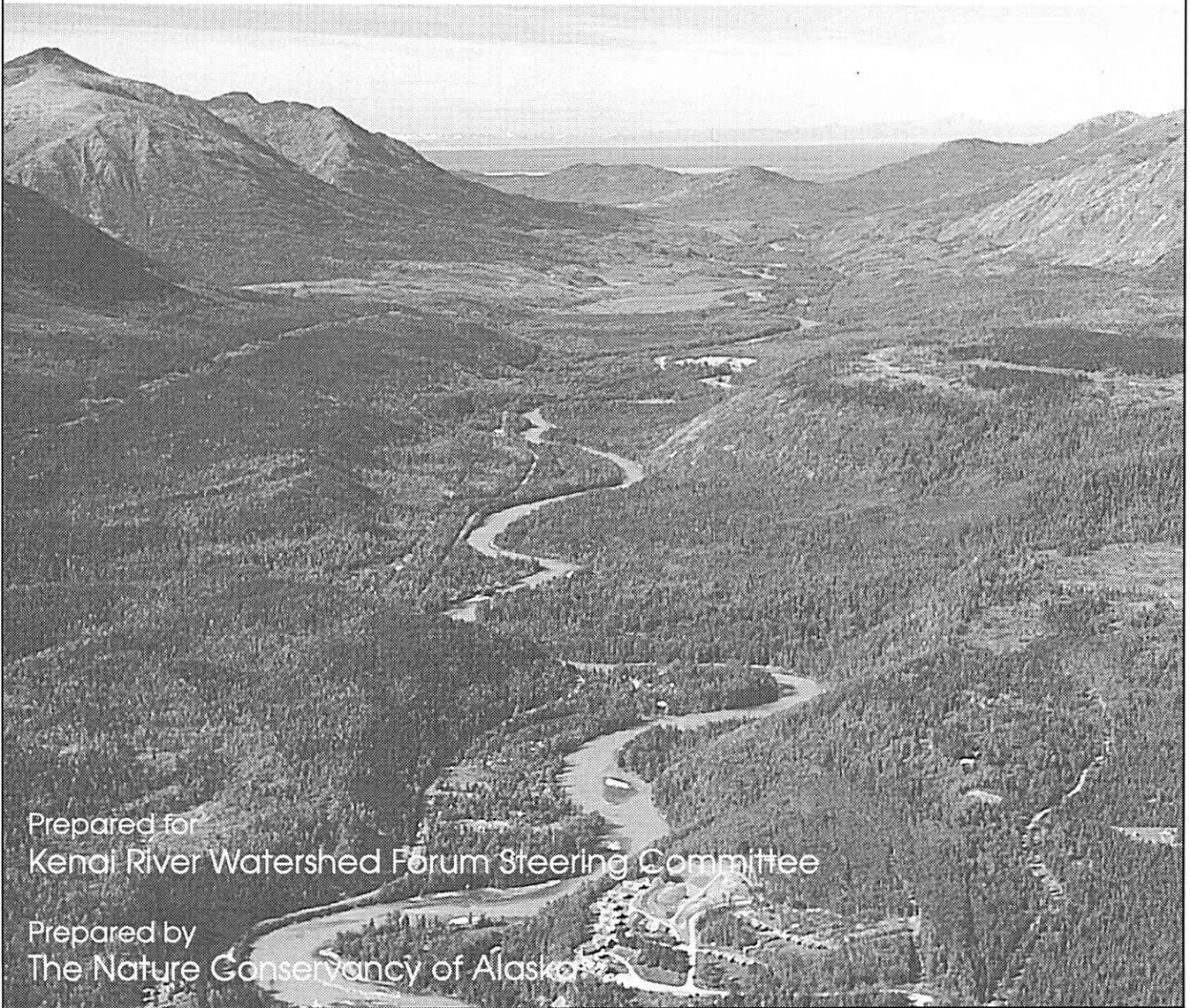


A Framework for Guiding the Future of Alaska's Kenai River Watershed

A Report on
Forces of A River:
A Kenai River Community Forum
Spring, 1996



Prepared for
Kenai River Watershed Forum Steering Committee

Prepared by
The Nature Conservancy of Alaska

Forces of A River: A Kenai River Community Forum

Executive Summary

More than 145 people concerned about the Kenai River and its watershed participated in *Forces of A River: A Kenai River Community Forum*. Held in Soldotna, Alaska, in April 1996, this forum provided people with the opportunity to celebrate their connection with the river, become better informed, and engage in thoughtful dialogue about the future of the Kenai River.

Three featured speakers set the stage for the Forum's presentations and discussions. Dan'l Markham, Executive Director of the Willapa Alliance in Washington state, chronicled the Alliance's efforts to lead their community toward a sustainable economic future. Chris Frissell detailed findings from his research on the link between land use and salmon declines in the Pacific Northwest. He explained that declines in salmon abundance are generally caused by a variety of factors and that those factors must be addressed through a comprehensive watershed approach. Luther Propst of the Sonoran Institute, drawing upon his experience in more than 15 communities throughout the West, outlined key characteristics that set successful communities apart from others. Some of these distinguishing characteristics include: a proactive vision for the future, policies built

around the community's special assets, and strong local leadership.

The Forum also included informational workshops on diverse topics including: how watersheds function, low-impact recreation and site planning, economic values of the Kenai River, habitat restoration, and conflict resolution.

Following the workshops, forum participants divided into seven discussion groups to say what they valued about living in the Kenai River watershed, what were their visions for the future, and what action steps they could take to achieve their visions. From Saturday afternoon through Sunday, people listened, talked, and reached consensus on these broad action steps:

- Encourage comprehensive, watershed-wide land use planning;
- Create a non-governmental citizen's organization to be a voice for the Kenai River;
- Support and encourage river-friendly economic development;
- Improve watershed education including expansion of the Adopt-a-Stream program in area schools;
- Work with agencies to ensure consistency;
- Protect river-front lands through purchase and conservation easements;
