

# FRIENDS OF MAT-SU



## INSIDE

### Towering Over the Mat-Su: How Tall Structures Impact Our Community

*By Mimi Peabody*

Recently the residents of Lazy Mountain finally completed a comprehensive plan that was two years in the making. Just as the plan passed public approval Morris Communications (MCC) let the Lazy Mountain Community Council know they were submitting an application to obtain a permit to build a 199' radio tower on the slopes of Lazy Mountain. The borough requires companies to obtain conditional use permits for many things such as junk yards, mobile home parks, and tall structures over 100'. During this process the public can provide written comments and testify in person at the Planning Commission's public hearing.

Not surprisingly, there was overwhelming opposition to the proposed tower on Lazy Mountain, including the Lazy Mountain Community Council. Opponents believe a tower would significantly detract from the spirit of Lazy Mountain and that it would violate the Comprehensive Plan designed to reflect that spirit. For example, one of the overall goals of the plan is to, "Protect and maintain the natural resources, natural environment, water and air quality, scenic view sheds, trails, and recreational opportunities". Moreover, the plan explicitly states that, "to protect the scenic values on Lazy Mountain and the associated views, tall or large structures and other similar construction that blocks the views of the mountains, and other natural features is discouraged."

Some opponents cited legal concerns of subdivision codes and some were bothered that this was a non-essential service that did not enhance cell phone coverage or emergency service response, but simply added one

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TAKE SPECIAL NOTE:



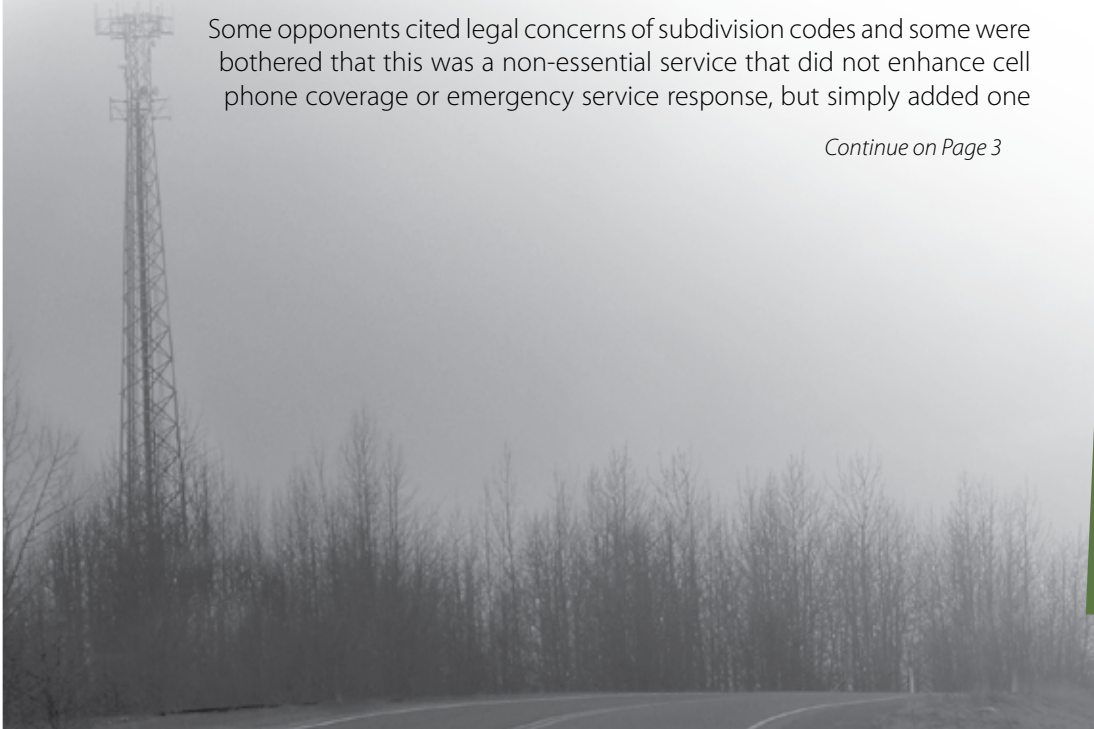
**DON'T MISS THE FoMS  
ANNUAL MEETING**

**March 29, 2008  
Agate Inn - 6pm to 9pm  
Refreshments and Appetizers**

**Featured Speakers:  
Rob McLeod, Full Metal Minerals**

**Mark Mayo, MSB Planning  
Director**

**We'll be kicking off our  
major donor campaign so  
bring your wallets!**



# LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR

## CONTACT US

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## OUR BOARD

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## Happy 10th Anniversary FoMS!

