

FALL 2025

INTERIOR ALASKA LAND TRUST



FROM THE BOARD PRESIDENT

*Owen Guthrie
Board President*

Dear Friends,

Thank you for taking the time to read our newsletter. Thank you for your donations and for all of your support! You are making a difference in the character of Fairbanks.

As ever, your all-volunteer Board at the Interior Alaska Land Trust has been busy this past spring and summer! Here's a quick overview of some of the projects you, our board members, and other volunteers have been working on in recent months.

We finished the cleanup of the 20-acre parcel off the end of Miller Hill Road, adjacent to the Goldstream Valley Greenbelt. This accomplishment was marked when I called Alaska Waste to have the last of the 30-cubic-yard dumpsters retrieved from the property. With volunteer help, we collected more than 300-cubic-yards of trash and rotting building materials—the equivalent of 25 dumpster trucks! This parcel was purchased with your help, and especially with the help of Jack and Carol Wilbur. We are so delighted and grateful to have this parcel conserved and cleaned up!

The Goldstream Greenbelt remains a priority, and we are excited to be on track to add another 110 acres to this amazing greenspace and winter-trails wonderland. We could not do this work without your donations. Jack and Carol Wilbur have also been very generous (again!) and are helping us acquire an 80-acre parcel that comprises the majority of these additions. Thank you!

Many of you probably saw the recent article in the Daily News-Miner about our 319 acre donation to the Fairbanks North Star Borough for the expansion of the Isberg Recreation Area.

This was an amazing effort, and our gratitude goes to all those who helped make this happen.

Farther afield, IALT is working with our friends at The Conservation Fund to acquire a huge conservation easement along the lower Nome River. This will include both banks for about eleven miles of riverfront. We are also excited to partner with Sitnasuak Corporation in this great project for Nome. There are five species of salmon found in the Nome River and it has been used as a subsistence resource for thousands of years. We are grateful to be able to help conserve this important and beautiful stretch of an important Alaskan river.

In this time of national turmoil, our work brings me joy. The completion of these projects brings me peace. As a recipient of our newsletter, it's likely we share common values such as the wooded spaces interspersed between our homes, access to trails through black spruce bogs, as well as the presence of the wild creatures that harbor in these spaces. Together, we are supporting IALT's long-term effort to shape what our community looks like and what it feels like. Whether it is conserving salmon habitat or preserving access to trails and green spaces, it is work worth doing.

I wish you a wonderful fall. I know we are all looking forward to a beautiful Fairbanks winter with some great new trail opportunities!

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Owen Guthrie", with a long, sweeping horizontal stroke extending to the right.



HAPPY 30TH ANNIVERSARY, IALT!

*Jen Schell
Board Member*

What do you remember about 1995? *Braveheart* was in theaters; *Seinfeld* was on television. And IALT conserved its very first property! To celebrate the thirtieth anniversary of this landmark occasion, we threw a party for our members on Friday, August 15th at Ursa Major Distilling. At the gathering, we shared stories about our organization and our conservation successes. From the conversations, it was evident that our members definitely enjoy spending time watching waterfowl at the Peat Ponds and hiking in Chinook Conservation Park! We also held a small ceremony—emceed by our secretary Max Plichta—to honor our major donors. We truly appreciate their generosity! Afterwards, we indulged in cake and cocktails. We want to thank Ursa Major for sponsoring this super fun celebration, and we want to thank all of our members for contributing to our success. We couldn't do it without you. Here's to many more years of conserving properties in Fairbanks and elsewhere in Interior Alaska!

LEGACIES

*Cam Leonard
Board Member*

It all began with Celia Hunter!

Back in the 90's Martha 'Tako' Raynolds and her husband Sam were neighbors with the late Celia Hunter, one of the early and legendary conservationists in Alaska. Celia was the one to suggest that Tako look into starting a land trust for the Fairbanks area. Tako and Celia convened a public meeting at the library, and over 50 folks showed up. The seed for Interior Alaska Land Trust was planted.



