

MORE INFO SEE:
www.landrights.org/ak

CONSERVATIVE VOICE FOR ALASKANS

Times

WILLIAM J. TOBIN
Senior editor

Is Park Service trampling on Alaskans?

By RICK KENYON

Not long ago, the Pilgrim family set out to live their dream, to live in peace in their little cabin on McCarthy Creek, with 400 acres to call their own. It was located 14 miles from town, on an old mining road built a hundred years ago — a road that knows washouts, mudslides and blizzards.

No matter, the Pilgrims, strong in faith and in numbers, settled in, fitting in to this vast land like a cold hand in a warm glove. It was a match truly made in heaven. That the property had been an active copper mine before National Park Service regulations made it impossible for the former owner to continue operations made little difference to the members of this God-fearing family.

The little town of McCarthy received them with open arms. Their impromptu "gospel-grass" music concerts with sweet harmony accompanied by fiddle and mandolin brought tears to our eyes. Their quickness to come to the aid of a neighbor with an offer of help was welcome. Even their strong faith in God was respected by saint and sinner alike.

The old mining road had seen better days, but as McCarthy folk traveled to visit the Pilgrims, and the Pilgrims hauled food for the family and livestock, the road was patched in the worst places. Nobody thought about getting a permit — folks had been doing this same thing for years.

Enter the National Park Service. Not content with such fine neighbors, the NPS began a campaign to foul the Pilgrims' good name. Before meeting these fine folks, NPS rangers at Kennicott gathered the NPS maintenance crew together and told them to start locking things up because of "those people" who had moved in just over the ridge at Bonanza.

NPS rangers were caught spreading rumors about ammunition being carried in violin cases. Someone brought this disgrace to the attention of Wrangell-St. Elias National Park Superintendent Gary Candelaria. Instead of being stopped, this ugly flow of rumors seemed to increase, only getting nastier.

On April 8, 2003, the NPS hurled another bombshell. The Pilgrims, the NPS said, had built an "illegal road." Candelar-



"Want me to try to get you a private ward?"

ia posted notices around McCarthy saying that the 100-year-old mining road was now illegal, because the family had just created it.

When confronted with the fact that the road was, in fact, an old mining road, Candelaria finally admitted that the road had been built more than 80 years ago, and started muttering something about a permit. The Pilgrims had also cleared some alder brush near their cabin that had regrown since the former owner cleared it a few years ago. Some of that brush "may have been" on park lands, Candelaria said. NPS would send a survey team up to define the property lines.

No problem, the Pilgrims said, but please, use our airstrip and not helicopters, as the noise and confusion of helicopters near the children and livestock is unsettling. The surveyors may even stay at the family's lodge — free of cost to the government — and we'll help them find the property lines and clear the brush. No way. The NPS said that not only would they use helicopters, they would also send a "Special Events Team" (SET) of specially trained rangers to "protect" the surveyors. The Pilgrims, NPS says, are "dangerous."

The only thing dangerous around McCarthy is this use-more-force mentality of the current NPS administration. Visitor services at Wrangell-St. Elias have been severely curtailed in order to pay for this

government-sponsored campaign against a family that epitomizes gentleness, strength born of faith, and a respect for all about them, from the dizzying mountains to the folks in McCarthy, 42 strong. This is the family that offered their labor and materials to rebuild a church wall that recently burned. Dangerous? Hardly!

Today, word is filtering back to McCarthy that some people are being told that park programs are being cut because the NPS had to devote all of its resources to deal with "those kooks out in McCarthy." The town banded together, wrote e-mail letters, made phone calls, and the NPS finally bowed to public pressure and common sense, telling their SET team to stay home — at least for the present.

Now, the word from the NPS is that the family "cleared 13 miles of park." Willing allies in the press dutifully repeat the story as if it were fact. It is not. The reason that the old mining road looks like a road is because — it is a road! Not pristine wilderness, but a road — built by other hardy souls, decades ago.

At the other end of the park, almost lost amid this mind-boggling scenario, is Doug Fredericks, owner of Sportsman's Paradise Lodge. Guests can no longer fish at Copper Lake, where Doug has six cabins and boats. In hand with the Wilderness Alliance, the NPS has closed Doug's ATV route to the lake, a route that was created by his father, long before the land became a national park.

Last week, Doug received a citation from the NPS for constructing buildings or other facilities within Wrangell-St. Elias National Park without a permit. He had neatly laid some planking over the braided areas of his trail without spending \$20,000 plus for the engineering drawings necessary for a permit.

Alaska is at a crossroads. It's time to decide. Are people like the Pilgrims and Doug Fredericks criminals, to be dragged into court and ruined financially?

Or do we want to be able to enjoy our parks, to fish at Doug's lodge, to visit the Pilgrims at their remote cabin and listen to their sweet music and harmony around the campfire?

Rick Kenyon is owner and editor of the Wrangell St. Elias News.

The Anchorage Times

Editors: **TOM BRENNAN**, 264-8191; **PAUL JENKINS**, 264-8192; **WILLIAM J. TOBIN**, 264-8193.
Associate editor: **JAN SINGYKE**, 264-8107 • P.O. Box 100040, Anchorage, AK 99510 • FAX: 907-264-8194
• e-mail: AnchTimes@alaska.net

The Voice of the Times does not represent the views of the Anchorage Daily News. It is published under an agreement to preserve the separate editorial voice of the former Anchorage Times.