*By Kathy Wells, Director of Friends of Mat-Su*

Friends of Mat-Su (FoMS) is alive and well because of you, as one of our many members. Your commitment to staying informed and involved in land use issues and your participation in the planning process at many levels in the community is making a positive difference.

For 10 years, FoMS has been educating residents and policy makers about the importance of land use planning, despite the anti-planning, private property rights mind set. We are seeing change in the valley. People want their private property rights but want to protect their property value and recognize that planning growth and development can give them both.

FoMS has come a long way since its humble beginnings in May of 1998. For instance, who would have thought that the former director of FoMS would be currently serving on the Borough Assembly or that other members of our organization would take the time to serve on various boards and commissions?

And who would have thought that the Borough would be contracting with FoMS to work on an education and outreach project concerning green infrastructure in our community? These are all tributes to our effectiveness and belief that planning our growth is positive, visionary and good for the community.

Our success is due to coalition building, advocating for a thorough public process and working closely with local government. Consequently, progress for planning and implementing plans is happening in all areas of our borough. However, too many people still do not know about the issues or that FoMS exists. At the annual board retreat in January, the hot topic was how to be more effective. The board committed to a plan of action to expand membership and seek sustainable funding options to make it happen. The board is energized about the future and invites you to join us as we take our next step to grow as an organization.

In the coming months we will be asking you to take an extra step in raising awareness about FoMS and the important issues we face as a growing community. Do you know like-minded individuals that would join FoMS and lend their voice in the planning arena? Would you be willing to host a small house party with your neighbors and one of our staff to introduce them to FoMS and the work we do? Think about it, the potential is great for keeping the borough a great place to live, work and play with more voices and active participation. We can't wait to see what the next ten years brings! 🌱

**Friends of Mat-Su thanks the following foundations, corporations, and companies for their generous support:**

Alaska Conservation Foundation  
Carr-Gottstein Properties  
Full Metal Minerals  
Patagonia Inc.  
The Pumpkin Hill Foundation  
Eastman Kodak - The Conservation Fund

**Special thanks to Jim Chesbro for his service on the Board of Directors.**



*Kathy Wells*



Mimi Peabody

Towering Over continued from Page 1

more radio station to the Valley that would benefit a for profit corporation and the landowners who would receive monthly payments for hosting the tall tower with a blinking red light. The Planning Commission heard the public, weighed the arguments and ultimately denied the permit unanimously. MCC now has the ability to appeal this decision through the Board of Adjustments and Appeals, as of this writing MCC has not filed an appeal.

As we wait for the final decision on the Lazy Mountain tower, it is important to understand how locating towers affects the entire Mat-Su Valley. Neighborhoods have struggled with this issue for years as more and more towers are needed to keep up with the demand from cell phone users, TV viewers, radio listeners, and the like, while operators seek to locate towers in convenient places. Sometimes the location is relatively benign and no one complains about impacts from light pollution and the visual disturbance of a great view of our spectacular mountains. But more and more towers are being placed in non-compatible locations and end up creating a nuisance for residents. The Lazy Mountain tower is a perfect example of this problem.

Therefore, it is becoming necessary that our planning department take a serious look at planning the location of future towers and emphasize the importance of co-locating towers to minimize the number of new towers while keeping up with the demand for tower needs. We understand that MCC could have used another tower in the area but because of local regulations or lack of regulations, this was not required so they sought to build a brand new tower.

The borough will be examining this issue and revamping policies to protect all neighborhoods from living with unwanted towers. One solution would be to locate towers on borough owned land. This would avoid conflicts within neighborhoods and would offer residents predictability in where towers could be built. An additional benefit would be revenue for the borough as the lessor. Finally, the take home lessons that were learned from the situation on Lazy Mountain are threefold and worth noting. First, Comprehensive Plans are a valuable tool and the Planning Commission takes them seriously. Second, the public process works (most of the time). Residents provided comments that were seriously evaluated by the Planning Commission, despite the reluctance of MCC to adequately engage the community. Finally, planning for tower location and co-location is sorely needed in the Mat-Su and we will actively be pushing the borough to do just that! 🌱



### April Major Donor Campaign Time • Membership Renewal Form

Friends of Mat-Su (FoMS) provides land use information, advocates for borough wide planning, promotes citizen involvement and offers tools and support to develop a healthy and vibrant community.