In August 1995, the Interior Alaska Land Trust was formally incorporated as a nonprofit corporation. Purporting to be "too green," Celia declined to be one of the incorporators or original board members. That honor belongs to Tako, Merritt Helfferich, and Frank Foster.

Remarkably, Tako has served on the board for 29 of the past 30 years, taking one year off for a Fulbright sabbatical. Celia passed away in 2001, but is still remembered fondly around the kitchen table she left behind, in her former home where Tako and Sam now reside. Merritt, another beloved fixture in our Fairbanks community, passed on in 2019. Frank passed away in 2011, and his wife Nora recently conserved their land with a conservation easement. Their legacies live on, through IALT's ongoing efforts to preserve what they loved about Alaska, what we IALT members love as well: undisturbed natural settings, with trails that allow us to enjoy them. Largely thanks to Celia's vision and Tako's dedication.



YOU ARE INVITED

Interior Alaska Land Trust Annual Meeting
7pm Wednesday, November 5, 2025
Murie Auditorium, UAF

Come learn more about the Cripple Creek Restoration project! UAF graduate student Dakota Keller will share about her research monitoring the success of the fish passage installation. The presentation will be followed by a brief business meeting to elect Board Members for 2025.

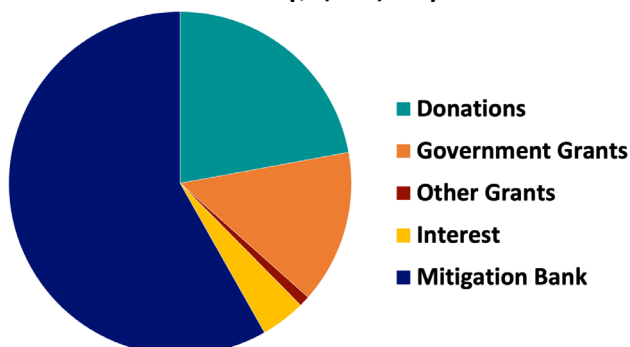


FINANCIALS AT A GLANCE

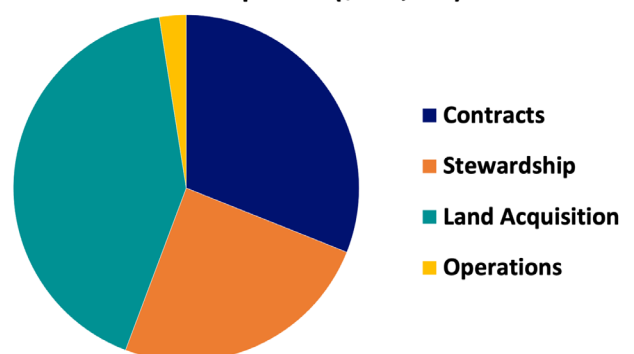
Martha Raynolds
Board Treasurer

In 2024, IALT received funding for long-term stewardship of 2,294 acres of wetlands to be set aside in a mitigation bank. If we look at IALT's 2024 income without the mitigation bank funding, our income was still greater than our expenses. Donations from the public were our second largest source of income. IALT also received a government grant for work on the Cripple Creek restoration project, which is accounted for in the contracts category in the expenses chart below. The majority of our 2024 expenses were for conservation projects—land acquisition and stewardship activities.