- Improve management of angling; and
- Develop funding mechanisms to support conservation activities on the river.

Since the Forum, working groups have made progress on a number of these action steps: a new broad-based citizen's organization, the Kenai Watershed Forum, has been organized; two workshops are being planned (including training for teachers interested in the Adopt-a-Stream program and compatible economic development for planners and decision-makers); and working groups on other action steps have met periodically. People who are concerned with the future of the Kenai River are taking responsibility for ensuring the river's long-term health.



Photo by Randy Hagenstein

Introduction

Background

More than 145 people attended *Forces of a River: A Kenai River Community Forum* in April 1996. They represented a broad cross-section of people who own, use, and manage lands and waters of the Kenai River watershed. They were drawn together by a common concern for the future of the Kenai River and the communities that rely on the health and productivity of the river.

The Forum was the product of nine months of planning by a steering committee of Kenai and Soldotna area residents and was facilitated by The Nature Conservancy of Alaska.

Conference Approach

The weekend was part information, part entertainment, and part discussion. The discussion, in many ways the most illuminating part of the weekend, focused on three primary questions:

- What do you value most about the Kenai River?
- What is your vision for the Kenai River watershed in the next 20 years?
- What are some specific actions that can move us towards that vision?

Forum participants engaged in thoughtful, civil dialogue about these questions and focused primarily on areas of agreement and consensus. This report provides an overview of the key points of the discus-

sions during the Forum and highlights the action steps that people at the Forum developed.

Conference Proceedings

The Forum began Friday evening with a social gathering that established the context for the week-

end by giving us glimpses of the past and the future. The Kenaitze people — through dance by the Jabila'ina Dance Group, readings, and stories — told of how the Kenai River has provided for people since the time known only through legends. Fifth and sixth graders involved in the K-Beach Elementary School Adopt-a-Stream program presented a skit on stream monitoring on Slikok Creek. These future caretakers of the Kenai River watershed impressed the audience with their technical understanding and provided a hopeful vision for the future.

