



Chena Flats Greenbelt Project

July, 2006

e-newsletter

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Birds and Trail Users, Celebrate! First Property under Contract

At the end of May, The Conservation Fund, on behalf of the Interior Alaska Land Trust, secured the first 84.920-acre parcel of the proposed Chena Flats Greenbelt. Owned by Michael and Kathy Craft, the property sits at the base of Chena Ridge, directly north of Chena Point Avenue and contains some of the most highly valued bird and wildlife habitat in the entire proposed Greenbelt.

The parcel will remain as is, continuing to provide excellent range for moose and smaller mammals as well as nesting cranes, migrating waterfowl and songbirds. A long-used winter recreational trail crossing the property will continue to offer skiing, snowmachining and walking opportunities. Perhaps most importantly, the natural beauty of the property has been preserved for passersby.

The Crafts also own two 20-acre parcels located along the base of the ridge upon which they are planning development without compromising wetland habitat.

We are grateful to the Crafts for initiating what we envision as the Chena Flats Greenbelt and protecting this open space for future generations. As the first property becomes a part of the Greenbelt, we hope more will follow. Work is being done to communicate with other landowners to find a way that they too could participate in the Project either by selling, or by establishing a conservation easement for trail use on their property. In coming months, notice will be given as to when access on the land will be permitted.

Breaking News! Second Property Secured

A second parcel will soon be added to the Greenbelt by The Conservation Fund on behalf of the Project. In early July, Craig Ketzler signed a contract to sell his 91.7-acre parcel located directly north of the Craft parcel. These two adjacent parcels totaling 176.6 acres will be reserved for continued trail use, permanent habitat for wildlife and undisturbed landscape. We appreciate Mr. Ketzler's willingness to work with the Greenbelt to help protect this valuable habitat for everyone to enjoy for years to come.

Volunteers Step Up to Serve

Through a series of meetings held between December and May, a volunteer Chena Flats Greenbelt Project Steering Committee has been formed giving the project the direction and momentum it will need to carry out its long-term goals. The committee represents four subcommittees including realty, resources, outreach and fundraising. Each of these groups has created a timeline outlining goals to accomplish over the next year.

Members include: resources, Dick Stolzberg and Peter Smith; realty, Shelly Jacobson and Jon Lindstrom; outreach, Janet Kidd; and fundraising currently needs members. The goal is to have two members heading each subcommittee so that in the absence of one, meetings can still take place.

Timeline goals range from developing a GIS database of the proposed property and identifying existing trails by GPS to planning a fall fundraiser and making connections with community organizations that would use and support the greenbelt.

The Steering Committee last met in May and will meet again early this fall. As mentioned, there is still a need for volunteers to join the Steering Committee and to serve on the subcommittees as well. Contact Peggy if you're interested at pgpowell3@yahoo.com.

Grants Awarded

The Interior Alaska Land Trust has been awarded both a grant from the North American Wetland Conservation Act (NAWCA) small grants program, and from the Alaska State Parks Recreational Trails Grant program, each worth \$50,000. Both grants will be used for land acquisition for the Project. Originally written to help purchase the property belonging to the Hopkins family, the funds will be used to help purchase the two properties with negotiated contracts.

Rezone Proposal Sent to Borough Assembly

A request by Milt Behr to rezone 80 acres south of Chena Point Avenue from Rural Estate-2 to General Use-1 and Outdoor Recreation was heard by the Borough Planning Commission on July 5th. This rezone change would allow commercial peat and gravel mining on the property. Although there was very short notice, several area residents attended the hearing and requested that the current zoning be maintained. The Planning Commission over-turned the Borough Planning Staff's recommendation for approval, and recommended that the request be denied. The rezone request will come before the Borough Assembly in a meeting on September 14. Before that time, however, two meetings will be held which would be beneficial to attend. The following gives dates for and describes the typical events of these meetings:

August 10 - Borough Assembly Meeting: The proposed rezone will be introduced to the Assembly. This normally means that it is read into the minutes and placed on the agenda of the next regularly scheduled Assembly meeting. The public can provide comments under "Citizens Comments" on non-agenda items. It would be favorable to have concerned neighbors provide testimony here and leave written comments with the Assembly.

September 7 - Committee of the Whole Meeting: A committee of Assembly members meets to go over agenda items and discuss issues that will come up at the next regular Assembly meeting. Milt Behr's rezone proposal will most likely be discussed. Citizens can listen in on this meeting, but there is no public testimony. It may, however, be helpful to attend this meeting to understand the perspective Assembly members have of the proposal.