2024 Income (\$1,364,361)



2024 Expenses (\$546,021)

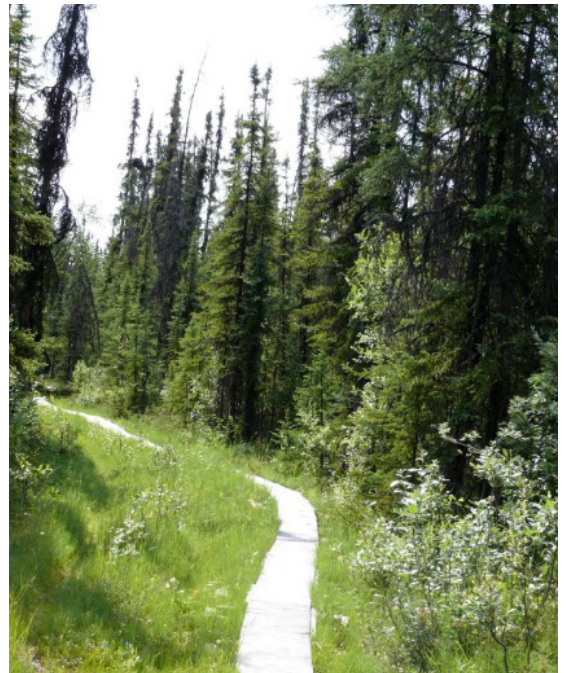


FINDLAY FOREST

*Martha Raynolds
Board Treasurer*

Findlay Forest is a patch of woods not far from Ace Lake, that was once home to a group of idealistic artists and musicians, including Gordon Wright and Findlay Abbott. They built cabins in the forest and established a network of trails to visit each other. Nora and Frank Foster were also part of this collective; the cabin where they raised their daughter was a half-mile walk from the road. Over time, they got ownership of many of the parcels.

After Frank's death, Nora started working with the Land Trust to conserve Findlay Forest. Nora was already well acquainted with the Interior Alaska Land Trust.



Frank Foster was a founding member, and he and Nora both served on the Board in alternating terms. They helped to ensure a stable footing for IALT, following Land Trust Alliance guidelines, and find its niche in Fairbanks' land ownership and land conservation community.

Nora has generously donated a conservation easement on the Findlay Forest property. The boardwalks that were once well maintained over the fragile permafrost have deteriorated over the years, now that most of the cabins are no longer occupied. But winter recreationists have continued to use the trails, which connect to the Ace Lake and Sheep Creek trail system, and Nora plans to allow non-motorized recreation to continue. Many thanks to the Foster family for their stewardship of this special property, and their willingness to donate all development rights to the Interior Alaska Land Trust!

THANK YOU VOLUNTEERS

MONITORS: Martha Raynolds, Maxwell Plichta, Christin Swearingen, Marissa Breslin, Frank Keim, Julie Lageson, Andrew Keller, Magali Vincent, Scott Bredbenner, Tracie Curry, Jerry Lipka, Heather Koponen, Carolyn Loeffler, Betsy and Mathew Sturm, Brie Van Dam, Sara Tabbert, Gail Davidson, Joe McWilliams, and Rick Baumfalk

BOARD OF DIRECTORS: Owen Guthrie (President), Brendan Labelle-Hamer (Vice President), Martha Raynolds (Treasurer), Maxwell Plichta (Secretary), Seth Adams, Sue Bishop, Cam Leonard, Jen Schell, and Christin Swearingen

TANANA VALLEY RAILROAD PARCEL CLEANUP

*Max Plichta
Board Secretary*

In March 2024, with generous support of community members and a matching gift from Jack and Carol Wilbur, IALT purchased the 20-acre parcel at 725 Miller Hill Road. This acquisition was especially important because the historic Tanana Valley Railroad trail, long used by skiers, mushers, and snowmachiners, had been blocked since about 2020. Reopening the trail reconnected a key link between Ballaine Road and Sheep Creek Road for both recreation and winter commuting.