Dan'l Markham, Executive Director of the Willapa Alliance in southwest Washington state, also spoke on Friday. He told the story of his community's successful efforts to improve the quality of life around Washington state's most productive estuary by catalyzing citizen efforts to help make a change. The Willapa Alliance, a broad-based citizen's group created in 1992, has played a prominent role in building awareness of the natural assets of the Willapa Bay watershed and encouraging economic development that is compatible with the character and natural productivity of the area. The Willapa Alliance served as both inspiration and model throughout the Forum.

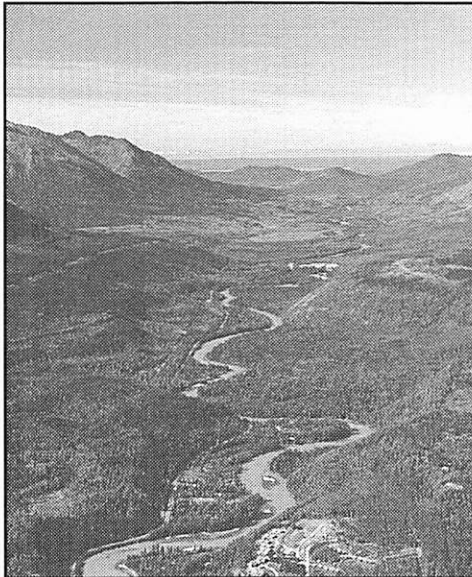
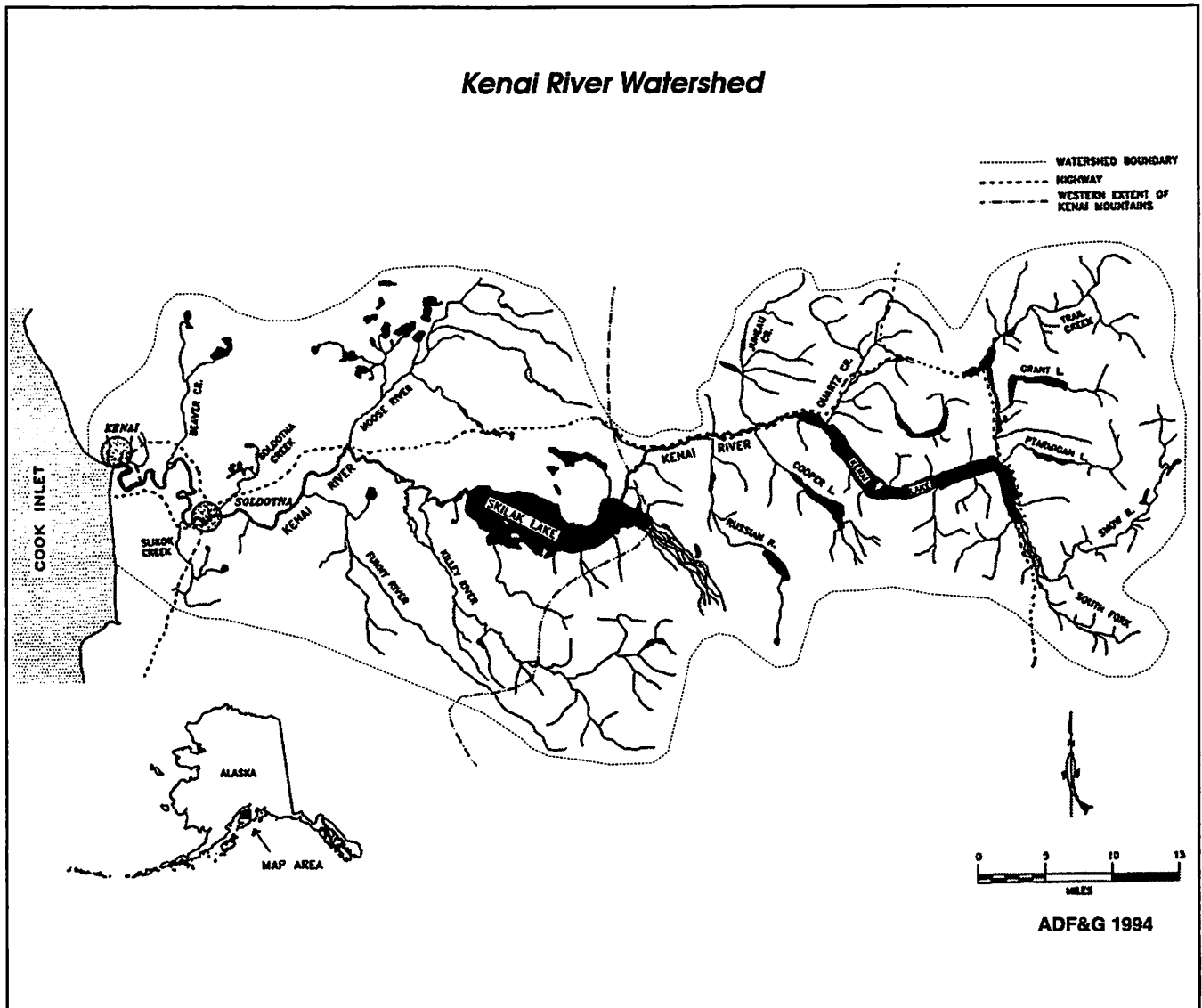


