect our beautiful Valley. Good luck to both of these wonderful women.



Upcoming CMC Events and Programs

Monthly Speaker Series

Our fledging speaker series got off to an amazing start when 47 people gathered at the Sutton Library to hear Dr. Mark Clark give a fascinating talk on the formation of the Matanuska Valley. Dr. Clark's talk was followed a month later by archeologist Fran Seager-Boss's discussion of the prehistory and history of the Matanuska Valley. **Join us for the following speaker series events at the Sutton Library at 7pm:**

Thursday, March 12: The Matanuska, a River of Raptors by Bob Dittrick

Thursday, April 8: The Matanuska Valley's Edible and Medicinal Plants by Rachel Bobka

Friday, May 1: River Geomorphology and Mapping of the Mat River by Janet Curran, USGS hydrologist

Friday May 15: Matanuska Winds by Peter Olsson of the University of Alaska

Kudos to the wonderful volunteers who conceived of this series and put it together--Pat Owens, Kendra Zamzow, and Frankie Barker.

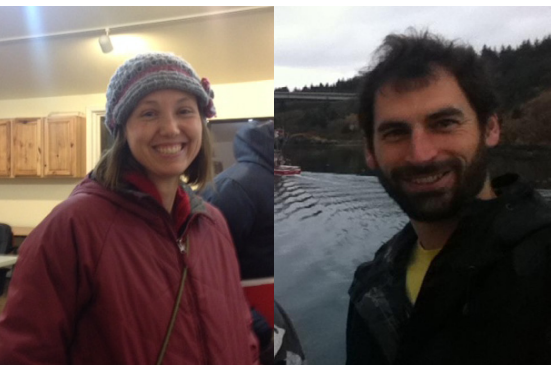


Summer Hiking Series

Stay tuned for the release of the 2015 summer hiking series schedule at www.castlemountain.org!

New Board Members

We welcome Kaarle Straaley and Laurel Carlsen to our Board of Directors. Kaarle will bring experience through his work at the Northern Alaska Environmental



Center in Fairbanks as well as at the Alaska Center for the Environment.

At the present time, Laurel is a nursing student. Her home is in the Butte right along the river. The most important thing Kaarle and Laurel both bring to the BOD is a strong belief in our mission and a willingness to work to preserve our watershed.

If you share that belief and would like to become more involved in our work, we hope you will consider joining our Board of Directors. We welcome diverse skills. Not all of us are experienced activists. But we are all committed to the CMC mission.

Donate to CMC today

We're already off to an amazing start in 2015, but we need your help to keep the momentum going. Please consider making a donation to CMC today!

Donate by mail: You can mail a donation to P.O. Box 1244 Chickaloon, AK 99674

Donate online: make a donation via PayPal at www.castlemountain.org

Donate your time: volunteer with CMC by emailing director@castlemountain.org

