



KHLT adds to Anchor River Conservation Corridor

Kachemak Heritage Land Trust recently purchased the 11.76-acre Martin property located off the Old Sterling Highway in Anchor Point. This property is the first acquired for permanent conservation through the land trust's Lower Peninsula Wetlands Fund. Its selection as a priority parcel was based on its proximity to existing conservation properties, and the findings of research on the Anchor River done by Kachemak Bay Research Reserve, Homer Soil and Water Conservation District, and Cook Inletkeeper. The initial assessment of the habitat values of the Martin property and prioritization of parcels along the Anchor River was supported through a cooperative agreement between U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service Coastal Program and KHLT.

The Martin property contains Anchor River frontage and side channels with nine acres of discharge slope wetlands, all-important for salmon and water quality. It is near the 64-acre Pate property owned for conservation by the land trust, the 12-acre Clark property owned for conservation by Kachemak Moose Habitat Inc., and is across the river from property owned by Alaska Department of Natural Resources designated for moose habitat and public access under the Kenai Area Plan. The Anchor River bottomland provides winter moose browse and functions as part of a corridor from the North Fork moose wintering grounds.

Working with Homer Soil and Water Conservation District and Cook Inletkeeper, KHLT overlaid previously mapped priority areas on the Anchor with river reaches identified as providing cool water habitats important to salmon as stream temperatures rise due to climate change. This information was used to identify which landowners to contact.

According to Cook Inletkeeper stream ecologist Sue Mauger, "Water temperature plays a critical role in all phases of the salmonid lifecycle, especially in freshwater systems where fish hatch from eggs and later return to spawn. Warm stream temperatures are frequently associated with increased stress in fish, making them increasingly vulnerable to pollution, predation and disease." Mauger continues, "By protecting key private parcels, the Land Trust is leading the way to ensure the long-term resilience of Anchor River salmon during this time of thermal change".

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Cook Inletkeeper Stream Ecologist

Research by Kachemak Bay Research Reserve, in collaboration with Baylor University and the Smithsonian Environmental Research Center, found that it is important to maintain a diversity of habitats for juvenile salmon that spend at least a year in fresh water. The combination of this research and the resulting maps helped Kachemak Heritage Land Trust articulate the significance of private land conservation along the Anchor River to priority landowners.

Kachemak Bay Research Reserve biologist Coowe Walker said, "Kachemak Heritage Land Trust is leading the way for effective conservation by using science to guide its land acquisition and management strategies. This is the hope for sustaining salmon into the future."

KHLT is grateful for Bonnie Martin's efforts to work with us to purchase her land. Land along the Anchor River is a mosaic of State, Borough, and private properties whose owners have a variety of management objectives. Healthy salmon habitat can

only be maintained if relatively intact corridors of streamside land are protected from incompatible development. The purchase of the Martin property is part of our strategy to preserve ecologically significant land next to or near existing conservation parcels, maintaining linkages of habitat important to fish and wildlife.

"Completion of the Martin parcel purchase underscores how private landowners can work cooperatively with KHLT and other partners to protect habitat for salmon and other wildlife on the Anchor River"; said David Wigglesworth, manager of the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service Coastal Program. "Bonnie Martin is to be commended for her willingness to work with KHLT to protect this property for the benefit of present and future residents of the Kenai Peninsula", Wigglesworth added.

Along the lower Anchor River, KHLT now owns a total of 131 acres that together preserve two miles of the river's banks, and has helped other conservation organizations acquire an additional 68 acres, spanning another mile of the river and containing wetlands important to the river's health. These acquisitions help fill gaps in the river corridor protected by the State Department of Natural Resources and the State Parks system.

Landowner Bonnie Martin responded to a KHLT outreach packet containing Kachemak Bay Research Reserve and Cook Inletkeeper research. She stated, "I am excited and proud to a part of this conservation project. With so many habitats disappearing we all need to be concerned, and participate in any way we can to save the animals, fish and plants so valuable to us all."

In 2010, the U.S. Department of Justice, on behalf of the Environmental Protection Agency, entered into a consent decree with the Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities to resolve violations of the Clean Water Act. In part, the consent decree required the Department of Transportation and Public Facilities to provide Kachemak Heritage Land Trust with \$850,000 to be used to "acquire and permanently conserve riparian areas, for the preservation of water quality and salmon habitat, on the Anchor River, Ninilchik River, Deep Creek, or Stariski Creek watersheds on the Kenai Peninsula, Alaska." These funds comprise KHLT's Lower Peninsula Wetlands Fund and are restricted solely to the use described above. ✧