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Technical Sessions

Technical sessions began with a presentation on how watersheds function by Chris Frissell, a watershed scientist who has studied the relationship between land use and salmon population declines in the Pacific Northwest. His main points were:

1. Water moving through a watershed establishes the connections between all of the different parts of the watershed, and
2. Stresses to a river typically have many causes and must be addressed through comprehensive measures rather than through site-specific fixes.

Following Dr. Frissell's presentation, Forum participants chose among several concurrent technical presentations, including:

- What is a Watershed?
- Findings of the Alaska Board of Fish on Habitat Protection
- Low-Impact Recreation
- Low-Impact Site Planning
- Economic Value of the Kenai River to the Community
- Habitat Restoration Techniques
- Conflict Resolution and Mediation
- Fish Habitat and Geographic Information Systems

What Makes Successful Communities?

Luther Propst of the Sonoran Institute* talked about “gateway” communities in the western United States. These communities are typically located near areas with abundant natural values that draw both tourists and residents, and often experience unplanned, rapid growth. People in these areas have seen undeveloped land converted to residential or commercial uses, rising land values that frequently exclude long-time residents from buying and owning property, increased demand on local services and infrastructure, and so forth.

Examples of communities that have or are experiencing these pressures include Jackson Hole, Wyoming; Moab, Utah; Red Lodge, Montana; and Estes Park, Colorado. The communities of the Kenai River watershed are facing similar changes.

What sets successful communities apart from others? Luther Propst outlined several common actions by which successful communities have exerted more influence over development, and thereby protected the values cherished by their residents. Successful communities are ones that:

1. Build local policies around a *vision* of what the community can be.
2. Build policies around the *special assets* that make them distinctive, such as scenic landscapes, historic buildings, working farms or waterfronts. (Designing local initiatives around these assets is the basis for many far-reaching successes.)
3. Go *beyond regulations* to secure quality development and protect local values. (Alone,

regulations are too blunt a tool and usually only serve to define the minimum level of acceptable conduct.)

4. Commonly have *hometown heroes* — persistent residents who spearhead local efforts to better the community.
5. Have an effective, broad-based *quality-of-life lobby*, often in the form of a non-governmental organization that provides long-term leadership, promotes informed dialogue, and helps implement the community’s ideas and initiatives.
6. Are *discriminating about development* and *create partnerships* with responsible developers, local government officials, and land managers to promote local values.

