



20<sup>th</sup> ANNIVERSARY EDITION

2015

25 years of land trusts in Alaska, and 20 years of our very own local land trust in Fairbanks, the Interior Alaska Land Trust.



BYRON BIRDSALL - 2015

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

ALASKA LAND TRUSTS - 25 YEARS OF CONSERVATION

CONSERVING OUR LANDS, WATERWAYS, AND OUTDOOR HERITAGE FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS

ALASKA FARMLAND TRUST · BRISTOL BAY HERITAGE LAND TRUST · GREAT LAND TRUST · INTERIOR ALASKA LAND TRUST · KACHEMAK HERITAGE LAND TRUST · NATIVE CONSERVANCY LAND TRUST · SOUTHEAST ALASKA LAND TRUST

MARK YOUR CALENDAR  
FOR MONDAY NEXT WEEK!



#### IALT ANNUAL MEETING

6:30-8:00 pm Monday 2 November  
Noel Wien Library Conference Room  
Speakers: Bob Henszey  
*"Chena River and Slough over  
the past 100 years"*

## Message from the President



*Greetings!*

*As another fall comes to a close, it is time to take a moment and reflect on the past year, and 2015 has been very productive for the volunteer board of the Interior Alaska Land Trust. With your help, and the help of other local partners, we're pushing ahead with a couple of big projects and establishing several new conservation easements with local landowners.*

*This past summer we learned that the Alaska Department of Transportation & Public Facilities is able to include a new culvert reconnecting the historic Cripple Creek channel with their upcoming project replacing the Cripple Creek Drain culvert at Chena Ridge Road. See the article in this newsletter for more details on this fortuitous development, but the bottom line is we are making progress on our plans to restore flow to the lower reaches of historic Cripple Creek channel and thus improve Chinook Salmon habitat and recreational value. This is an exciting project for Fairbanks and for all of the Interior.*

*We also have good news on our Lower Goldstream Initiative. With your help and through our partners at The Conservation Fund, we're working to conserve and connect large pieces of lower Goldstream Creek and associated wetlands. Look for some big news on this project early next year.*

*We continue to work on the Chena Flats Greenbelt project as well. Soon, we'll hand over two parcels comprising nearly 90 acres on the southern end of the project to Borough Parks and Recreation, as we continue to expand and improve this great wildlife and recreational resource.*

*Lastly, we're in the process of working with local landowners to finalize several new conservation easements near the Chena Flats Greenbelt and in lower Goldstream.*

*Here's a big thank you to all our members. Thanks also to those who help with additional donations and to those who assist with monitoring. We do a lot with a little here at the Interior Alaska Land Trust and we appreciate and make the most of every aspect of your support. 2016 is already shaping up to be a very busy year and we need your help more than ever. If you're interested in getting involved in any of these projects, please let me know. As always, we also appreciate your membership and donations tremendously.*

*Best wishes for the winter ahead,*

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Trail on Cripple Creek property, showing damage from ATV use and felling of trees by other users to block the trail. The result was the creation of numerous alternate trails. IALT volunteers removed the trees. This trail is not on sensitive wetlands, and has been used by motorized recreationists for years, so the Board supports continued responsible use. *Photo by O. Guthrie*



## Land Stewardship Decisions

The Interior Alaska Land Trust mission statement is "Working with Interior Alaska landowners to safeguard the character and natural resources of our community". We use a number of different methods to meet this objective and protect valuable green space around the Interior. Most of the land parcels we monitor are protected through conservation easements placed on privately owned land. In those cases, the land use restrictions are determined by the land owner and the agreed upon conservation easement on the property. IALT also monitors land owned by the Borough and IALT owns a few properties, most notably the Blueberry Preserves parcel off of Ballaine Road and the Peat Ponds near the corner of Murphy Dome Road and Goldstream Road. For the properties that IALT owns, the IALT Board of Directors has to set the land use rules.

As with all multiple-use land, there are necessary trade-offs that may lead to conflicts among user

