



2014

Working with Interior Alaska landowners to safeguard the character and natural resources of our community



All-Alaska Land Trust meeting, Homer April 2014. Photo by Denise Jantz

Why do we value land?

A feather, a stone, a photograph, and other various items lay on the table in the center of the room overlooking Kachemak Bay. We'd been asked to bring an item that represented the "new story that you hope can be told about Alaska Land Trusts".

It was a powerful beginning to a Community Conservation Retreat led by Peter Forbes of the Center for Whole Communities in Vermont. People from all of the Alaska Land Trusts, from Dillingham, Palmer, Anchorage, Homer, Cordova, Arctic Village and Fairbanks gathered in Homer last April to talk about not the nuts and bolts of land trust work, easements and title searches, but about what land trusts mean to our communities. About how we can make our land trusts more relevant, and about how we can connect our work to the people in the places where we live.

It was not a typical land trust meeting. We spent time getting to know why we each are interested in land trusts, and how we can move our activities from protecting land to connecting people to the land we protect. The important message that ran through all the discussions was that the bond between

individual people and undeveloped land is the core. This is true for people who own land, those who work and volunteer for land trusts, and all those who appreciate their local landscapes. That connection forms the basis of all land trust work. And whether writing letters, putting together web sites, or talking with landowners, that is the core that we have to return to in order to effectively communicate with all the different types of people in our communities.

Three of us from Fairbanks were able to attend the meeting, Merritt Helfferich, Sally Andersen, and Martha Reynolds, thanks to efforts of the Kachemak Heritage Land Trust in Homer and funding from the national Land Trust Alliance, Anchorage/Mat-Su's Great Land Trust, the Bristol Bay Heritage Land Trust, the Alaska Farmland Trust, the Interior Alaska Land Trust, the Southeast Alaska Land Trust, the Native Land Conservancy of Cordova and Arctic Village, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Coastal Program, Pacific Coast Joint Venture and The Conservation Fund.

MARK YOUR CALENDAR
FOR NEXT WEEK!



IALT ANNUAL MEETING

6-8 pm Monday 3 November

Noel Wien Library Conference Room

Speakers: Mitch Osborne and Bob Henszey
"Salmon of the Chena River and the Historic
Watershed of Cripple Creek"

Message from the President



As the Interior landscape evolves, so changes the landscape of the Interior Alaska Land Trust Board of Directors. We bid a fond farewell to Roselyn Ressa, who was a Board member since 2007 and President of the Interior Alaska Land Trust from 2010 until this past spring. Under Roselyn's tenure and with your help, the IALT achieved many great things including the Chena Flats Greenbelt Project, the Blueberry Preserves in Goldstream. We will miss her wisdom and thoughtful presence, and wish her well in her new endeavors. We also say goodbye to Mike Stredny. Mike's practical perspective, extensive local knowledge and ready-to-help attitude will be missed on the Board. We wish him well, and to both Roselyn and Mike, you will always have a welcome seat at our meetings.

It seems this summer, all of Fairbanks and the Interior was awash in wetlands. It was also a very busy summer for the Land Trust. We held information booths at the spring migration celebration at Creamers, the Chena River Walk, and at the Tanana Valley State Fair. We actively assisted several local landowners in securing conservation easements on their property, and possibly as a result of the deluge, an opportunity to restore the historic flow of Cripple Creek arose. Make sure to read Merritt Helfferich's piece about that great opportunity in this newsletter.

Looking ahead, we continue to look to Goldstream Valley (generally described as the area lying south of Goldstream Road between Sheep Creek Road and Fox) as a priority area. When local residents supported the State's continued management of the Goldstream Public Use Area in 2010, the importance of this resource was identified by a wide range of users. If you are an area property owner, a user of the trails or green space, or simply care about this resource, we need your help. At the same time, IALT will pursue other opportunities as they arise, continue to work toward completion of the Chena Flats Greenbelt Project, and we have high hopes for restoring flow to historic Cripple Creek.