Name (please print) \_\_\_\_\_

Agency/Organization/Company Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Mailing Address: \_\_\_\_\_ City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ ZIP \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Fax: \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_

**Membership:**  New  Renewal

- Annual Individual \$30.00
- Annual Family \$50.00
- Annual Student \$20.00
- Community Council \$35.00
- Lifetime Membership \$500.00
- Business/Corporation \$100.00
- Donation \$\_\_\_\_\_

**Payment Options:**

Payment: \$\_\_\_\_\_ TOTAL

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**RETURN TO FOMS: P.O. BOX 116 • PALMER, AK • 99645 • PH: 746-0130 • FAX: 746-0142**

***We look forward to your ongoing support!***



## MEMBER'S CORNER

# A Report on Environmental Challenges Facing the Mat-Su

By Ralph Baldwin

The 10th Alaska Forum on the Environment was held in Anchorage at the Egan Convention Center, February 11–15. Once again it was an impressive event with more than 170 presenters and in 80 breakout sessions. As Edwin Markham, schoolteacher and poet said, “Choices are the hinges of destiny.” I decided to spend my time in sessions on climate change and mining in Alaska. The decisions we make about how we deal with the warming of our landscape and with the reality of resource extraction, an economic foundation of our state, will affect us far into the future.

Senator Lisa Murkowski on Monday morning at the first keynote said, “Most of us here today understand that Alaska’s climate has been changing during the past three decades. We know that the North is warming. We’ve seen that the Arctic ice pack is shrinking, that permafrost is thawing, and that vegetation and fish and wildlife habitat is changing. Climate change is a worldwide battle, and we need to establish a beachhead right here at home – literally.”

Governor Sarah Palin has established the Alaska Climate Change Sub-Cabinet to assist in preparing and implementing a climate change strategy for the State. Climate change on the large scale is reflected locally. Backcountry travelers in Southcentral Alaska note significant retreat of glaciers in the Talkeetna and Chugach Ranges. One experienced mountaineer reports the Eklutna Glacier has retreated at least one-half mile over the 15 years he has been leading glacier traverses in the area. Permanent snowfields and glaciers at Hatcher Pass are likewise retreating and brushy vegetation creeping up mountain slopes.

There has been much publicity regarding poor salmon runs in Mat-Su rivers. According to the website of the Alaska Conservation Foundation (<http://www.akcf.org/>), the 2005 stream monitoring survey conducted by Cook Inlet Keeper and Homer Soil and Water Conservation District found that temperatures of each stream were greater than 55° F for more than 80 days. Fisheries experts consider such temperatures unhealthy for spawning due to risk of increased siltation and disease. Eric Hoberg, USDA, stated increased levels of fungal parasite in Chinook salmon are leading to substantial pre-spawn mortality. Thirty to 40% of the Chinook in the Yukon drainage are currently affected.

The CDC workshop focused on the complicated relationships between climate change and public health. Joel Scheraga,

U.S. EPA, cited the Arctic Climate Impact Assessment in stating that the most vulnerable groups will be the elderly, very young and the very ill. Those who live in close association with the land and in remote communities will be especially vulnerable. Direct impacts from extreme weather events will result from avalanches, storms, floods, and rockslides. “We can plan ahead or we can react.”

The price of gold climbed to a 10-year record high of \$953.80 this past February. Much of the Hatcher Pass Management Area in the mountains above Mat-Su is part of the Willow Creek Mining District. This District included 510 unpatented and 22 patented claims according to the 1986 Hatcher Pass Management Plan with a conservative estimate of all-time gold production at over 400,000 ounces. It is no surprise that there is renewed interest in mining at Hatcher Pass.

The basics of mineral exploration and surface and subsurface mining in Alaska were reviewed in the mining sessions I attended. Most state lands are open to mineral entry as the state doctrine is for multiple-use. Lands closed to mineral entry are usually legislatively designated areas like parks and public use areas. Light exploration for mineral deposits is a generally allowed use in most areas. Permitting is required when land disturbance occurs such as trenching, core or rotary drilling, or bulk sampling. Environmental baseline studies are not required until exploration is in its advanced stages. Once mineral resources are adequately measured, the feasibility and economics of the ore reserve can be determined.

