

**News from the ALASKA CENTER FOR APPROPRIATE TECHNOLOGY**  
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Volume 13, Number 3 - December 2005  
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Our mission is to promote research and education for Alaskans in sustainable economic development.

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**JANUARY MEMBER MEETING – GEOTHERMAL ENERGY IN ICELAND WITH CHRIS ROSE**

Chris Rose, the director of the Renewable Energy Alaska Project (REAP) and an ACAT member, recently visited Iceland to learn more about their geothermal energy systems. Chris has kindly offered to report on his trip, and share his thoughts on how these resources can and are being developed in Alaska. I'm sure it will lead to some good discussion! The event will take place near Wasilla at:

6:30 PM, January 14, 2006  
Agate Inn Conference room ([www.agateinn.com](http://www.agateinn.com))

Hope to see you there! If you need directions please email me (they are also available on the Agate Inn web site).

**BIONEERS IN ALASKA 2005 A GREAT SUCCESS!**

Often you'll hear Bioneers described as "where the hope is" – and this proved true again as we wrapped up the second *Bioneers in Alaska: Creating Sustainable Communities* conference at UAA. As usual, the plenary speakers were tremendous, and we had an impressive array of locally-led workshops. Over 400 people attended!

The planning effort for Bioneers begins in February (some of us think it never stops!), and several ACAT members serve on the main planning group. Many thanks go to members Margie Warnke, Terri Pauls, Scott Waterman and Michael Allwright for all their work making this great event happen. In addition, many thanks go to our major financial supporters: Alaska Conservation Foundation, Arctic Wire Rope and Supply, Alaska Housing Finance Corporation, Chickaloon Village and Alaska Building Science Network. There were many other sponsors as well – check them out at [www.sustainak.org](http://www.sustainak.org).

We were one of 17 "satellite" sites where the plenary sessions were being shown simultaneously with the main Bioneers conference in California. Knowing that similar events occur all across the country (and in Canada) certainly lends a feeling of "connectedness" as we all strive to create sustainable communities in our own ways. Almost 8,000 people attended the various satellite events, and over 3,000 attended the main conference. Here's the breakdown by site:

Vancouver: 200  
Marion: 750

Taos: 350-400/Albuquerque: 250 per day. Taos/ABQ total: 850  
Prescott: 150  
Telluride: 220  
Boulder: 320  
Traverse City: 350  
Detroit: 280  
Carbondale: 225  
Bloomington: 300  
DC: 300  
Eugene: 380  
Bozeman: 1000  
Utah: 300 +  
Houston: 350  
Anchorage: 410  
Atlanta: 300+  
total satellite event attendance: 7,945

When you compare the population base in Anchorage with that of most other cities hosting Bioneers events, we certainly had a high proportion of folks attending! (Does that make you feel less alone??)

We had a large number of volunteers help with this gathering, and most of the local workshops were video-recorded. We hope to have those available soon.

Our intention is to expand the Bioneers in Alaska web site to contain a communication tool that can help different interest groups develop and network. We are in the process of re-vamping the web site with this in mind ([www.sustainak.org](http://www.sustainak.org)). Also, we have ordered DVD copies of the plenary speakers – we will put a set in Loussac Library, and I'll have a set here in the Mat-Su Valley.

Planning starts for 2006 soon! Holler if you want to be involved in any way! Contact me at [m.masteller@acat.org](mailto:m.masteller@acat.org) or 907-373-0909.

## **DEMOCRACY SCHOOL in ALASKA**

Alaska's first Democracy School, organized by "the two ACAT's" (yours truly and staff from Alaska Community Action on Toxics) and held at the Agate Inn near Wasilla, was an eye-opener for myself and the other 15 students. It was an intensive course crammed into 2.5 days. Here's a brief synopsis, though this clearly won't do the event justice.