As Fairbanksans, we are lucky to have our own Land Trust and I greatly value the privilege of serving on the Board. With Roselyn's departure, I have some big shoes to fill. As a native of Fairbanks, I spent my childhood wandering the green spaces between Goldstream, Farmers Loop and Chena Ridge. I'm sure you all know that these spaces, and all the green spaces in our community, greatly contribute to our quality of life. With your help and support an amazing amount has already been accomplished, yet there is much that needs to be done to keep Fairbanks as special as we know it to be.



Peat Ponds. Photo by M Raynolds



Habitat, land trusts and taxes

A recent report from the World Wildlife Fund found that global wildlife populations have declined by 52% in just the last 40 years. That is a devastating drop over a short period of time and one of the major factors was habitat loss or degradation. Living in Alaska, it is easy to take large natural ecosystems

for granted, but habitat fragmentation is a serious problem in most of the rest of the country and the world. And even in Alaska, sprawl results in development with little foresight for the best use of land. Strategic placement of green space can create wildlife movement corridors, maintain biodiversity, maintain clean water, control runoff, provide recreational networks, and increase property values for all the adjacent land.

But too often, there are strong economic incentives to develop green spaces because property or estate taxes make it difficult for landowners to afford to keep property undeveloped or as farmland. Conservation easements and the associated tax cuts and tax incentives are one way to create more options within the private property framework. The tax reductions associated with a permanent

easement limiting the use of property to undeveloped greenspace or farmland gives landowners a flexible way to keep their property undeveloped, donate it to a land trust, or pass it on to the next generation.

For years, the tax incentives for conservation easements have been temporary and periodically extended, but the House of Representatives has recently passed a bill called the *America Gives More Act* that would make the tax incentives for conservation easements and other types of charitable giving permanent. The bill is now awaiting a vote in the Senate. You can find out more about this bill and other legislation affecting land trusts at <http://www.landtrustalliance.org/policy>.

--Alex Prichard

Land Conserved by IALT

15 parcels owned, 451.2 acres

22 parcels with easements, 772.4 acres

1223.5 TOTAL ACRES CONSERVED

Photo above by M. Helfferich, on easement property, Oct. 2014.

Land Trust Alliance “Rally 2014”

by Larry Byrne, Board of Directors

In September 18 – 21, I attended the 2014 National Land Conservation Conference in Providence, Rhode Island. The event was sponsored by the Land Trust Alliance which contributed a \$1000 scholarship toward trip expenses. Of special note to Alaskans was the presentation of the National Land Trust Excellence Award to the Bristol Bay Heritage Land Trust (BBHLT) - essentially the Oscar for best land trust performance. The BBHLT was instrumental in convincing the State of Alaska to restore wildlife habitat and recreation protection to over 4 million acres in the Bristol Bay watershed. The state had reclassified the acreage to facilitate permitting for large development projects (e.g., Pebble Mine).

Nationally there are over 1200 Land Trusts conserving open public spaces. Four of these operate in Alaska, while in the three states of Rhode Island, Connecticut and Massachusetts there are 300. Open spaces are highly valued throughout New England and many citizens want to be involved. One Rhode Island trustee told me that every town in his state has a land trust and that parcels as small as 0.3 acres are accepted for protection. The all-volunteer Lyme CT (of tick fame) Conservation Trust has 50 stewards, a board of trustees and a board of directors. That is quite a contrast to our Interior Alaska Land Trust with a six-member board of directors, and a handful of volunteers who assist in monitoring properties.

The IALT has had a pretty smooth history managing its acquired property and conservation easements. That’s not necessarily the case in other parts of the country. I sat in on a session on Mediating Conservation Disputes and learned about using a mediator to resolve disputes. This can be both less expensive and quicker than going through the legal system if it ever comes to that. A growing issue noted by many land trusts is second-generation landowners who inherited land with a conservation



Photo by M. Reynolds

easement attached to it, but do not want to comply exactly with the terms of the easement.

Another piece of valuable information came from a session on The Economic Benefits of Land Conservation, presented by economists from the Trust for Public Land. They cited one study of public lands in the Cleveland, OH area that found property values increased by at least 5% if located within 500 feet of a public open space. This was a conservative estimate and the upper end of the range was a 20% increase in value.