Luther concluded with examples of towns that have responded to rapid change around and within the community; shaped those changes to conform to the vision, assets, and character of the community; and emerged better off as a result.



Photo by Randy Hagenstein

* The Sonoran Institute, a non-profit organization based in Tucson, Arizona, works with communities to help citizens identify and fulfill their own objectives for the future of their communities. The Institute assisted the Kenai River Community Forum organizers by structuring and facilitating the small group discussions and distilling the results.)

Discussion Groups

With the model of other successful local initiatives in mind, people divided into groups of 8 to 10, rolled up their sleeves, and began discussions in earnest. Trained facilitators helped keep discussions on track, while key decision-makers from both state and federal agencies served as scribes to record the major points of discussion and consensus. The process followed the format developed by the Sonoran Institute.

The groups focused on three questions, which are discussed below:

1. *What do you value about the Kenai River and living along the River?*

- Abundant wildlife, particularly the salmon that return to the river.
- The culture and small-town feeling, the sense of place and community, and knowing one's neighbors.
- The beauty of the area, the power of the river, and the sense of open space. People also valued the Kenai River as a largely intact watershed.
- The diversity of recreational opportunities, including different types of fishing experiences, hiking, canoeing and rafting, hunting, and sight-seeing.
- The productivity of the river and its role as an economic engine for commercial fishing and for commerce related to sportfishing.
- Subsistence hunting and fishing and the opportunity to pass along these values to children.
- The accessibility of the river for local residents of all ages.

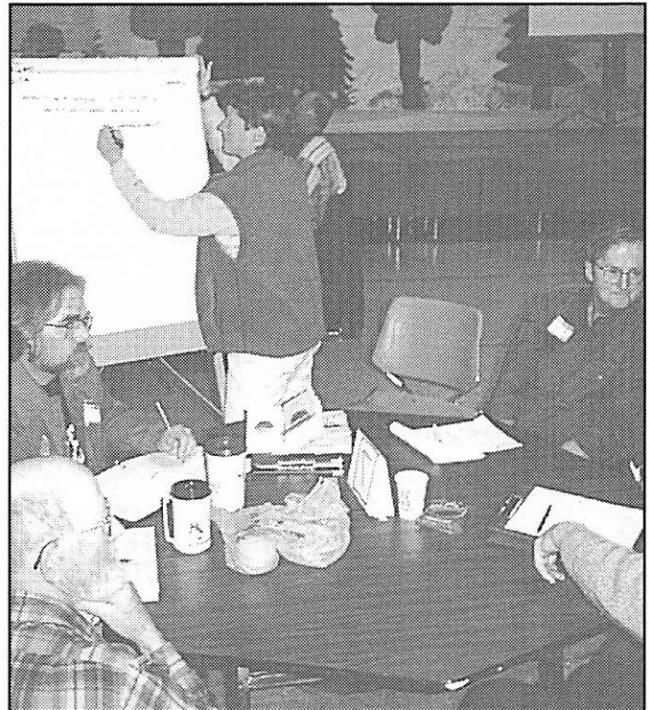


Photo by Randy Hagenstein

- The peace, serenity, and spiritual nature of the river. One person described the Kenai River as "food for the soul".

Many people felt that some of these values had been compromised to a degree in recent years. For example, people who valued the quiet and serenity on the river also spoke about the growing noise from powerboats. People who valued the opportunity to fish with children also expressed dismay at the lack of civility and common courtesy as crowds vie for prime fishing locations.