September 14 - Borough Assembly Meeting: This is where the Assembly will openly discuss the proposal and vote it up or down. Obviously, as many local residents as possible should be there to voice concerns regarding the rezone request.

This is the normal procedure, but it is not to say the Assembly won't decide on a different schedule. We should know more after the August 10 meeting. Please put these dates on your calendar and prepare written and/or oral comments for the Assembly. Since the Assembly will make the final decision, it is important that everyone that attended the Planning Commission hearing also attend the Assembly hearing, along with everyone else concerned about this rezone request. If you would like more information regarding this rezone request, please contact the Borough Department of Community Planning (459-1260), or click on the link below:

<http://co.fairbanks.ak.us/meetings/PlanningCommission/2006meetings/070506/rz2005-005.pdf>

Walmart Partnership

Pristine lands are preserved each year by the program Acres for America, sponsored by Walmart and the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation. The CFP submitted a pre-proposal to Acres for America, but was denied. Very few projects are awarded aid with this program, so the denial wasn't surprising. However, we've been speaking with a community coordinator from our local Fairbanks Walmart who would like to work with us, although on a smaller scale, to help in ways that may involve school use of the trails on the Flats. The discussions at this point are preliminary, but promising.

Old Chena Townsite For Sale

The property nearest the Tanana River, directly across from the Tanana boat launch (formally named Chena River Recreation Area), has been offered for sale. The three parcels, all belonging to one owner, was a hopeful piece for the greenbelt as a conservation easement or otherwise, especially considering the network of trails on the property and the historic value it holds in the existing remnants of the old Chena townsite. Two of the tracts have recently sold, but optimism still remains for the third piece. We hope the new owner will be willing to work with us to preserve the trails and possibly grant a conservation easement.

Historic Report: Chena Townsite

Steve Ulvi, NPS Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance Program

By now I am sure you know that the area encompassing the proposed Chena Flats Greenbelt contains a variety of resources important to the larger community of Fairbanks as well as to the people who have chosen to live there. Some of these valued resources are common throughout the region while others are unique to the immediate area. Less obvious in the immediate area of this relatively small open space are historical sites of importance and modern recreational sites as well.

Click here to see a photo of the old Chena townsite:

<http://vilda.alaska.edu/cgi-bin/viewer.exe?CISOROOT=/cdmg11&CISOPTR=1012&CISOMODE=grid>

The town of Chena, incorporated in 1903 and viable for less than 20 years, served as a seminal hub of supply and settlement in the Upper Tanana River basin. Originally known as Tanana City, Chena began as a small trading post on the south side of the river until it was decided to move it across the river in 1902 to the site now referred to as Chena Townsite. The settlement of warehouses, small businesses and homes was soon inhabited by thousands of people and provided support to miners and workers in the region. Mostly abandoned by 1920 the number of standing structures was substantially reduced by flooding, bank erosion, fire and teardown for use elsewhere.

In 2003, field archeological investigations of the old townsite were conducted as part of a planning effort related to the development of the DNR Chena Wayside. Approximately 48 historic features were identified with at least 13 being foundations of historic structures and one thought to be that of a commercial warehouse in the former commercial district. The report finds the townsite to be eligible to the Register of Historic Places as an

archeological district under two criteria. The portions of the townsite north of Chena Pump Road have not been investigated, as they are privately owned. However, it is believed to retain outstanding potential for further research.

A network of historic trails exists adjacent to the greenbelt. One old equipment trail, referred to as the “Chena to Ester Road”, originates near the old townsite and winds up and over Chena Ridge. It is a valid existing RS 2477 right-of-way owned by the State of Alaska and designated as RST 1826. As yet unsurveyed, but legally established and mapped as a public easement to be managed by the DNR, this 100 foot wide route encumbers the titles of all private parcels that it crosses.

There were also a number of ditches, trails and pipelines fed by machinery pumping water out of the Chena River that cut through the project area across the road from the restaurant of today. Not much remains but little investigation has occurred.

In July of 1967 approximately 17 riverfront acres named the Chena River Recreation Area was established as a wayside and boat landing to be managed by the State of Alaska adjacent to Chena Pump Road. Alaska State Parks currently manages the area and has expressed an interest in reviving the project if funds were to become available. The agency would consider exploring the use of privately owned land across Chena Pump Road, if it was to become available, for additional site expansion, public use and parking.