The conference provided a good opportunity to interact with land trust personnel from across the country and compare notes on common problems, regional differences and emerging trends.

--- Larry Byrne

Win-win-win: flow in Cripple Creek

Above is a recent photo of a section of the old Cripple Creek channel just north of the new Chena Ridge Road, near Just-A-Store. In the 1930s the US Refining & Mining Company and Fairbanks Exploration Co. were using hydraulic “giants” to wash away the overburden at Ester and get at gold bearing gravels. The mud and other light-weight material they washed away flowed down Cripple Creek to the Chena and Tanana rivers, but the winding Cripple Creek bed hindered that flow. So the mining company built a wide and straight ditch along the valley floor that carried the overburden down the ditch to the Chena River at the Chena Pump House and it as carried the Cripple Creek waters ever since.



Old Cripple Creek channel, above Chena Ridge Road. Photo by M. Helfferich

The Interior Alaska Land Trust owns a 90-acre parcel south of the Chena Ridge Road parallel to Chena Pump Road, with the previous natural bed of Cripple Creek. We have been looking at the potential to restore the flow now in the mining ditch to its historic bed and to recreate the fish and other species habitat that a natural stream supports. The Chena is a salmon stream and the restored Cripple Creek section could add to salmon rearing and grayling habitat and provide other sorts of habitat, recreational and environmental benefits to the public in the Fairbanks area.

To restore that flow would be relatively easy. A second culvert under Chena Ridge Road and an about 180-ft ditch to carry the water flow connecting the new culvert to the old river bed downstream would be required. Currently the new Chena Ridge Road paving is suffering from saturation of the sub-strata downstream from the old river bed that now collects water and forms a blocked pond on the upstream side of the Chena Ridge Road (shown in the photo above). The new culvert would reduce the deterioration of the road.

The photo to the right, showing the center divider on Chena Ridge road shows the crack that has developed in the divider due to excess water in the old creek bed. The Alaska DOTPF says that they have to replace the paving frequently in this location, so draining the old stream through a new culvert would reduce maintenance costs.



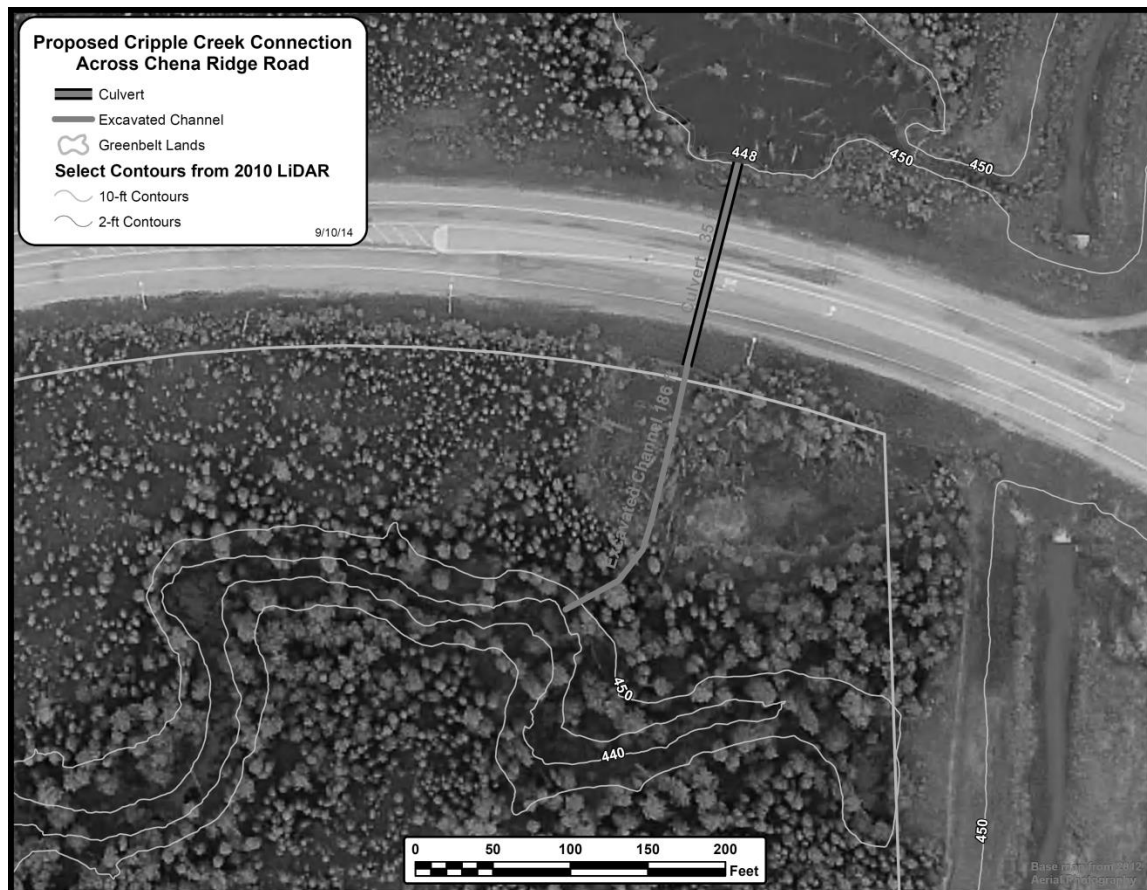
Center of Chena Ridge Road, intersection with Chena Pump Road in background. Photo by M. Helfferich