Alaska State Parks photo

2. What is your vision for the Kenai River and its watershed in the next 20 years?

- Healthy habitat for salmon, other fish, and wildlife species.
- Habitat restored where once degraded, and protected where necessary.
- No incompatible land uses, including no logging in sensitive habitats.
- Land remaining in private ownership.
- Heavily used streamside habitat protected on both public and private land.
- Fish and wildlife populations maintained at healthy and productive levels.
- Economic development based on the natural resources of the area and compatible with the continued health of the river.
- More diversified economy, especially more tourism.
- Only river-dependent activities along the river with other development occurring away from the river banks.
- A model for sustainable and ethical use of a river.
- Communities in the Kenai River watershed sharing a strong connection to the river and playing a stronger role in defining use and management of the river.
- A local population aware of issues, educated, and involved.
- A high-quality sportfishing experience, with angling opportunities available for local residents and families.
- Ecologically responsible access to the river.
- Education opportunities enhanced and expanded for area residents, decision-makers, and visitors.
- A comprehensive plan for the Kenai River that guides economic growth and resource management.
- Planning that precedes action, that protects habitat, implemented responsibly and with consistency.
- Residents, river users, and agencies working together.

- Development clustered and moved away from the river.
- Improved waste management with no sewage effluent discharged into the river.
- Funding available from a diverse array of sources (including potentially from businesses that financially benefit from the Kenai River) for habitat protection, restoration, and improved management.

3. What are some specific action steps that can be taken to achieve this vision?

- Adopt comprehensive land use and watershed planning.
- Create a broad-based citizens' organization for the Kenai River watershed.
- Encourage river-friendly economic development.
- Expand education about the river.
- Influence agencies to achieve higher standards for management of their own lands.
- Protect river-front land through acquisition or exchange, conservation easements, tax and other incentives for private landowners, and restoration; restrict access where habitat needs restoration or protection.
- Management of angling to reduce crowding and habitat impacts, e.g., limiting the number of anglers, scheduling or reducing the number of guides, reducing the speed of powerboats and exploring "drift only" options for all or part of the river.
- Protect habitat through construction of boardwalks and other structures to prevent stream-side damage; maintain a natural habitat corridor along the river to allow normal movement of fish and wildlife populations.
- Develop mechanisms for long-term funding.

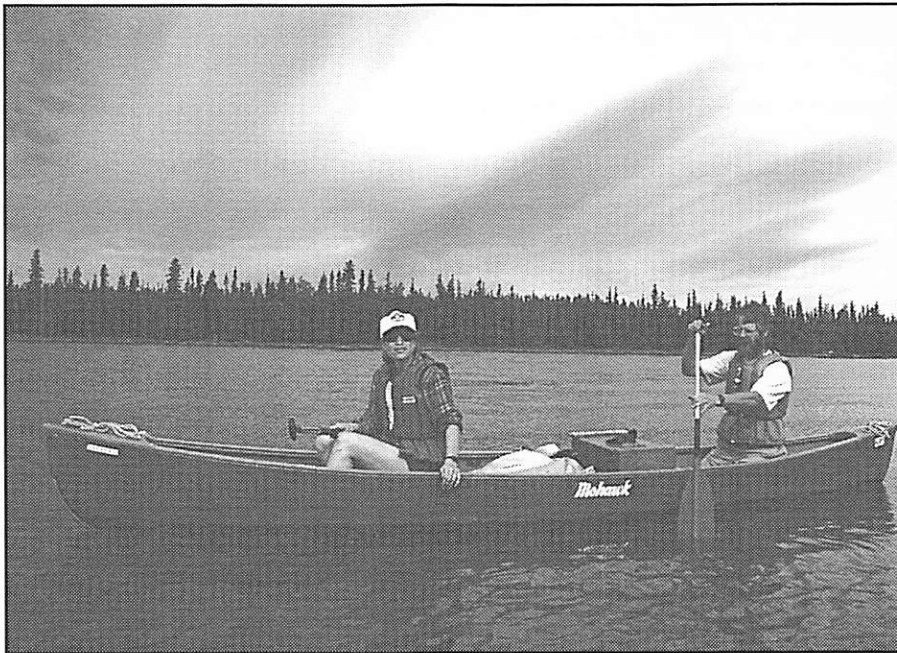


Photo by Susan Ruddy

Conclusions

A Kenai River Community Forum

The Forum gave the community an opportunity to define priorities for the watershed. The concerns voiced by Forum participants and the ideas they generated, will be passed along to other organizations working in the watershed, such as the Kenai River Special Management Area Advisory Board.