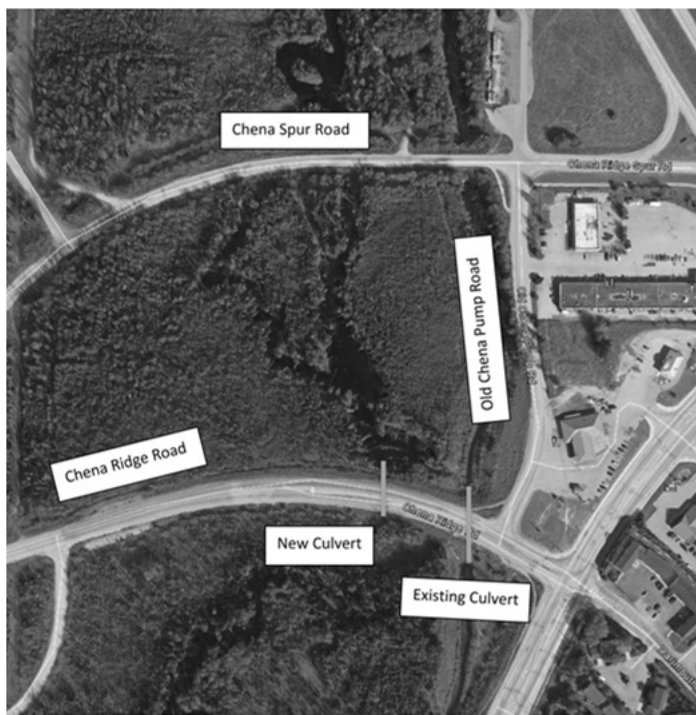
maximize the public use value of the land while maintaining our core mission of safeguarding the character and natural resources. The biggest issue over the years has been motorized vehicle traffic on public trails. The IALT Board of Directors has taken the position that snowmachine travel on adequate snow cover is acceptable, but non-winter 4-wheeler travel over wetlands results in too much trail damage. We are currently adding signs to Chena Flats Greenbelt properties to make clear that motorized traffic is limited to the winter months. Another potentially contentious issue is hunting and trapping. So far, the Board has not prohibited bowhunting on IALT land but has not allowed trapping. We decided that most of the land is too close to residential areas and there is too much public use to allow trapping. As with all IALT decisions, we welcome public and member input on these decisions.

--Alex Prichard

# Restoring Cripple Creek

In the early 1930's, water from the Chena River was pumped from the Chena Pump House, over Chena Ridge, and used to wash away sediment and overburden in the Cripple Creek and Gold Hill area. Cripple Creek's natural channel was bypassed in 1935 in favor of an artificial ditch or drain which returned wastewater and sediment back to the Chena River. Hydraulic mining activity ceased years ago but the Cripple Creek Drain has persisted. As a result, the natural channel habitat of Cripple Creek has been abandoned for about eighty years, and the straight, channelized Drain has offered relatively poor fish habitat, especially Chinook Salmon rearing habitat, ever since.

Interior Alaska Land Trust (IALT), in partnership with the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (USF&WS), has studied the restoration feasibility of Cripple Creek in the lower Chena River watershed for almost a decade, including extensive studies by Herrera Environmental Consultants and DOWL Engineering. After years of seemingly insurmountable obstacles, restoring Cripple Creek has become possible



*The New Culvert will reconnect the historic Cripple Creek Channel. Replacement of the Existing Culvert will maintain the flow of the Cripple Creek Drain.*

In 2017, the Alaska Department of Transportation & Public Facilities (AKDOT&PF) plans to facilitate reconnecting two reaches of the abandoned Cripple Creek channel by installing a fish passage culvert where fill was placed to construct Chena Ridge Road. With their commitment to this single expensive and complicated piece, and through additional work by IALT and USF&WS, AKDOT&PF will remove the largest obstacle in the overall project of restoring Cripple Creek.

However, three additional smaller but significant obstacles will remain. Two involve fish passage constrained culverts at the Old Chena Ridge Road and Chena Ridge Spur Road crossings. This October, IALT applied for grant funds to address fish passage in the Old Chena Ridge Road culvert. Lastly, the final step involves redirecting flow from the upper reaches of the Drain back into the historic channel near the historic confluence of Happy Creek and Cripple Creek.

Earlier this summer, fish sampling in the lower Chena and local tributaries revealed the presence of juvenile Chinook Salmon in the Cripple Creek Drain above the Chena Ridge Road culvert. An essential part of the life cycle of Chinook Salmon involves off-channel habitat use by juveniles for refuge and rearing. We surmised Chinook might be present, but it was great to find the proof. Lower Cripple Creek is an important and historically neglected piece of the Chena River Chinook Salmon habitat puzzle. USF&WS and Alaska Department of Fish & Game fish habitat biologists agree that restoring Cripple Creek should improve habitat opportunities for Chinook Salmon right here in Fairbanks.

This fall, IALT, in partnership with USF&WS, contracted with DOWL Engineering to conduct preliminary design work on the initial stages of each of these projects, with an eye toward reconnecting and restoring Cripple Creek. IALT worked with local contractor, Mike Stredny, and the United States Army Corps of Engineers to remove two lengths of the old Chena Pump House pipe from the historic channel.

*(continued on page 5)*

# Property Monitoring

Every conservation easement that IALT administers has the requirement of an annual site visit. The visit consists of a walk through the property, taking photos and filling out a short report form. These reports and photos document site conditions at a given time and over many years can provide a record of environmental change. Thank you to all the IALT members who volunteer for these visits. We can always use more help, so if you're interested in helping, ask one of the board members how to get involved. It's a good way to spend an hour or two familiarizing yourself with some of IALT's conserved areas. There are still a few properties to monitor, and with the early snow they can be skied or snow-shoed. As we conserve more land, volunteer assistance in monitoring only gets more important.