The Land Trust would provide free access across its land for the restoration of Cripple Creek and deliver the results of two 2010 studies funded by the Land Trust and the US Fish and Wildlife Service, "Fish Passage Restoration Plan: Returning Stream Flow to Cripple Creek, a Tributary to the Chena River." And the Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities has discovered that the culvert presently carrying the Cripple Creek ditch flow under Chena Ridge Road is failing and will have to be replaced. It would be much easier to stage both culvert installations simultaneously and thus only disturb traffic flow over a single period rather than twice.

We have explored this possibility with the US Fish and Wildlife Service, who has considered this idea

for a decade, with the Alaska Department of Fish and Game, and the Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities. There was general agreement that it was an interesting idea and has several compound benefits. The Fairbanks North Star Borough Assembly unanimously passed a Resolution in October 2014 in support of the idea. We are seeking additional support from other organizations for the concept and, potentially, some sources of additional funding from conservation organizations, the State and the federal government to carry out the task. There appears that there may already be some sources of funds to design the project.

--Merritt Helfferich



Map showing the proposed new culvert and short ditch connecting the old Cripple Creek channel north of Chena Ridge Road (top) and south of the road (bottom). The water currently flows through the Cripple Creek Ditch, shown on the right, flowing from top to bottom. The road in this area needs frequent maintenance due to the standing water north of the road, and the Ditch culvert (on right) will need to be replaced soon. Produced by Bob Henzey (USF&WS).

Staff or no staff?

The Interior Alaska Land Trust (IALT) is an all-volunteer organization, with no staff. All our work is done by volunteer board members and community volunteers, supplemented by an occasional contract worker funded through outside grants. This organizational structure is common for small land trusts. Almost 60% of the land trusts in the US are all-volunteer (2012 data, www.ialt.org).

The advantages and disadvantages of staying all-volunteer is a common topic of discussion for the IALT Board. The advantage of staying all-volunteer is keeping a leaner budget, where almost every penny raised and every hour of time spent goes directly to land conservation. The advantage of having staff is that IALT could get a lot more conservation work done.



The successful model for a small community land trust matches the organization to the community's needs. If we are successful, IALT can be sustainable on into the future, continuing to steward the lands we have conserved. Grants from foundations and government agencies can help with particular projects, but the operating budget of a non-profit has to come from community donations.

The amount of land protected by IALT continues to grow, up to 1,224 acres now. IALT tries to ensure that there is adequate stewardship funding for each property, but given interest rates these days, our stewardship funding does not generate much income, so we rely on volunteer monitors. The monies in our stewardship fund are thus preserved for extraordinary expenses such as legal defense of properties (though we also carry insurance for this type of event).

