



Bering River Coal Field

Key Message

Several representatives of the conservation community are sponsoring an initiative to acquire the coal development rights associated with Chugach Alaska Corporation (CAC) lands in the Bering River area of the Chugach National Forest.

Background

The potential development of the Bering River coal field has been an issue of controversy practically since the creation of the Chugach National Forest in 1907. Forest Service Chief Gifford Pinchot was replaced by President Taft in 1910 due to his strong disagreement with Richard Ballinger, Taft's Secretary of the Interior, over the likely fraudulent practices that occurred in the General Land Office (GLO) involving the Katalla and Bering River mining claims while Ballinger was Commissioner of the GLO. The claims were not developed during the early years following the creation of the Chugach National Forest and remain undeveloped today.

In 1982, the Chugach Natives, Inc., an Alaska Native corporation that is now known as CAC, entered into a settlement agreement (CNI Agreement) with the United States and the State of Alaska regarding its selection rights under the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act. Under the CNI Agreement, CAC obtained certain limited rights to explore, develop and produce oil and gas in the Katalla area and a right of access across National Forest System lands to the Bering River coal field located on the Carbon Mountain tract of CAC lands. The Bering River field on CAC's land reportedly has the potential to produce nearly 59 million tons of coal. CAC formed the Bering Development Corporation, a joint venture with a consortium of Korean companies called KADCO to explore and extract coal, which is presumed to be destined primarily for export markets once developed.

CAC's oil and gas rights related to the Katalla area expired in 2007. The Forest Service granted CAC an easement in 2000, in accordance with the terms of the CNI Agreement, to provide access to the Carbon Mountain tract for the Bering River coal field. The surrounding national forest lands are managed primarily for the conservation of fish and wildlife and their habitats as directed in Section 501 (b) of the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act.

Current Situation

CAC has not undertaken actions to develop a road within the easement granted by the Forest Service to access the Bering River coal field. The Forest Service is not aware of actions currently being taken by CAC, KADCO, or any other entity to further develop the coal field. The conservation community has periodically sought support for acquiring these coal development rights to protect fish, wildlife, and subsistence habitats in the Bering River area.

More Information

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