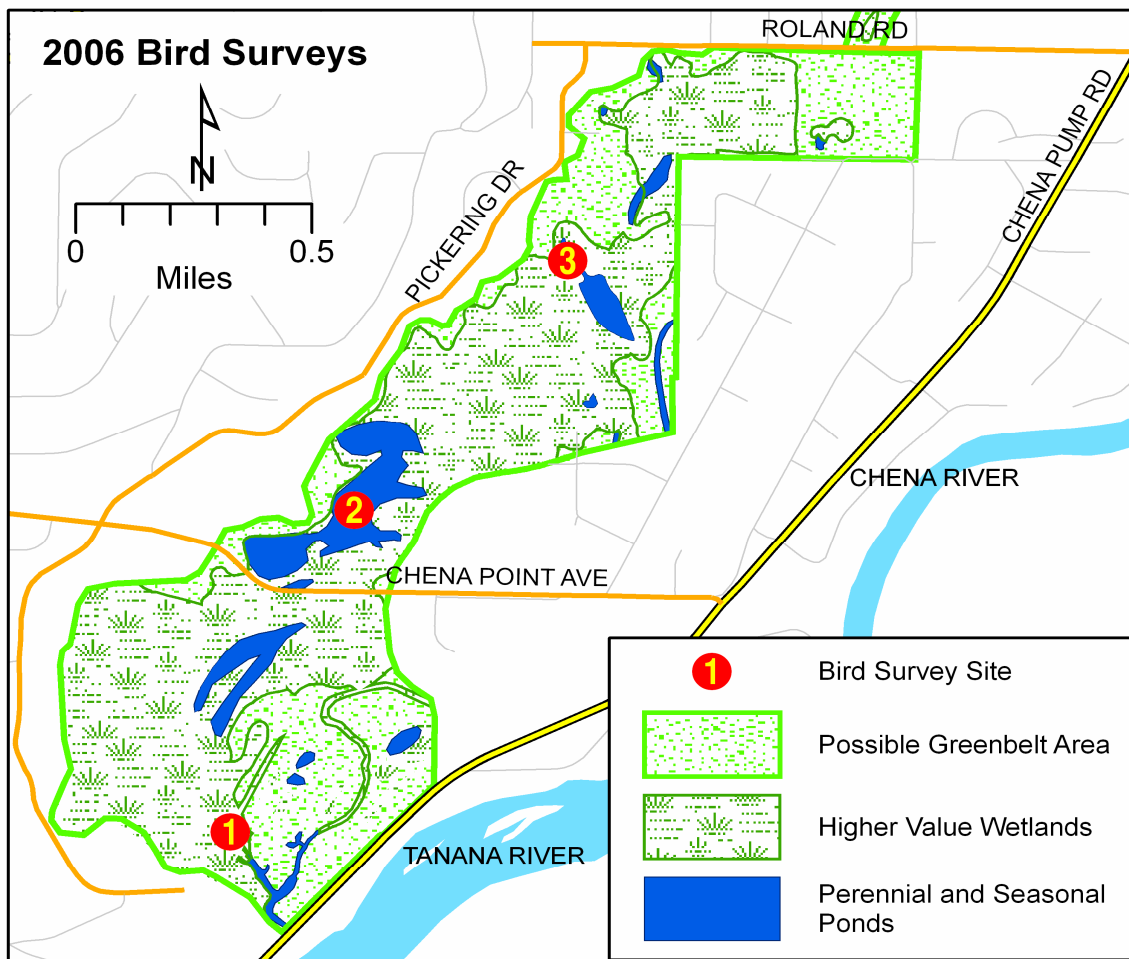
If this sketch of some of the historic resources in the project area piques your interest contact the Project Coordinator or Steering Committee Members.

Resource Subcommittee at Work

By Louise Smith, USFWS

Chena Flats Greenbelt Bird Surveys

Surveys for waterbirds and songbirds in selected areas (see map) of the Chena Flats Greenbelt have been conducted this spring and summer to determine species presence and season of use. Waterbird surveys began in early May and were conducted approximately three times a week through mid-June. Breeding bird surveys for passerines were conducted three times in Areas 1 and 2 during late May through early June. Surveys for waterbirds will continue biweekly through late summer and at least weekly during fall migration. Thus far, 45 species of birds have been seen during the waterbird and breeding bird surveys (see Table). Although nest searches have not been conducted, it is assumed that most of the songbirds are nesting in the area. Several of the ducks, such as mallards, green-winged teal, shovelers, and pintails also may be nesting. Sandhill cranes and common snipe have been confirmed as nesting, as nests were located incidentally during surveys. Several species of mammals (see Table) also have been seen during surveys, including a cow moose and calf.