Photo by L. Byrne

## Land Conserved by IALT

15 parcels owned, 451.2 acres  
22 parcels with easements, 772.4 acres  
**1223.5 TOTAL ACRES CONSERVED**

This past spring IALT volunteers monitoring a property in the Chena Flats Greenbelt on Raven Lake Road came across extensive 4-wheeler damage on a trail. The hiking / dog sledding trail was deeply rutted by ATVs. The damage extended for over a hundred yards. In an attempt to prevent further occurrence our response was to erect a sign at the trailhead, asking riders to restrict motorized access to the trail from April 1 through October 1. The sign is similar to ones posted by the Tanana Valley Mitigation Bank, which has an adjacent property. Let's hope it has the desired effect.

--- Larry Byrne

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## Restoring Cripple Creek (continued from page 4)

The pipes were likely put in the channel to act as culverts at some point in the past, but they had become crushed and bent and no longer served their original purpose. With this step, restoring Cripple Creek officially begins.

Local involvement and support also includes The Tanana Valley Watershed Association's participation and expertise, and resolutions in support of the overall Cripple Creek restoration project by the Fairbanks North Star Borough Assembly and by the Chena Riverfront Commission. The Fairbanks Daily News Miner continues to cover the project and has published at least two articles, including one front-page article on the project.

Many communities across the US struggle to find the vision, resources, and partnerships to make these kinds of efforts possible. Salmon habitat restoration projects are often far more problematic and far more expensive in other parts of the US. IALT is proud to be at the center of this important and historic community conservation effort, and to participate with such helpful and supportive partners. If you'd like to participate, please don't hesitate to contact us.

--Owen Guthrie

# IALT History

The Interior Alaska Land Trust (IALT) was established in 1995 as a result of discussions on the disappearing open land between residential and commercial development in the Fairbanks area. This same discussion was occurring elsewhere in Alaska, and the Nature Conservancy encouraged the formation of local land trusts in areas concerned about the rapidly changing character of the land.

In Fairbanks, with Nature Conservancy encouragement and assistance, Celia Hunter, who had worked on the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act, called together a group to discuss the issue of disappearing open space. This group included Martha Reynolds and me, Merritt Helfferich, who helped to establish the IALT, became members of the original Board of Directors, and remain on the Board today.

Elsewhere in Alaska other land trusts were established and there exist seven such organizations today. The IALT remains essentially a totally volunteer organization working to safeguard the character of the land by working with concerned land owners to insure that the beneficial aesthetic and habitat elements that describe their land and that characterize the Interior of Alaska are preserved.

Land Trusts have a national association to assist the 1667 regional non-profits, the Land Trust Alliance with its offices in Washington, DC. It provides technical help and assists in initiating and supporting governmental legislation that support

land owners in granting conservation easements and provides technical and other support for the member land trusts across the nation.

54% of land trusts are operated by all-volunteer boards who also comprise the working staff to assist land owners. The IALT is one of these, but occasionally will contract with individual consultants, interns and commercial firms for assistance on specific tasks for a fixed period.

The IALT has received support from organizations such as The Conservation Fund, the US Fish and Wildlife Service, the Fairbanks North Star Borough and many Fairbanks individuals. Over the past 20 years, the IALT has learned from the examples and training our board receives from the Land Trust Alliance, and the support of interested individuals in the community. We join the other Alaska land trusts on a regular basis to compare notes, solve common problems and take advantage of the skills and experiences we collectively have acquired.

Presently the Board of Directors consists of five individuals and a sixth soon potentially becoming a board member. We are pleased that we have been able to protect over 1200 acres in an area extending from Central to Birch Lake with the majority lying near Fairbanks in projects such as the Chena Flats Greenbelt, the Goldstream Peat Ponds, and Blueberry Preserves. It has been a rewarding experience to serve the community in this way over the past two decades.

*--Merritt Helfferich*



*Conserved agricultural land  
Photo by M. Helfferich*



## How Your Land Trust Works

Last winter, I was invited to attend monthly IALT board meetings at the suggestion that it might be a good fit with my interests. As an aspiring Financial Planner I am interested in learning more about the benefits of land trusts as an estate planning tool. I also hoped to support the Land Trust's goal to safeguard the character of the land and natural resources in my community. After a few meetings with the Board, I was struck by and pleased to discover that I'd be working with an efficient and devoted group of individuals.