Potential environmental impacts from mining are soil and land-based contamination, air impacts, and water quality and quantity impacts to both ground and surface water. Mining operations are part and parcel of Alaska’s economy and they bring with them the specter of serious environmental consequences. However, proper collection of baseline data and an effective environmental impact study (EIS) at both the state and federal levels can and should serve to protect habitat, fish and wildlife, and public health.

A lot of information relevant to Mat-Su and to Alaska was presented at the 10th Alaska Forum on the Environment. The dynamic and constructive exchanges between all sectors of the Alaskan community: rural and urban, government and industry, scientist and citizen were exemplary. I encourage all readers to attend the 2009 Alaskan Forum on the Environment (<http://www.akforum.com/>). An individual can make a difference; a determined community can make a *huge* difference. 🌱

# MEET YOUR BOARD



## Mary Barret, Treasurer

I was just dimly aware of FoMS before my husband, Jeff Arndt, worked as the CBM Coordinator for 5 months in 2004. Because of his involvement, I too entered the fray of community activism and saw how with CBM that FoMS came into its own as a force to be heard and reckoned with. FoMS was able to educate property owners, forge alliances, and work with the Borough Assembly to pass a protective ordinance. In October of that year I was invited to join the Board. I was excited to band together with like-minded people rather than sitting on the couch complaining about issues. Eventually, I took on the role of Madame Treasurer, which Kathy Wells insisted was the right next step for me in my evolution as a Board member.

It has been an eye opener to look at the expenses even a non-profit incurs and how our operations hang on the amount of money that a grant brings in year to year. Importantly, obtaining grants depends on a strong demonstration of member support in dollars as well as heart, so as Treasurer I appreciate your membership renewals and donations. Furthermore, I encourage all of you to find new members so that FoMS can continue to be a voice of land-use planning in our growing community. Our staff does incredible work, but we do have to pay them and I dream about being able to add staff to work on more needed projects and with other organizations.

I have lived in Alaska for 26 years and currently work as a Nurse Practitioner in Palmer. I run to work year round and if you see a woman running with reflective tape on her backpack along Springer Loop, that would be me. Prior to living in Palmer, I lived for 14 years in Chickaloon and gave some input into the comprehensive plan, not knowing at the time how important those plans are in ensuring that growth happens the way you and your neighbors want it to. I have lived in Palmer for 6 years with my husband, 2 cats, and a giant garden. 🌿



## Jim Klaunder, Secretary

As Alaskans we have vast opportunities. One of those opportunities is to plan what our towns, boroughs, and state will look like in the future. Growth and development are happening fast. We can decide, we must decide how we will grow and develop; otherwise the developers will make those decisions for us.

I have been on the FoMS board of directors for 9 years. During this time I feel I have brought perspectives from having lived on the East Coast and from living right here in the Mat-Su Valley. In those years, FoMS grew from a small organization facing what at times seemed like impossible tasks to the FoMS of today that is accepted and even respected. We have accomplished a lot but there is still more to do. Most of the accomplishments we have achieved as an organization are due to our wonderful staff and our great membership.

As board members we all appreciate the work that you all do. Thank you very much. 🌿



## The Future of Valley Forests

In 1989, 137,014 acres of borough owned land were identified and listed in the borough adopted first Multiple-Use Forest Management Plan. For the past three years the borough has been drafting new policies and procedures for identifying, planning and managing borough owned forestlands. This update is important because a comprehensive timber inventory was never completed and changes in sociological, environmental and economic conditions have occurred.

In order to identify forest management units the borough is engaging in 3 phases.

**PHASE 1** – Review all borough-owned land that is within existing forest management units and recommend, revise and identify new units.

**PHASE 2** – Utilize results from Phase 1 and public comments from that phase to develop a new multiple use forest management plan.

**PHASE 3** – After the new plan is adopted this phase will recommend both a five-year timber sale schedule and sale implementation schedule.

The borough will be seeking public review and comment during each phase and before Assembly consideration. There will also be a land use and timber harvest plan prepared for any area scheduled for a timber harvest.

