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PRESS RELEASE

Community Response Unanimous: Local nonprofits and Cordova City Council Oppose Permitting to Explore and Drill for Oil and Gas in Katalla and Controller Bay in the Gulf of Alaska

***The Department of Natural Resources Preliminary Finding says the Application
“in the State’s Best Interest”***

CORDOVA, ALASKA.

After advocating for a more reasonable comment period, community-driven nonprofits turned to the Cordova City Council to take its measure on support for a State Department of Natural Resources finding that drilling for oil and gas along the famed Copper River delta coastline, immediately adjacent to a State Critical Fish & Wildlife Habitat area, is in the State’s best interest.

“Cordova District Fishermen United has opposed oil and gas exploration and development along the northern Gulf of Alaska coastline . . . for over 30 years. The Copper River and Bering River districts are active commercial fishing grounds, and stakeholders include the 537 Area E gillnet permit holders who participate in the commercial fishery within both of these districts. Commercial fishing is at the core of our community, both economically and culturally, and consistently, Cordova ranks among the top fishing ports nationwide” wrote CDFU in a letter to the Cordova City Council.

The initial notice from the State was issued on August 2, 2019 to a small number of people in Cordova, Alaska who are on a specific email list serve by the Department of Natural Resources:

The Alaska Department of Natural Resources (DNR), Division of Oil and Gas (DO&G), gives notice, under AS 38.05.945(a)(6), that it has issued the Gulf of Alaska Oil and Gas Exploration License Preliminary Written Finding of the Director. The director has preliminarily found that issuing the Gulf of Alaska Oil and Gas Exploration License is in “...the state’s best interests”.

The public was given only 30 days to comment. Members of the community reached out to one another, and in unison, Cordova District Fishermen United, Copper River Watershed Project, Eyak Preservation Council, the Copper River / Prince William Sound Marketing Association and the Prince William Sound Audubon Society requested a 30-day extension. Now, the comment period has been extended to November 4, 2019.

The concerned Cordovans then reached out to the Cordova City Council, and submitted a resolution . . . STATING SUPPORT FOR AREA E SALMON FISHERIES AND OPPOSITION TO EXPLORATION OR DRILLING FOR OIL AND GAS IN THE GULF OF ALASKA. This resolution passed unanimously on September 18, 2019.

In addition to the local groups uniting to protect Controller Bay and Katalla, individual Cordovans are also expressing concern. Mike Mickelson, a second-generation Cordovan said: “As a commercial fisherman born and raised in Cordova, the absolute worst weather we see is in the Controller Bay and Katalla area. The regularity of extreme weather events makes it impossible to safeguard our world class salmon habitat. The ocean is shallow and frequently is subject to high surf conditions for miles offshore. Under no circumstances should oil and gas permitting be allowed in this region. The last attempts of oil development in the 80’s have still not been cleaned up, and it is extremely concerning that there is even consideration of allowing the same company access to this area again.”

Cassandra Energy Corporation’s President William Stevens has shown interest in oil drilling in Katalla since the 1980’s. Decaying buildings, drill sites and unlined oil pits from the failed forays remain at the site with which Cassandra Energy was involved in the early 1980’s. Then, in the early 2000’s, Cassandra Energy attempted the permitting process numerous times again, with more rejections. Strong regional opposition to oil and gas development in the sensitive salmon habitat of Controller Bay stretches back as long as Cassandra’s interest.

Alaska environmental groups remain concerned about well sites that were never fully cleaned up by Cassandra Energy. Now, the Acting Division of Oil and Gas Director, Jim Beckham, has signed the Preliminary Finding that, if finalized, would give Cassandra Energy Corporation the exclusive rights to explore 65,773 acres at Katalla and in Controller Bay, at the mouth of the Bering River. The area of mostly tidelands and near shore state waters is adjacent to the Copper River Delta State Critical Habitat Area. Much of the surrounding uplands area is Chugach National Forest land. The region supports a rich commercial wild salmon fishery and is home to important historical and cultural sites.

Eyak Native and commercial fisherman Dune Lankard confirms: “This entire area is of high cultural and historical significance to our Eyak people and the Tlingit and Chugach tribes who inhabited the region. For thousands of years Indigenous people thrived off the bounty of the wild food and wild salmon resources in Controller Bay and along the Gulf of Alaska all the way to Yakutat.”

“To sacrifice this sacred place that provides a subsistence and commercial fishing way of life for many, that is comparable to none, for an oil bonanza dream that is based on greed and exploitation that benefits just a few, would be a loss and mistake beyond belief, especially after what we are still living with in the wake of the Exxon oil spill,” Lankard further stated.

The public comment deadline is 5PM AK November 4, 2019. Comments can be sent to the Department of Oil and Gas via email: dog.bif@alaska.gov or mail: Best Interest Findings, 500 W. 7th Ave., Suite 1100, Anchorage, AK 99501

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Attached:

Cordova City Council Resolution

Overhead Photo from Katalla; credit: *Nels Evangelista / Eyak Preservation Council*