



# Chena Flats Greenbelt Project

December 2010

*Happy Holidays!*

Newsletter

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## A pond in the Greenbelt

A small pond adjacent to the Chena Flats Greenbelt will be conserved as part of an agreement between the Army Corps of Engineers, a property developer, and the Interior Alaska Land Trust (IALT). The parcel is over three acres, including a small pond, and will be set aside as a separate parcel that will be donated to the Land Trust. IALT will conserve the property consistent with the designation of a "Native Growth Protection Easement". As a result the property will be actively managed by the Land Trust as part of the Chena Flats Greenbelt, rather than putting that burden on a Homeowner's Association. Preserving access and the natural character of this pond and adjacent lands for posterity is another positive conservation effort IALT has carried out for the community and for the little muskrat who currently makes the pond his home.



**This pond, adjacent to the Bachner Acres subdivision off of Roland Road, will be conserved and included in the Chena Flats Greenbelt.**

## Annual Fund Appeal

This newsletter will take the place of our annual December fund appeal. If you would like to contribute to our effort, please visit [www.chenaflats.org](http://www.chenaflats.org) to donate online, call 907-479-4345, or mail a check to The Interior Alaska Land Trust, PO Box 84169, Fairbanks, AK 99708 using the enclosed, pre-addressed envelope.

Donations to the Interior Alaska Land Trust are fully tax deductible. The Land Trust is a 501(c)3 non-profit organization (Tax ID: 92-0156956).

## Conservation Planning

The Chena Flats Greenbelt has been one of those unplanned successes. This is not to say that there hasn't been a lot of planning and work that has gone into the conservation of nearly 500 acres. But this relatively undeveloped strip of land with historic trails in an area lacking places to recreate did just sort of fall in our laps. The Land Trust wasn't looking for a Greenbelt, wasn't looking for a large conservation project. Your neighbors were looking for this area to stay the way it is, forever.



One of the tasty and numerous benefits of the Greenbelt!

The Greenbelt has become such a success that there's now another one being pieced together in Anchorage, slowly, piece by piece, as there is interest from landowners to sell, and as there is money found to purchase land. It has also been such a success, that the US Fish and Wildlife Service has given us funding to find another one in the Fairbanks North Star Borough. We're going to go about it in a more systematic way this time, looking at proximity to trails or public land, fish resources, wetland habitat, and local development patterns. But the idea is the same—to concentrate conservation efforts in one area to make a bigger impact to nesting ducks, rusty blackbirds, wandering moose, dogs who need to be walked, and you.

## A new source of funding



Rost Creek near Chena Pump Road

As the Greenbelt enters its fifth (sixth?) year, we are starting to broaden our search for funding for land acquisition.

### **The Numbers**

**Greenbelt Size: 497 acres**

We've been incredibly successful, and perhaps lucky, at writing winning grant proposals and raising local funds (thanks to you). But all good things must end, or at least, perhaps slow to a trickle, and though we continue to receive amazing financial support from friends and neighbors of the Greenbelt, our opportunities for grant funding have dwindled. However, we have formed a partnership with the Salcha-Delta Soil and Water Conservation District (SDSWCD) that will bring more money for land acquisition.

When a landowner desires to dredge or fill wetlands or any stream that has been designated "waters of the U.S." by the Army Corps of Engineers, the landowner must obtain a



permit. These days permits come with conditions for “mitigation,” so that if you destroy or impair a wetland in one place, you must create or preserve wetland in another place. Sometimes these requirements are on an acre-for-acre basis and sometimes, depending on the type of wetland being impacted, there are other mitigation ratios determined by the Army Corps of Engineers.

What does this all have to do with the Chena Flats Greenbelt? The Salcha-Delta Soil and Water Conservation District works with the military for their mitigation needs, yet as a quasi-State agency, cannot hold title to land. When the military develops its training grounds, they too have to somehow offset their impacts to wetlands. That’s how important wetlands are to water quality and wildlife habitat. The SDSWCD is currently holding money that the military has paid to mitigate impacts to wetlands, and this money will be spent to purchase land in the Greenbelt. It is a win-win situation. The military has completed their obligation, and the money will be spent to further conservation in an area where it will have a big impact. The Interior Alaska Land Trust will use the funds to purchase about 90 acres in the southern end of the Greenbelt.

## **Signs and Parking**

We are currently discussing with the Fairbanks North Star Borough the idea of building two small parking lots on Greenbelt properties. There seems to be plenty of access for local users, but now that some of the properties are owned by the Borough, and are thus public land, we would like to make sure that everyone can get to the properties easily and safely. The lots would be built to accommodate three cars and built on land that has already been disturbed; one will be located on Pickering Road and the second on Chena Point Avenue. In addition, we will install interpretive signs at these locations and on the Cripple Creek Forest property focusing on wetlands and wildlife found on the properties. We are now waiting for approval from the Borough, and would also like to hear from you. What do you think of these locations? Are the lots needed? Any concerns?



## **“Healing” Cripple Creek**

One of the bigger successes of the Greenbelt is the donation of 90 acres along Chena Pump Road. Nearly a mile of the road front will remain undeveloped, meaning that your drive home along this stretch will remain peaceful and forested, which is why you’re living here in the first place, right? What you can’t see on your drive home is that back in the woods is Cripple Creek, and along with a mile of Chena Pump Road frontage, this property also contains nearly a mile of the creek channel.

In the 1930s, a ditch was dug alongside the creek, a straight run from Ester to the Chena River, and the creek was diverted into the ditch so that mining sediments could be flushed out into the river without slowing down in the bends of the meandering Cripple Creek. Despite the fact that the creek has been running in a ditch for the last 80 years, the original channel is relatively intact, and we believe that at least Arctic grayling, and perhaps king salmon, would benefit from putting the creek back where it belongs.

We have received funding to begin the process of restoring the portion of Cripple Creek that is on Land Trust property. At this early point in the process, we will hire a contractor to develop a restoration plan for returning flow to about 5-½ miles of Cripple Creek. This is a big, multi-phased project that would involve the cooperation of the Department of Transportation to replace a culvert underneath Old Chena Ridge Road to reconnect the original creek channel. The Alaska Department of Transportation is unlikely to consider a project to install a culvert or bridge the Creek without a formal restoration plan. We believe, though, that restoring the creek would be a big triumph both for fish habitat and for the people who would like to see the creek alive and flowing again.



**The US Fish and Wildlife Service looks for fish in Cripple Creek.**