This is an important plan and deserves public scrutiny and we urge everyone to review the plan and weigh in. The borough is requesting comments on Phase 1 no later than Friday, March 21, 2008. Copies are available at local libraries and at the borough in the land management office. You can also review the plan at the borough website:

► <http://www.matsugov.us/LandManagement/AssetManagementPlans.cfm>

## To Permit or not to Permit: The Planning Commission and the AOGCC weigh in on CBM in the Valley

During the summer of 2007 Fowler Oil & Gas (FOG) applied for a conditional use permit to drill for coal bed methane in the Mat-Su Valley. FOG is the first company to test the Borough's strict CBM ordinance and to submit all the necessary paperwork required by the planning department. In October 2007, after a thorough public process that involved a public hearing, the Planning Commission voted to issue FOG the conditional use permit with a few stipulations, including the regular testing of ground water in the surrounding area.

Companies seeking to develop oil and gas resources are also required to obtain a permit from the Alaska Oil and Gas Conservation Commission (AOGCC). In their application, FOG requested several exemptions and waivers from the conventional oil and gas regulations. The company cited these waivers were needed in order to conduct the directional drilling project and because the state does not have CBM specific criteria in their regulations. The AOGCC held a public hearing in January and FoMS provided comments concerning the need for CBM specific regulations and the need to protect fresh ground water resources. Recently, the AOGCC approved all the waivers except the requested waiver to the requirement to drill a pilot hole with a diameter no larger than the diverter line, so FOG must comply with the provisions of 20AAC 25.035(c) (1)(B). Although, the AOGCC has granted these waivers and variances they have not yet approved FOG's application for a permit to drill the subject well. 🌱

## Title 17 Amendments: Clean Water Now and for the Future

During the rewrite of the borough subdivision code it became apparent that water quality, riparian habitat and retaining native vegetation along water bodies was not addressed in the subdivision code and only minimally in Title 17 the borough land use zoning code. The Platting board recommended to adopt regulations in Title 17 and the Planning Commission, after a lengthy debate and discussion concurred with the Platting board recommendation.

Borough planning staff convened a technical science committee, which met for a year to work on draft strategies, and in Fall 2007 a citizen's working group, with FoMS as a participant, began meeting to create draft legislation based on the science committee recommendations and a citizen perspective.

The citizen's group is continuing to meet and hopes to have a draft ordinance ready for the public process in late spring or early summer. This is a critical step in assuring water quality for humans, fish and wildlife as the borough population grows and addresses development pressures. We urge our members to get involved and comment on this legislation as it works its way through the public process. 🌱

# PROJECTS UPDATE

## Taking Green on the Road

FoMS was successfully awarded a contract through the borough competitive process to conduct a community education and outreach campaign for Green Infrastructure. This will be an exciting project working in partnership with borough planning staff to introduce the network design process of communities drafting a plan for their area. It is a hands on grass roots process of residents, business and other interested parties working together. One of the important concepts to promote is the fact that green infrastructure (open space, farm & ranch lands, parks, trails, clean water, fish & wildlife habitat) is as important in development of our borough as gray infrastructure (roads, rail, public facilities, emergency services). So, stay tuned and we will update everyone about the when and where of this campaign. 🌱



## Fostering Coalitions for a Cleaner Big Lake

FoMS recently submitted a grant proposal to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Coastal Program to conduct a watershed education campaign in the Big Lake area. In 2006 The Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) listed Big Lake as an impaired water body for elevated levels of petroleum hydrocarbons, joining Lake Lucille, Cottonwood Creek, and the Matanuska River as highly polluted water bodies. Last spring FoMS conducted the Mat-Su Landowner Watershed Education Project, in which we targeted the residents of Lake Lucille and Cottonwood Creek in a door-to-door outreach campaign. We provided landowners with important information on ways to manage their property that would result in a healthier water body. This project was a big success.

However, in Big Lake we will be using a different approach to accommodate for the many seasonal and recreational users who visit the area. We plan to work closely with local organizations, such as the Big Lake Chamber of Commerce, the Big Lake Community Council, and the Alaska Sailing Club in order to plan an effective watershed education campaign. FoMS and partners from DEC, Fish & Game and the Wasilla Soil and Water Conservation District will work with the local organizations to host a series of open houses in the Fall of 2008 and Spring of 2009. We also plan to work with local school children to do a shoreline landscaping demonstration project in the Spring of 2009. We will keep you updated on our progress and other watershed related projects. Stay tuned! 🌱





## *Friends of Mat-Su*

**Friends of Mat-Su**

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**[www.foms.net](http://www.foms.net)**

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