(Table on following page)

**Birds and
Mammals
Observed at
the 2006
Survey Sites**

Bird Species	Area 1	Area 2	Area 3
Red-necked Grebe			x
Swan <i>spp.</i>		x	
Canada Goose		x	
Green-winged Teal	x	x	x
Mallard	x	x	x
Northern Pintail	x	x	x
Northern Shoveler		x	x
American Wigeon		x	x
Northern Harrier		x	x
Sharp-shinned Hawk		x	
American Kestrel		x	x
Sandhill Crane	x	x	x
Lesser Yellowlegs	x	x	x
Pectoral Sandpiper		x	
Common Snipe		x	
Mew Gull		x	x
Glaucous-winged Gull		x	
Short-eared Owl		x	
Hairy Woodpecker	x		
Northern Flicker	x	x	
Alder Flycatcher	x	x	
Hammond's Flycatcher	x		
Tree Swallow	x		
Violet-green Swallow	x	x	
Gray Jay		x	
Black-billed Magpie		x	
Common Raven	x	x	
Black-capped Chickadee	x	x	
Boreal Chickadee	x		
Ruby-crowned Kinglet	x		
Swainson's Thrush	x		
Hermit Thrush	x	x	
American Robin	x	x	
Varied Thrush	x		
Bohemian Waxwing		x	
Orange-crowned Warbler	x	x	
Yellow Warbler	x	x	
Yellow-rumped Warbler	x		
Wilson's Warbler	x		
Savannah Sparrow		x	
Fox Sparrow		x	
Lincoln's Sparrow	x	x	
White-crowned Sparrow		x	
Dark-eyed Junco	x	x	
Rusty Blackbird		x	
Mammal Species	Area 1	Area 2	Area 3
Moose	x	x	
Red Fox	x		
Beaver	x		
Muskrat			x

A New Threat to the Greenbelt

The Alaska Railroad is revisiting plans to reroute tracks through different areas of the Fairbanks North Star Borough in an effort to decrease contact with road intersections and increase efficiency to refineries. One of the proposed alternate track routes runs directly through the Chena Flats area. Certainly, the idea of freight trains running so near our neighborhood conflicts with the goals of the Greenbelt. Hopefully, the work done thus far to protect the resources of the Flats (including the bird surveys and historic report in this newsletter) will be decisive in eliminating the Chena Flats area as an option. The public will have a voice in the outcome of this issue, so please share this news with others. We will keep you informed as to how you can help. The following link gives more detailed information about the proposal:

<http://www.akrr.com/pdf/2006%20Freight%20Rail%20Realignment.pdf>

Fall Fundraiser

Plans for an October dinner fundraiser are in the works. We hope to sell approximately 200 tickets for an evening dinner that would be coupled with a raffle drawing of several large items. Please be watching for the opportunity to purchase both raffle and dinner tickets and have fun doing your part to help our efforts. Or, if fundraising is your cup of tea, please join the effort to sell tickets. All proceeds will help to continue the work that has thus far been successful in protecting the Chena Flats area. Contact Peggy at pgpowell3@yahoo.com for more information.

Fundraising Report

The toughest part of any non-profit organization is often fundraising. Going door-to-door or sending out requests for donations at first seems like a daunting task. Furthermore, it is difficult to find volunteers who are willing to take on this role. However, in just a little over one year, CFGP has been validated by the incredible response to give to this cause. Showing up in the form of grant money (\$110,000), grants of in-kind service (\$24,000), personal donations (\$1,300) and hundreds of hours of time given to meetings, research and hard work has made this Project one worthy of supporting in the future. Of course, The Conservation Fund has become the driving financial force of the Project. As mentioned, we are in need of fundraising steering committee members and people who are willing to work on the fundraising subcommittee. Please consider getting involved on some level, or pass the word on to someone who you believe may have an interest in helping.

Help Wanted: New Coordinator Needed

A return to full-time teaching for the fall semester coupled with the joyful anticipation of their second child in November leaves Peggy Powell, CFGP Coordinator, with little choice. It is time to pass the baton to a new Project Coordinator. In a nutshell: The position demands patience, optimism, persistence and a shared vision in reaching the goals defined thus far. The time commitment ranges from 10 to 15 hours per week and includes the responsibilities of record keeping, making contacts with neighbors and landowners, organizing and facilitating meetings, writing this newsletter and working closely with the Steering Committee and agencies involved in helping the Project. If you possess conservation values, strong interpersonal, communication and technology skills, and have at least 15 hours per week to devote to this work, then please contact Martha Raynolds (mraynolds@gci.net) with the Interior Alaska Land Trust to discuss the next step in becoming a candidate for the position of Chena Flats Greenbelt Project Coordinator.

Contact Information:
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