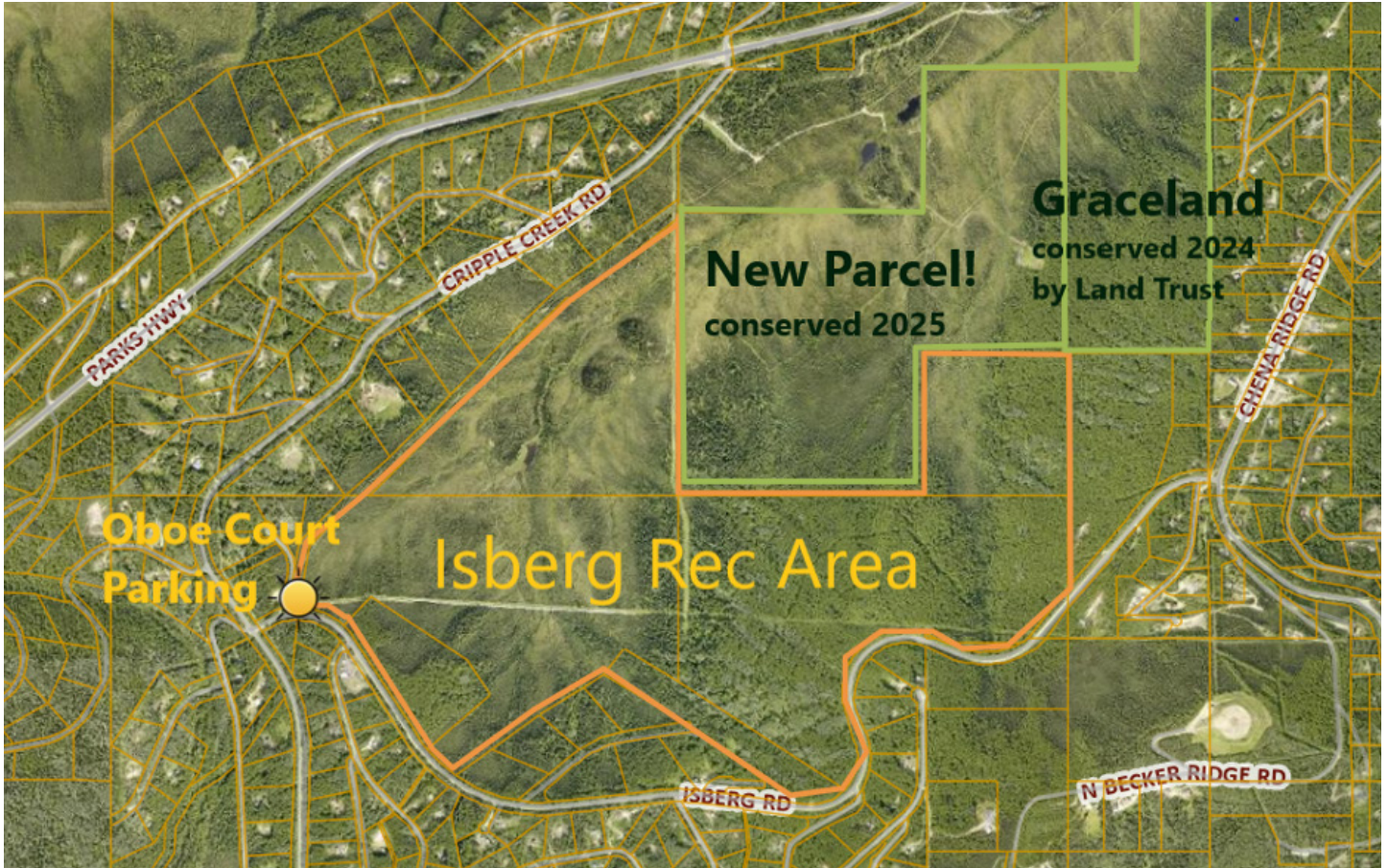
The purchase was only the beginning. The property came with decades of accumulated junk including a derelict school bus, a trailer used as a pig pen, a collapsing one-room house, countless tires, and scattered refuse. Over two summers of dedicated cleanup, IALT board members and dozens of volunteers hauled away eight large dumpsters of trash, multiple vehicles, and roughly 20 tons of debris. With the help of donated materials, discounted equipment, and countless volunteer hours, the site has been transformed. Moose beds are already visible in the tall grass where trash piles once stood.

Today, the Tanana Valley Railroad parcel protects wetlands and wildlife habitat, provides open space at the edge of the Goldstream Valley Greenbelt, and ensures permanent access along the Tanana Valley Railroad trail. If you helped, thank you. Your efforts turned an eyesore into a community asset. We invite everyone to enjoy the trail this winter and celebrate what can be accomplished together.



