Wooding With Howard

By

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Title Only for a strictly oral Dark Winter Nights- or Moth-style story
Sometimes, the humor in a story is best directed at the storyteller, as victim!
Pickles, FDNM Thursday 28th Jan. 2019
Even more recently, Pickles’ treatment of its “hero” Earl turned even more savage…
…as suggested by casting Earl as Captain “Back in My Day.”
There are 23 States that have marine coastlines. Can you tell by this graphic which one of those has the most? The basic **Outer Continental Shelf (OCS) Lands Act** dates back to 1953. With many subsequent amendments, it establishes the boundaries of jurisdiction (sovereignty) between federal and states’ interests.

Alaska has **about 52 percent** of the total U.S. Marine Coastline. An even greater share of the continental shelf of the country lies offshore of Alaska’s Pacific Ocean, Bering Sea and Arctic Ocean shores (~73 percent). Alaska is the only state that fronts on three oceanic rims. Florida is the only other state to front on two oceanic rims.

There are **35 states and Puerto Rico** that are covered by the 1972 Coastal Zone Management Act of 1972, and amendments to it that permit states and Puerto Rico to participate in the federally funded **Coastal Zone Management Program**, co-administered by NOAA, BLM, and local oversight.

Currently, there remain **34 states and Puerto Rico** participating in the **CZMP**: **Alaska withdrew from the Program in 2011**, under Gov. Murkowski.
The 3-mile limit centered on the questioned status of Dinkum Sands. The Boulder Patch in question lay at about the 20-m isobath offshore of Foggy Island Bay. State and Federal legal experts came to an impasse, and decided not to rush to judgment about who owned the lands enclosed by the barrier islands because of the status of Dinkum Sands. Both sides would allow remote cameras to record the emergence and subsidence of Dinkum Sands for months before deciding how or whether to pro-rate seafloor land ownership. A joint state-federal lease sale was scheduled for 1979, by which time Dinkum Sands’ status might or might not be settled. If the ownership was not settled by the date of the lease sale, proceeds from bidding on questioned tracts would go into an escrow account, for later award to the “true” owner of submerged acreage in Stefansson Sound.
Besides favoring ecological studies, I brought two other prejudices to my OCSEAP position. First, I had been impressed with how smoothly State and Federal biologists had worked together on the TAPS construction project, helping one another be effective “cops behind the (environmental) billboard.” Second, I had worked almost as smoothly with project engineers by getting them to explain their constraints and needs to us biologists, then to work with those engineers to solve problems in the field to a great extent.

I was able to persuade key people in NOAA and the State of Alaska, that OCS Research off Alaska’s shores needed to be monitored by both federal (e.g. NOAA, BLM) and State overseers. Soon the Alaska Governor’s Office hired three of us state folks and assigned us to various OCSEAP offices.

OCSEAP’s Arctic Project Office commissioned a modest ($10,000) study, called a “technology scenario” to determine, with petroleum engineers’ input, how soon the petroleum industry could be prepared to deal with progressively more serious physical challenges of the Beaufort Sea environment.
During OCSEAP studies, U.S.G.S. dive surveys discovered this previously unknown “rock garden” or boulder field covered by macroalgae and animals that gave the location the appearance of a tropical coral reef.

The Stefansson Sound Boulder Patch proved both more extensive and a prime target of petroleum companies’ wishes to drill exploratory wells than we originally realized. And it was potentially entirely on State of Alaska sovereign land within the adjusted 3-mile limit.

The contested-sovereignty status of Dinkum Sands—state or federal—was nothing short of diabolical. If federal, then almost all of Stefansson Sound was federal; if state, then the 3-mile enclosures were completed, thus making all of Stefansson Sound inside the Barrier Islands State of Alaska jurisdiction. Potentially enormous competitive lease sale bids would be directed at either the State of Alaska’s or the U.S. Department of Interior’s treasuries.
The history of petroleum development distinguishes the Beaufort Sea from the Chukchi Sea. Since the discovery of oil in 1968 near Prudhoe Bay, exploration and exploitation have crept seaward from land-based operations. Offshore lease tracts were initially dominated (1979) by State of Alaska acreage inside the 3-mile limit, depicted here.
The result of this modest study was significant beyond our imagination at the time. Directional drilling would allow the industry to “slant drill” from land out to targets and reservoirs some distance offshore at angles—then—of up to 45° That is, a formation at a depth of 10,000 feet below the surface could be reached from 10,000 feet away. In other words if oil was far enough below the surface, companies could reach the nearest federal leases by slant drilling at the edge of dry (State or North Slope Borough) lands. The deepest and most distant OCS federal acreage generally could not be drilled for production from federal lands for 15-30 years from 1977, the projections stated. [Indeed, it would be 24 years before a production well was completed in that zone. But you can imagine, these predictions about Arctic offshore petroleum exploitation were most unwelcome to the Feds (ancestors of MMS and BOEM) whose agencies were supposed to be making the U.S. energy-independent.]

The red circle here is Dinkum Sands. Was this an island (State Land) or a submerged bar (Federal Land)? Its diabolical location within the string of barrier islands was such that if it were to be an island, it would lock the entire Sound it enclosed within State jurisdiction. Lease proceeds would go to the State and not to the U.S. Department of the Interior. We were amused that federal officials sent us pictures of themselves rowing boats over the shallow waters covering Dinkum Sands, while State officials sent us pictures (like this one) of people holding an Alaska flag while standing on Dinkum Sands in hipboots.
A reporter quoted me in print as wondering why it should take so long to settle this matter. The Governor’s Office in Juneau promptly phoned me to say that I was be on the next plane to Juneau. There I was gently, firmly, informed of realities beyond my experience. If Dinkum Sands and Stefansson Sound were declared State Lands, the U.S. Department of Interior intended to invoice the State for a share of the millions of dollars that would help DOI offset the costs of conducting environmental research in the U.S. Beaufort Sea. The State in 1977 could not afford any such invoice. Prudhoe Bay royalties had not started to trickle into the State’s treasury. The message was clear: “Norton, keep your mouth shut; we don’t want to know the answer…yet.”

Federal OCS tracts farther offshore became feasible targets with the growing experience and confidence of operators who gained experience through the learning process of proceeding stepwise from dry land out toward these submerged tracts.
This is a story about the ultimate scoundrel in northern history. It is a very little-known piece of history, for several reasons. Even most people here in Fairbanks and in Utqiagvik (Barrow) are unaware of the intrigue. I call it extreme, because the chief scoundrel hadn’t a shred of evil or selfish or negative thought in what he undertook.

Here’s the story…..