



You are not logged in. [Log in here.](#)

- [AUTOS](#) [JOBS](#) [REAL ESTATE](#) [CLASSIFIEDS](#) [log in](#) [log out](#) [my account](#) [faq](#)
- [subscribe](#) [archives](#) [newspaper ads](#) [contact us](#) [juneau brides](#) [clubhooligan.com](#) [aklegislature](#) [blogs](#) [visitor guide](#)

NEWS

- » [Empire Front Page](#)
- » [Local News](#)
- » [Opinion](#)
- » [Letters To The Editor](#)
- » [ClubHooligan.com](#)
- » [Neighbors](#)
- » [State & Regional News](#)
- » [Obituaries](#)
- » [Weather](#)
- » [Archives](#)
- » [Alaska AP Wire](#)
- » [National AP Wire](#)
- » [RSS](#)
- » [Health](#)
- » [SE Alaska Real Estate & Rental](#)
- » [Juneau-Skagway Road Series](#)
- » [Looking Forward](#)

SPORTS

- » [Local Sports](#)
- » [Empire Outdoors](#)
- » [Juneau Softball](#)
- » [JDHS Sports](#)
- » [Gold Medal 2007](#)
- » [Golf News & Scores](#)



This belongs to all of us. 'National' means all of us.

◆ **Melanie Heacox of Gustavus**

A land vast and wild

Controversy over drilling in the arctic refuge has boosted interest so much that tour operators turned away clients this year

By BILL McALLISTER
The Juneau Empire

There are no roads, trails or designated campsites in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, a 19-million-acre area almost as large as South Carolina. Visitors must float rivers, book small planes or walk in at their own risk.

It's this sense of remoteness and isolation that attracts those with the stamina ◆ and the money ◆ to go on a guided ANWR excursion of a week or more at a cost of \$2,300 to \$3,200.

This summer, as never before, the refuge has attracted visitors, many from the Lower 48. Most arrive already opposed to drilling for oil in ANWR's coastal plain. Their predispositions are confirmed by what they see.

Paul Haseman, a United Parcel Service driver from Indianapolis, went on a hike in the midnight sun at Caribou Pass, and commented afterward: "I had a few spiritual moments. Hard to put into words." He said whatever oil could be recovered ◆ a small amount, he believes ◆ would be exported to Asia, anyway. Haseman knows about the Gwich'in Athabascans of Arctic Village, just south of the refuge, and he supports their struggle to protect the caribou herd that has often calved on the coastal plain before circling back toward Gwich'in hunting grounds.

But in the arctic island village of Kaktovik, about 50 miles northwest of Caribou Pass, views like those expressed by Haseman are anathema.



Perennial passage: A herd of about 100 caribou migrate in June through Caribou Pass in the northeast corner of Alaska's Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. Tourist numbers are going up as the refuge gains national interest with the possibility of oil exploration and drilling.

PHOTO By MICHAEL PENN

What:

Where:

FUN

- » [UAS Connections](#)
- » [Job Fair](#)
- » [Capital City Weekly](#)
- » [ClubHooligan.com](#)
- » [Food Challenge!](#)
- » [Submit "Around Town" Event](#)

- » [Books](#)
- » [Slideshows](#)
- » [Spotted](#)
- » [Select TV](#)
- » [Movie Listings](#)
- » [Juneau History](#)
- » [Poll Results](#)

USEFUL

- » [Classifieds](#)
- » [Email Newsletter](#)
- » [Stop N' Shop](#)
- » [Subscribe](#)
- » [2007 Employment Guide](#)
- » [Jobs At The Empire](#)
- » [Open Carrier Routes](#)
- » [Local Maps](#)
- » [Advertising](#)
- » [Contact Us](#)

search jobs
in juneau
or statewide

**alaska
Job
net.com**

powered by
YAHOO! hotjobs

share **YOUR** photos
register and create
as many galleries
of your shots as
you want!

spotted.juneauempire.com

Mayoral aide Karl Francis, a professor who has written a lengthy statement on behalf of the Inupiat Eskimo community, refers derisively to "urban wilderness buffs" pursuing an "odd lust" in ANWR. "Indeed, we see these people as dangerously naive with a strange religious fanaticism that is both weird and frightening," he wrote.

Everywhere, it seems, the battle lines are drawn between members of Congress, between ecotourists from the Lower 48 and the majority of Alaskans, and between the residents of Native villages closest to the refuge.



On the lookout: Writer and photographer Kim Heacox of Gustavus waits to photograph caribou near Caribou Pass.
PHOTO By MICHAEL PENN

Tourism operators in ANWR say the threat of oil exploration has generated such interest that they've turned people away this year. A common refrain is that people want to see the refuge before it's spoiled.

