



Topic: Bering River Coalfields

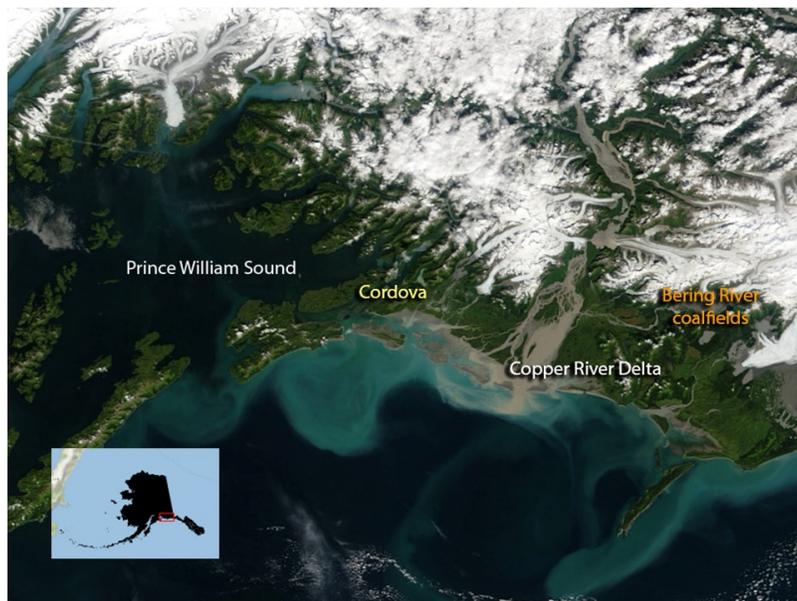
Date: October 8, 2021

Contact: Allison Gillum, Alaska Lands Team

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Proposal: The Alaska Region of the U.S. Forest Service is applying for competitive national funding through the Land and Water Conservation Fund to acquire the partial interest (coal rights) held by the Korea-Alaska Development Corporation (KADCO) on the last unprotected 11,920 acres of the Bering River coalfields.

Letters of Support: As part of our application, we are strongly encouraged to submit letters of support to supplement our proposal, particularly support from locally elected officials, Tribes, members of Congress, adjoining landowners, and community members.



Map production: Eyak Preservation Council

Region: The Bering-Copper River watershed is located along the Gulf of Alaska coastline and is framed by snow covered peaks reaching over 16,000 feet, out of which flow massive glaciers that feed the two major river systems of the watershed: the Copper and Bering Rivers. These rivers end in a highly productive, 75-mile-wide alluvial fan, known as the Copper River Delta. The Copper River Delta provides critical habitat for anadromous fish, terrestrial wildlife, and migratory birds. This area is the ancestral homeland of the Eyak people.

Coal Rights: The Bering River coalfields total 73,000 acres, of which KADCO holds the coal rights to the last unprotected 11,920 acres (16%). The KADCO coal rights reportedly have the potential to produce up to 60 million tons of coal. Development and extraction of Bering River coal resources has the potential to negatively affect air and water quality, fish habitat, ecosystem function, and economic stability within the Copper River Delta region. Conserving the coalfields will keep an estimated 100-185 million metric tons of carbon dioxide in the ground.

Why is the Bering River region important?

Economy and Livelihoods:

- Provides critical salmon spawning habitat that supports healthy runs of all five species of Pacific salmon, as well as steelhead trout, and grayling.
- Sustains commercial fishing operations of approximately 500 commercial fishing gillnet operations and several hundred purse seine fishing operations, numerous canneries, and important sport and subsistence fisheries.
- Supports and protects the existing tourism and recreation economies of the region.
- The wild salmon harvest of the Bering-Copper River watershed is one of the most significant in the State of Alaska. The 10-year average (2010-2019) commercial harvest for this region is 1.66 million fish valued at roughly \$24 million.



Natural Resources:

- The Copper River Delta is the largest contiguous wetland on the Pacific Coast of North America.
- This productive coastal wetland is rich in wildlife. In addition to supporting healthy runs of all five species of Pacific salmon, it is home to bald eagles, shorebirds, seabirds, brown bear, black bear, wolf, moose, deer, mountain goats, and small furbearers.
- The Copper River Delta is home to 8% of North America's breeding trumpeter swans, and each year, during what is the largest gathering of shorebirds anywhere in the western hemisphere, the wetland is host to an estimated 12 million birds.
- Recognizing the significance of this system to fish and wildlife resources, Congress, with the 1980 Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA) stated: "The conservation of fish and wildlife and their habitat shall be the primary purpose for the management of the Copper River-Bering River portion of the existing Chugach National Forest."

Building on other Conservation Efforts in the Region:

- In 2016, Chugach Alaska Corporation (CAC) protected their 62,000 acres (84%) of Bering River coal rights with a perpetual conservation covenant, held by the Native Conservancy.
- The 73,000-acre Bering River coalfields surface estate is owned by CAC and was protected in 2016 by an agreement for carbon offsets, the largest carbon-offset deal in Alaska's history.
- In this agreement, CAC's trees will be left standing and in turn provides carbon-exchange income to their shareholders for decades to come.
- The 11,920 acres of coal rights owned by KADCO remain unprotected and vulnerable to mining. The development of the subsurface coal rights held by KADCO could jeopardize the integrity of the surface estate subject to the carbon offset agreement.
- In addition, the protection of these coal rights would support President Biden's Executive Order 14008, Tackling the Climate Crisis at Home and Abroad (commonly referred to as "30x30" conservation initiative), by conserving land and resources, stopping negative impacts to biodiversity and climate change, and protecting public health and local economies.

Please email letters of support to allison.gillum@usda.gov by Thursday, October 21, 2021.

Feel free to add some of your personal story to the letter: why you care about protecting the homelands of the Native Eyak People, the wild salmon, abundance of wilderness and wildlife, clean water, etc.



Please address letters of support to:

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