

News from the ALASKA CENTER FOR APPROPRIATE TECHNOLOGY
Box 872020, Wasilla, AK 99687 ph: 907-373-0909

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by Mark Masteller, Executive Director, m.masteller@acat.org

Our mission is to promote research and education for Alaskans in sustainable economic development

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ECOLOGICAL ECONOMICS WITH ERIC LARSON

Almost 50 people attended this January 8 presentation and discussion led by Eric Larson, economist with the Institute of Social and Economic Research at UAA. Eric first described the differences between conventional economics and ecological economics, and how (like many evolutionary changes) the progression to economic models that place value on healthy natural systems has been slow. In large part, this is because traditional economic models were developed when supplies of natural raw materials often seemed limitless. Only in recent years have the limits become obvious. Also, deterioration of natural systems does not fit neatly into the supply and demand "forces" that traditional economists rely upon.

New schools of thought have attempted to place monetary value on natural systems - including watershed benefits, nutrient cycling, biodiversity, habitat, consumptive and non-consumptive benefits, cultural benefits, and value for future generations. Larson reviewed several studies examining these concepts in relation to Alaska. Examples include the value - in dollars and jobs - of fishing and hunting (sport, commercial, subsistence), carbon sequestration by intact forests, ecotourism (such as wildlife viewing), and "existence value," to name a few.

After some wide-ranging discussion, Eric finished up with a brief introduction to an alternate economic model, called the Genuine Progress Indicator. The GPI was developed by a group called Redefining Progress (www.rprogress.org) as an alternative to the widely quoted Gross Domestic Product. While the GDP is simply the sum total of spending, the GPI attempts to distinguish between spending on "good" versus "bad." For instance, under the GDP increased spending for health care (due to more obesity, for

instance) or cleaning up an oil spill is a GOOD thing. With the GPI, those costs are subtracted from the measure of economic health, to give a truer picture of whether we are "progressing."

I want to thank Eric for his willingness to present this sometimes difficult topic, and it was clear that there was room to talk far into the night on different aspects of economics. We had a great audience with lots of questions, and the evening went by far too quickly. If you want to get hold of Eric, you'll have to wait until May, as he's currently backpacking in Patagonia and has left ISER to pursue other work. I believe the adherence (primarily by policy-makers) to outdated economic models is one of Alaska's biggest problems, and we need to develop and refine new models that promote "steady-state" and LOCAL economies. Economists like Eric can help us do that, but there are huge challenges! No reason not to start now.

TOUR AN "ECOLOGICALLY ENGINEERED" HOME

I'm arranging a special, MEMBERS-ONLY opportunity to tour an "ecologically engineered" house built by Robert Crosby and Lou Anne Person-Crosby (of Biorealis Systems, Inc, <http://biorealis.com>). This house, in Eagle River, does NOT have a well or septic system, but instead has a recycling water purification system. Would you like to see how this works? I know I would! Can you imagine NOT having a well and septic? Of course the house has other energy-efficiency aspects, and Biorealis Systems won a national Energy Innovation award for this house in 1987.

While we have not typically limited our events to "members only," I thought this might be a good way to show our appreciation to our members, and an effective tour and discussion cannot include too many people, anyway. I got a pretty good response in my "early warning" email announcement, but if there is room I'll certainly invite others. I figure 20 is probably the maximum for an event like this.

The tour will be Saturday, March 20, at 3:00 pm. I'd like everyone to bring some finger food to share as we visit with Bob and Lou Anne (and each other).

If you are interested in attending, and have NOT already emailed me, please do so (m.masteller@acat.org). If there are not 20 confirmed by March 1, I'll open it up to non-members. Thanks.

NEW BOARD CONVENES JANUARY 16

ACAT's new board met for the first time January 16, including new board members Mollie Boyer (Palmer) and Henry Cole (Fairbanks), and continuing members Harvey Bowers (Wasilla), Roger Rowell (Madison, WI) and Joe LeBeau (Janesville, WI) in attendance. The Valley members gathered (with executive director Mark Masteller) at the Palmer MTA building, to use the teleconferencing facilities that enabled us to connect with board members in Fairbanks and Wisconsin.

The board approved a work plan and budget, based largely on existing activities and stressing the need to develop new revenue streams to provide non-grant income for everyday operating expenses. (Currently, the budget relies heavily on savings and grant income - an unsustainable situation.) We hope to continue developing ways to provide consulting services revolving

around education about, and application of, sustainable economic development concepts in Alaska.