Guided by instructors Thomas Linzey and Richard Grossman, we first explored why conventional community organizing around environmental and social justice issues often fails, typically because we are attacking the problem through some "regulatory" framework. Then we examined the role that corporate "personhood" plays in these struggles. To put this corporate power in perspective, we took a close look at the history of our US constitution. Who wrote it? Who benefited? For example, think of who was represented in the group of people who developed the document: white men of property. No women, no people of color, no people without land, etc. The US Constitution gave the minority property owners much power over the majority of people. Over time, as black and women gained rights, corporations (run by a very few people) gained increased power, again over the majority of residents.

Grossman and Linzey developed Democracy School to help community organizers begin to challenge corporate power. One way they have helped communities regain democracy is by re-writing municipal charters or constitutions to remove corporate "personhood." They have worked with small communities confronting agribusiness, sewage sludge, and quarry corporations. But they stress that there is another step: RIGHTS for nature. Linzey likes to say "there is no environmental movement" because "movements

drive rights into the constitution.” I see the quest to reduce corporate power and the desire for nature’s rights as two separate but related issues – and both are huge jobs!

After our School, Linzey and Grossman did a public presentation at APU’s Grant Hall. This event was recorded by Jim Sykes, and I have the DVD if you want to borrow it. I also presented a synopsis of the School at the Bioneers conference, and at Fireside Books in Palmer.

Where do we go from here? The Democracy School offers more training to graduates, and it looks like four of our “graduates” will go to Pennsylvania to get this training (which helps them become instructors). We have also tentatively scheduled two more Democracy Schools in November 2006.

Thanks for this great event go to Alaska Conservation Foundation and an anonymous donor for financial support, Sandy and Harvey Bowers (Agate Inn) for offering great room rates, Alex Papasavas for making fabulous organic lunches, Varsha Mathrani and Pam Miller at “the other ACAT” for marketing efforts and arranging the general public presentation in Anchorage, and Jim Sykes for recording that event.

## **HOW TO DRIVE A HYBRID CAR**

This information was excerpted from Rocky Mountain Institute Solutions (Summer 2005), by way of Alaska Building Science News (Fall 2005). Amory Lovins of the Rocky Mountain Institute (RMI) offers tips for making the most of your hybrid car’s fuel efficiency. RMI recently purchased a Toyota Prius hybrid for company use and Lovins owns a Honda Insight.

To get a state-of-the-art 4- to 5-seat hybrid-electric midsize sedan to perform at 53-55 mpg (it’s rated at 55) rather than in the low 40s, it needs “pulse driving,” which differs in two ways from our old driving habits.

1. When you see that you’ll need to slow or stop up ahead, start braking gently and as early as possible so you recover the most braking energy back into the battery for later reuse. Prius recovers 62-66 percent of braking energy in its regenerative mode, but if you brake too late, hence too hard, the mechanical brakes will override, and they simply turn motion into useless heat.
2. Contrary to what we were all taught in high-school driver’s ed, when accelerating a hybrid vehicle up to cruising speed, do so briskly. The engine is more efficient at high speed and torque, so you’ll use less fuel accelerating aggressively for a short time than gently for a long time. The same is not true for traditional non-hybrid vehicles. (Note: Please take into consideration road and weather conditions when practicing this in your hybrid. Safety is more important than fuel efficiency!)

Many reviewers test hybrids driven in the same way as non-hybrids, then gripe that hybrids fall short of their rated efficiency by even more than non-hybrids do. This is incorrect; properly driven hybrids can actually match their USEPA-rated mpg more closely than non-hybrids can. (My Honda Insight hybrid, for example, averages 63 mpg and is rated 64, the difference being more than attributable to snow tires’. Toyota’s U.S. Executive Engineer, Dave Hermance, gets 53-55 mpg on his 44-mpg-rated Prius.)

Consumer Reports is a major source of this confusion, having repeatedly refused to print a correction explaining that its standardized test procedure disproportionately reduces the mpg of the hybrids it tests. CR also calculates combined city-highway mpg differently than USEPA and automakers do.

Consistent with attentive driving, you’ll also find it very instructive, when driving a hybrid, to keep an eye on the real-time mpg display and (like a video game) use the feedback to improve your driving habits for best mpg. -- ABL

