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### **Kachemak Heritage Land Trust protects another 46.393 acres of the Kenai River Watershed**

As of March 22, 2024, Kachemak Heritage Land Trust (KHLT) has protected another 46.393 acres of land which is extremely valuable to people and salmon. This is the fifth and final mitigation project between KHLT and the Alaska Department of Transportation & Public Facilities (DOT&PF). In 2020, KHLT was selected to establish a mechanism to preserve, perpetually care for, and monitor wetland conservation properties for DOT&PF in response to the Sterling Highway MP 45-60 Reconstruction Project. KHLT's role has been to find, assess, select, and secure specific lands to protect on the Kenai Peninsula. **With the addition of these 46.393 acres, KHLT has protected a total of 209.033 acres within the Kenai River watershed since the project inception in 2020.**

In 2024, KHLT is celebrating 35 years of protecting the natural heritage of the Kenai Peninsula. KHLT is not an advocacy group, but rather a nonprofit organization with a mission to conserve the natural heritage of the Kenai Peninsula for future generations by working with willing landowners. In 35 years of protecting land, KHLT now has protected 3,944.479 acres in perpetuity.

All of the land KHLT has acquired and will protect in perpetuity as part of this particular mitigation project has been comprised of critical wetlands and salmon habitat. Conserving important wetland habitat is just one way Alaskans can work to keep salmon populations healthy and thriving. Salmon lay their eggs in tiny inland streams and juvenile salmon can live in those streams for up to three years. Salmon need land, not just water, to survive, thrive, and replenish their populations. Each acre conserved gives salmon a greater chance of surviving and gives people a greater chance of experiencing bountiful, healthy salmon fisheries.

These newly protected 46.393 acres contain wetlands that support habitat for the Kenai River which nourishes runs of four Pacific salmon species: king, red, silver, and pink in addition to trophy sized rainbow trout and Dolly Varden. The property contains significant wetlands that are vital to the health of the adjacent world class anadromous Kena River, Alaska's most popular salmon fishing river. In addition to being a preservation project, this property contains wetlands which provide important

functions and services to the area, including pollution filtration, sediment control, groundwater temperature modulation, flood management, and habitat for, moose, bears, and bald eagles.

Now that this land is under KHLT's care, it will remain open — for wildlife, public fishing, and as natural habitat — forever. This is a major win for all those who live, recreate, visit, and rely on the Kenai River watershed.

**Quote from Marie McCarty, Executive Director, Kachemak Heritage Land Trust**

*“This final piece in the DOT&PF mitigation project puzzle is such an exciting accomplishment! Protecting this special piece of land is a win-win-win – we are protecting habitat for wildlife, ensuring that salmon and trout fishing remain open to the public along this important fishing corridor, and giving our future generations of people, salmon, and everything in between a chance at a more secure future. We are so honored to be part of the solution to protecting really important wetlands here in our backyards.”*

**Quote from Lauren Rusin, Conservation Projects Manager, Kachemak Heritage Land Trust**

*“Finding and securing important wetlands on the Kenai Peninsula has been the bulk of my focus for the past several years since KHLT was selected to work with DOT&PF as part of the Cooper Landing Bypass mitigation project. It has been so rewarding to see land that I know is vital to our ways of life be protected, as they are now, forever. How cool is it that 200+ acres of land that support Alaska's most famous fishing river, the mighty Kenai, are going to remain intact forever?!”*

**Quote from Ben Meyer, Environmental Scientist, Kenai Watershed Forum**

*“The lands protected by Kachemak Heritage Land Trust as part of this project are part of my neighborhood's 'backyard' where I regularly see all manner of local wildlife, including moose, bears, eagles, and even the occasional caribou. It is truly heartening to know that we will be able to share this space in perpetuity as our community grows. These lands mean a lot to me professionally as a scientist who studies water quality and fish habitat, but they mean even more to me as a place that will persist as a wild space long beyond my time.”*

**Quote from Jonathan Tymick, Project Manager, DOT&PF**

*“DOT&PF seldom encounters projects requiring mitigation of this magnitude, and KHLT's rapid and efficient procurement of the needed credits has left the Department thoroughly impressed. Originally aiming for a 2026 deadline, KHLT's diligent efforts brought the final acquisition to completion nearly two years ahead of schedule. The Department looks forward to future partnerships with KHLT, enthusiastically supporting their mission to conserve critical habitats on the Kenai Peninsula.”*