CRIPPLE CREEK HEADWATERS

*Christin Swearingen
Board Member*



Thanks to generous community support, we conserved the 90-acre “Graceland” parcel in 2024. This property is an important asset for the intrinsic value of protecting the vital wildlife habitat where Cripple Creek begins, and the area boasts wonderful recreational opportunities as well. The southwest corner of Graceland shares a border with the borough’s Isberg Recreation Area. And in 2025, with a combination of individual donations and a North American Wetlands Conservation Act grant, we were able to purchase the adjacent parcel, roughly 210 acres that connect directly to Graceland and Isberg Rec Area. Together, the two IALT properties are known as the Cripple Creek Headwaters. These woods and wetlands were already beloved by our community; several trails wind through this area, used for decades by skiers, dog walkers, and snowmachiners alike. Thanks to wonderful supporters like you, these trails are no longer at risk of being gated off by a new residential subdivision.

But we didn’t stop there. IALT proposed an agreement of joint management of the land with Fairbanks North Star Borough Parks and Recreation Department. The Cripple Creek Headwaters property is over 300 acres; it functionally doubles the size of the Isberg Recreation Area. And this September, the Borough Assembly voted unanimously to accept IALT’s donation of these 300 acres! The merge protects a section of trail in the Borough’s Comprehensive Recreational Trails Plan, opens the possibility for new loop trails, and ensures the monitoring of the area’s conservation values in perpetuity.

WILD LAKE PARCEL

*Brendan LaBelle-Hamer
Board Vice President*

Wild Lake is a beautiful lake approximately 40 miles north of Bettles that drains into the Wild River. The lake is at the foot of Tobin Mountain, just outside the Gates of the Arctic National Park & Preserve. While IALT is primarily focused on conserving land around Fairbanks, we were approached by a former Fairbanks resident, Everett Hightower, about putting a conservation easement on land that he acquired on Wild Lake. Everett is passionate about the Brooks Range and he saw a remarkable conservation opportunity in this property. There is very little private land in this pristine area of Alaska and there is concern about the potential opening of a road to the Ambler mining district, which would make it easier for recreational users to gain access to the land. The purpose of the conservation easement is to retain the character of the land and its wildlife habitat in perpetuity, and prevent clearcutting, subdivision, or further development. We wish to thank Everett for his care and concern for these valuable lands.



SPECIAL THANKS

We wish to thank our in-kind supporters, Horst Expediting and Remote Operations and Ursa Major Distilling. Horst Expediting extended a generous discount on heavy equipment that was essential for the cleanup of the Tanana Valley Railroad parcel. And we thank Ursa Major for their support in thanking our major donors at our 30th Anniversary Party.

We also wish to thank Stan Justice and Fairbanks Trails Inc., and their Summer 2025 interns, Gavin Ferguson and Tyler Christensen, for their tremendous work on the trails at IALT's Chinook Conservation Park this past summer!



CONTRACTOR SPOTLIGHT

Ethan Hawkins

Ethan Hawkins joined the IALT team in the winter of 2024 to help with property monitoring and all the little things that keep conservation work moving forward. He's enjoyed the variety that comes with being a conservation contractor, from working with landowners to keeping trails open and exploring new stewardship projects.

Ethan's interest in land management started while earning his Environmental Studies degree at Wake Forest University and grew even stronger during his time with the Foothills Conservancy of North Carolina. Moving to Fairbanks brought a new landscape and community to learn from, and in the three years he's been here, Ethan worked many odd jobs until last February when he landed his current position as a processing coordinator at the University of Alaska Fairbanks.

What he's enjoyed most about Alaska is the easy access to the outdoors. It's both the summer trails and winter ones, and the mix of personalities, human and otherwise, that make the place feel alive. Through IALT, Ethan is glad to keep building connections with people and land while supporting the care and protection of local properties.

MEMBERSHIP

Member donations make the work we do possible. Please consider making a donation or renewing your membership today on our website interioraklandtrust.org. Membership levels start as low as \$25.

Prefer to donate by check? For your convenience, we provided a self-addressed envelope enclosed in this newsletter.

Lost the envelope? Make checks payable to Interior Alaska Land Trust and mail to >>>

Questions? Call 907-322-3462

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