Board members also discussed board positions: Harvey continues as president, Roger as vice-president, Mollie will serve as secretary/treasurer, and Henry and Joe as regular board members. I really appreciate the time and energy these folks are willing to dedicate to ACAT!

BEAMING BIONEERS TO ALASKA, October 15-17, 2004

ACAT is working with Alaska Earth Institute, Alaska Housing Finance Corporation and Chickaloon Village Environmental Protection to bring the annual Bioneers conference to Alaska! The Bioneers (www.bioneers.org), a group that advocates "visionary and practical solutions for restoring the Earth," have organized large October conferences (5000+ people) for several years, and have recently expanded their efforts by encouraging local events supported by satellite connections to the main event. For a set fee, "beaming" locations get live satellite links to the 12 plenary speakers in California. Past speakers have included Janine Benyus, Paul Hawken, Winona LaDuke, John Todd, Terry Tempest Williams, David Orr, and more.

Early efforts to establish an Alaska "beaming" location started in May 2003, and we recently applied to be one of the few new locations for the October 15-17, 2004 event. We got an early boost from AHFC, which has offered to sponsor the entire satellite uplink fee (\$2500). We anticipate holding the event on the UAA campus, and will organize local events - all related to developing sustainable communities - around the plenary sessions.

One primary interest of those of us organizing this event is the chance to inspire and strengthen the network of Alaskans working in the various aspects of "sustainability" - including everything from technology to spirituality. Of course, we can only tackle a limited number of sessions in a 3-day period! If you have ideas for local seminars or other events, please get hold of Mark Masteller (m.masteller@acat.org). There are lots of ways this can take shape, and it's exciting to see the ball rolling!

BIO-DIESEL WORKSHOP: From the Fryer to the Fuel Tank

ACAT is working with Penny Bauder, a graduate student at Alaska Pacific University, to develop a workshop on how to use "waste" fryer oil in your diesel vehicle. Penny will be researching techniques and equipment to safely utilize used oil, as well as developing curricula and materials to stage a workshop on the Kellogg Farm (near Palmer) this September. ACAT will assist with materials acquisition, curricula development, practice sessions, and marketing. Stay tuned for future announcements!

ACAT PRESENTATIONS - THE SCIENCE BEHIND "SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT"

Because the word "sustainable" is used in many different ways these days, I have been developing a presentation that helps people explore the science behind accepted concepts of sustainable development. I recently had a chance to make a short presentation to the Southwest Alaska Municipal Conference, and had chosen - as an example of sustainable development and the competing choices communities must make - the interest in gold mining in the headwaters

of some of the world's richest salmon fisheries. Imagine my delight when the speaker immediately preceding me was a geologist discussing all the mining potential in the region!

Anyway, I mention this only to encourage our members to encourage the folks you are connected with (businesses, service organizations) to contact ACAT about making a presentation aimed at getting people thinking about what we mean by "sustainable" economic development. This can include audience-tailored presentations such as:

"Just What do we mean by Sustainable Economic Development?" (gets at definitions and ecological roots), and,
"The Science Behind Sustainable Development" (addresses the scientific concepts and how they can be applied to various systems.)

I particularly like to encourage discussion involving the expertise of the audience. Got ideas of groups who may be interested? Give me a holler at m.masteller@acat.org.

VIDEO OF OCTOBER 2003 ACAT ANNUAL MEETING

Thanks to the hard work of member Charlie Renideo, we have a video of the six speaker presentations from our October 2003 Annual member meeting. If you would like a loaner copy, please let me know (Mark at m.masteller@acat.org). Speaker presentations include Tim Hudson (fuel cell project, Exit Glacier), Jeff Lowenfels (no-chemical gardening), Russ deForest (encouraging local economies), Patty DeMarco (Sustainability and UAA), Phil St. John (independent energy system at his remote lodge), and Delisa and Charlie Renideo (Vegan lifestyle considerations). Thanks, Charlie!

VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

Webmaster - Do you know of someone who might want to improve our web site, either for a school project or to combine their web skills with their interest in sustainable economic development? You can check out the site at www.acat.org, and help out by emailing Mark at m.masteller@acat.org.

YOUR FEEDBACK APPRECIATED!

Don't be shy about providing feedback - about this newsletter, ACAT's programs or projects, whatever. It'd be great to hear from you!

JOIN US!

Did a good friend send you this newsletter? Help expand the network of folks working to create the Alaska we want to live in! Go to our (developing) web site (www.acat.org) for a membership form, and join up!