Several small groups of rafters, backpackers and photographers converged on a sunny day at Caribou Pass, in the rapidly ascending foothills of the Brooks Range, overlooking the coastal plain where oil exploration would occur.

"As far as I'm concerned, leave Alaska alone," said Robert Vandegrift of North Dakota, a meteorological technician with the National Weather Service, during a break from rafting on the Kongakut River in ANWR in June.

"Don't drill. That sums it up," said Joan Miller, a Seattle physician. "You'd never drill for oil in a nursery, so you shouldn't drill where the caribou calve."

As the visitors camped by the Kongakut, next to a gravel air strip, they observed hundreds of caribou making the annual summer migration from Canada. Rafters also reported seeing wolverine, porcupine, bear, sheep, moose and golden eagles while traveling the river. Within ANWR, there are 180 species of birds, nine species of marine mammals, and 36 species each of fish and land mammals, according to the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service.

From the top of a 2,700-foot dome-shaped mountain offering a sweeping view of the coastal plain and the slowly melting pack ice offshore in the Beaufort Sea with the peaks of the Brooks Range cascading toward the southern horizon there is no sign of human activity.

As he rests from a hike up the steep, tussock-covered slope, Massachusetts computer programmer David Woods says the idea of an oil rig and pipeline appearing on the landscape is "pretty awful."

Along with the many Kaktovik residents who say that their generally pro-development views should be respected, opinion polls in Alaska largely have shown a clear majority of residents favor oil exploration in ANWR.

Anchorage pollster Dave Dittman said the smallest statewide margin he ever found, 64 percent to 29



Moving on: Robert

percent, came just after the Exxon Valdez oil spill in 1989. In February of this year, Dittman's poll showed 75-23 in favor.

"It's largely by default. It's like, 'Why not?'" Dittman said in an interview. "We need the resource; it's there; let's go get it."

In recent years, environmentalists have commissioned polls showing a much narrower margin. But at Caribou Pass, writer-photographer Kim Heacox of Gustavus in Southeast Alaska contends the issue is too important to be decided on a "local control" basis, anyway.

"This belongs to all of us," agreed wife Melanie, a former park ranger. " 'National' means all of us."

European romanticists complained for centuries about Americans' propensity to "prefer the useful over the beautiful," Kim Heacox said. Paraphrasing Alexis de Tocqueville's "Democracy in America" from 1831, he said, "And they will insist that the beautiful be useful."

It was East Coast congressmen who later protected the area that is now Yellowstone National Park, he said. "Large sweeping strides in conservation in America have almost never been local."



All-night hiking: Hikers chase the midnight sun on a mountain ridge in the Caribou Pass area of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge.

PHOTO By MICHAEL PENN

you can't find anywhere else."

Jeff Sloss of Juneau, a rafting guide for Alaska Discovery, said he's been doing ANWR trips since 1986 and has had very satisfied customers. "They're usually blown away."

Since ANWR became a campaign issue in the 2000 presidential race, interest has spiked, Sloss said. Some of this summer's trips were booked full for a year, he said.

Jettmar, who has been guiding in ANWR since 1987, said

Vandegraft, left, of North Dakota, and Paul Haseman, of Indiana, break down their campsite in Caribou Pass during the final morning of a 10-day guided rafting trip down the Kongakut River in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge.

PHOTO By MICHAEL PENN

Karen Jettmar, whose Anchorage-based Equinox Wilderness Expeditions conducts ANWR tours, also takes exception to the resentment expressed in Kaktovik about ecotourism.

"They all get huge dividends from oil. Everyone has a truck, a snowmachine, a four-wheeler, prefab house. They hunt for caribou. They can hunt for whales. They get it all. And they can sit there and say, 'We don't want oil development offshore, but we don't care about our brothers, the Gwich'in.' It seems like such a selfish attitude to me."

Jettmar says she's trying to create advocates for protecting the refuge as much as she's trying to make money.

"This is a place that can change people's lives," Jettmar said. "It's that feeling of freedom that



she generally does four trips ♦ three river rafting and one backpacking. But this summer, she offered a total of 12 outings.

The refuge could get 1,000 visitors this year, based upon data from commercial guides and air taxi operators, says Bev Reitz, spokeswoman for the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service in Fairbanks. That's up from a range of 550 to 880 as the drilling issue has waxed and waned over the years, and it doesn't include private parties that enter on their own, Reitz said.

Whatever the numbers, it's not just those making the trip who understand the value of ANWR, Kim Heacox said. People just "want to know it's here," he said.

"If the arctic refuge is so valuable for so many tomorrows, then in a world of changing climate and values ... let the next generation decide. Let's decide 30 years from now."



Arctic vista: Flowers in full bloom fill the tundra above the Kongakut River in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. The 19 million-acre refuge is almost as big as South Carolina, and is home to 180 species of birds and 36 species of land mammals.

PHOTO By MICHAEL PENN