(Continued on page 8)

MANY THANKS TO OUR VOLUNTEERS

Board of Directors: Larry Byrne, Owen Guthrie, Merritt Helfferich, Alex Prichard, Martha Raynolds

Community volunteers: Frank Keim, Tom Paragi, Sue and Dan Bishop, Connie Zachel, Peggy Powell, Sally Andersen

AND TO OUR MEMBERS

Mary Zalar & Ken Whitten, Connie & Cort Zachel, Doug Yates, Romany Wood & Carl Rosenberg, Paulette Wille, Jeffery Walters, Skip Walker, Eric Troyer & Corrine Leistikow, Dorothy Thompson, Steve Taylor, Walt Tape, Ann & Dan Swift, Mike Stredny, Carol Scott, Susan Royston, Katharine Richardson, Roselynn Ressa, Paul & Terry Reichardt, Martha Raynolds, Alex Prichard & Angela Larson, Barbara Powell, Roger & Bonita Post, Anna Plager & Chris Nye, Don & Tracie Pendergrast, Nicole Pearce, Charlie Parr & Marilyn Biagi, Tom Paragi, Mary Ann Nickles, Phyllis Morrow & Chase Hensel, John & Judi Morack, Bruce McIntosh, William McAmis, Barbara Matthews, Susan Malen, Sherry Lewis, Cam Leonard, Julie Lageson, Brendan & Nettie LaBelle-Hamer. Niilo & Joan Koponen, Stan Justice, Torre & Janet Jorgenson, Tanya Ignacio, Merritt Helfferich, Mary Lee and Dale Guthrie, Owen Guthrie, Joan Franz & Dave Mather, Muffy & Jim Durst, James Dewitt, Linda Schandelmeier & John Davies, Gail Davidson, Mary Burtness & Jeff Adams, Bob & Linda Bursiel, Jon Miller & Lou Brown, Susan Brinkman, Larry and Karla Bright, Mary & Richard Bishop, Dan and Sue Bishop, Sally Andersen & Michael Wald
And corporate donor: ABR, Inc.

2013 FINANCIAL REPORT

Income

Interest	929
Membership	1,920
Public support	5,244
Government grants	35,156
Total Income	43,249

Expenses

Conferences	25
Special Event Expense	1,596
Operating expenses	2,289
Land acquisition	2,857
Land stewardship*	9,514
Contract services**	27,338
Total Expenses	43,619

94.8% of the 2013 budget was used directly for land conservation. Only 5.2% was used for fundraising or running the organization. Your contributions go directly to conserving land.

*mostly FNSB property taxes

*work on the Cripple Creek stream restoration project



P.O. Box 84169
Fairbanks, AK 99708-4169

Annual Meeting

Nov. 6, 6:30-8:00 pm
Noel Wien Library
Conference Room

Staff or No Staff (*continued from page 7*)

IALT and other all-volunteer land trusts rely greatly on our umbrella organization, the Land Trust Alliance (LTA) to maintain professional standards. IALT would not be the stable, effective organization that it has been for almost twenty years without the support of the national Land Trust Alliance. IALT's governing policies and procedures were based on LTA's Standards and Practices, and have provided a solid foundation for our organization. The Land Trust Alliance has also twice sent regional representatives to Fairbanks to support our work and the work of other Alaska land trusts. Their advice and evaluation of IALT's strengths and weaknesses have helped the IALT Board continue to improve our organization.

Up to this point, IALT has decided to stay all-volunteer. We have a small, sustainable budget with very low overhead. We have used contract work very effectively, especially the work that Sally Andersen did to advance the Chena Flats Greenbelt, funded by a grant from the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service. We have partnered with the Conservation Fund, the Army Corps of Engineers, and the Salcha-Delta Soil and Water Conservation District on conservation projects. We have also benefited from excellent interns, some working for stipends, some for academic credit. And of course our volunteers, both on the Board of Directors and in the community, continue to form the backbone of the Interior Alaska Land Trust.

--Martha Raynolds

If you have opinions or suggestions on this subject, please contact us (interioraklandtrust@gmail.org). And of course, if you'd like to become involved in the Land Trust's work, we are experts at making good use of volunteers!