The IALT Board is much more productive than I expected. As part of routine activities, the organization actively works with individual land owners to establish land conservation goals for these owners. This seems to happen in such a way that land owners feel assured they are meeting both their own land use needs and those of their community. Land deals move forward once the transfer is determined to be in the best interest of involved parties. I have enjoyed watching Board members assist landowners from near the IALT Goldstream Peat Ponds and Chena Flats Greenbelt projects, in addition to establishing ties with new landowners from all over Fairbanks.

The thoughtful stewardship of IALT lands and easements is impressive. It is part of a land trust's charter to maintain the land trust agreement, and

IALT takes this responsibility seriously, by visiting IALT parcels at least annually. In the last half-year, I've participated in and am aware of numerous trip reports from land visits, which have included activities such as placement of educational signage to discourage squatters and trash removal, all for the purpose of maintaining the original integrity of each parcel. This winter I look forward to participating in some recreational visits to IALT lands, such as ice skating on the Peat Ponds!

It has been particularly rewarding to watch IALT work with agencies and individuals on land rehabilitation projects in our community, such as the Cripple Creek Restoration project. In this case, Board members have teamed up with Department of Transportation, US Fish and Wildlife Service, and locals in an effort to restore aquatic habitat in Cripple Creek. Although much of the Cripple Creek Restoration project remains to be implemented, already IALT has coordinated to remove aging infrastructure and improve land along the Creek.

These experiences have excited me about the year to come. Although winter can be a time for slowing down in Fairbanks, if last year was any indication, then I suspect it will be a busy one for IALT.

--Greta Myerchin-Tape



## Taxes or No Taxes?

Did you know that the Interior Alaska Land Trust pays property taxes on property that it owns in the Fairbanks North Star Borough? Though the Land Trust properties are used only for public purposes, they are not considered by the Borough to be permanently protected. The land trusts in Juneau, Homer and Anchorage do not pay property taxes on their conserved land.

The IALT Board, up to now, has considered paying these taxes as part of our contribution to the Fairbanks community. However, as the community use of Land Trust properties and the tax burden have grown over time, the Board feels it is time to reconsider our position, and petition the Borough to remove some parcels from the tax rolls. The tax payments are much larger than any other stewardship costs the Land Trust pays for maintaining these properties.

We would be interested in your perspective on this subject (and others!). If you have comments, please contact us via email: [interioraklandtrust@gmail.com](mailto:interioraklandtrust@gmail.com).

--Martha Reynolds, Board Treasurer



**Annual Meeting**

Monday Nov. 2, 6:30-8:00 pm  
Noel Wien Library  
Conference Room

**MANY THANKS TO OUR VOLUNTEERS**

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

**Community volunteers:** Frank Keim, Jen Allison-Keim, Greta Myerchin-Tape, Tom Paragi, Peggy Powell, Sally Andersen, Olivia Scott

**AND TO OUR MEMBERS**

Anne Ruggles & Don Hampton, Dan & Sue Bishop, Mary & Richard Bishop, Karen Bollinger, Larry & Karla Bright, Susan Brinkman, David & Patricia Burns, Bob & Linda Bursiel, Gail Davidson, Linda Schandelmeier & John Davies, Linda DeFoliart & Dave McGuire, Anne Doerpinghaus & Bill Witte, Muffy & Jim Durst, Nora Foster, Roger & Edith Garrett, Tony Gasbarro, Tom George, Joanne Groves, Mary Lee & Dale Guthrie, Merritt Helfferich, Bob & Joann Henszey, Daisy Huang, Tanya Ignacio, Jean James, Rick & Cory Johnson, Torre & Janet Jorgenson, Stan Justice, Janet Kidd & Jon Lindstrom, Joan Koponen, Heather

Koponen, Brendan & Nettie LaBelle-Hamer, Julie Lageson, Sherry Lewis, Matt Macander & Katie Garrity, Steve Masterman & Sarah Swift, Barbara Matthews, Gail Mayo, William McAmis, Bruce McIntosh, Phyllis Morrow & Chase Hensel, Chena Koponen & Gary Newman, Mary Ann Nickles, Dan Osborne, Tom Paragi, Carolyn Parker, Charlie Parr & Marilyn Biagi, Don & Tracie Pendergrast, Anna Plager & Chris Nye, Roger & Bonita Post, Barbara Powell, Alex Prichard & Angela Larson, Martha Raynolds, Paul & Terry Reichardt, Roselynn Ressa, Katharine Richardson, Bob & Bobbie Ritchie, Susan Royston, Carol Scott, Doug Sims, Judy Rae & Tom Smith, Richard & Louise Stoltzberg, Mike Stredny, Ann & Dan Swift, Walt Tape, Steve Taylor, Leo Wald, Jeffery Walters, Cindy Wentworth, Paulette Wille, Connie & Cort Zachel, Mary Zalar & Ken Whitten.

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