These ideas and action steps define priorities that can help guide us, both as individuals and as organizations, as we go about the business of living in the Kenai River watershed. These priorities will define the key focal areas for the Kenai Watershed Forum. The vision that emerged from the weekend can be achieved — *but only if we all share the responsibility and share the sacrifices that will be necessary to build a prosperous economy, enhance the quality of life, and maintain the health of the Kenai River.*

We encourage everyone who put their time, energy, and knowledge into making the Kenai River Community Forum a success, as well as all others interested in the health of the Kenai River watershed

and its communities, to join in making this vision a reality. *Become a force for the river.*

Since the Forum...

Groups have formed to begin taking steps toward the future vision described at the Forum. Already the following activities are underway:

- A new broad-based citizen's group, the Kenai Watershed Forum, has been incorporated as a non-profit organization in the state of Alaska.
- A workshop is being planned for teachers who want to start an Adopt-a-Stream program in their schools.
- A workshop on "Building a Stable Future for Local Communities" is planned for the fall of 1997.

People concerned with the future of the Kenai River are exploring ways to make a difference and are taking the initiative to help ensure the long-term health of the Kenai River and its watershed.

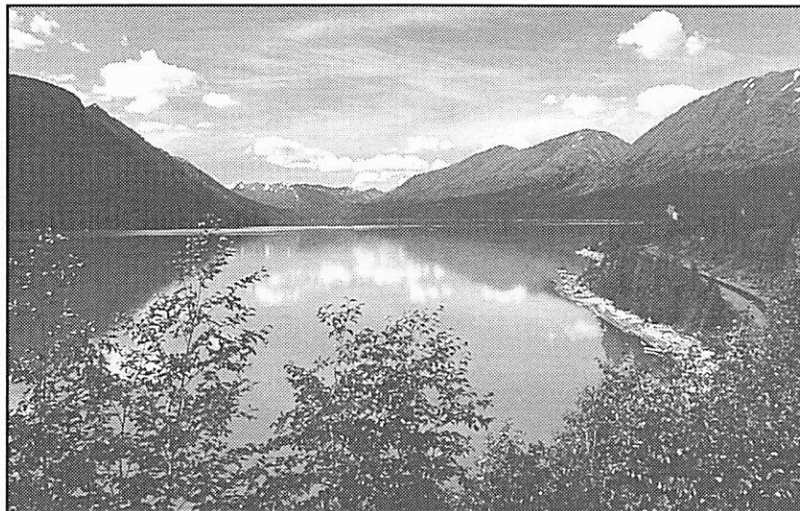


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Action Groups

At the end of the Forum, people organized into groups to begin taking specific steps toward achieving their vision for the river.

Watershed-wide land use planning

Brannon Ames
Catherine Cassidy
Jack Dean
Glenda Landau
Linell McCrum
Phil North

Create a non-government citizen's organization

Catherine Cassidy
Dan Chay
Bob Correia
Peggy Mullen
Phil North
Scott Philips
Charles Quarre
Paul A. Shadura II
Curt Shuey

River-friendly economic development

Heidi Chay
James E. Fisher
Glenda Landau
Edna Lyons
Ken Marlow
Peggy Mullen
Charles Quarre
Liz Schmidt

Watershed education

Barb Casell
Nancy Courtright
Ken Hasper
Charlie Jenkins
Lori Landstrom
Edna Lyons
Ken Marlow
Linell McCrum

Agency involvement/consistency

Glenda Landau
Edna Lyons
Paul A. Shadura II
Al Thompson

Protect riverfront land

Lori Landstrom
Glenda Landau
Peggy Mullen
Al Thompson
Joyce Thompson

Improve management of angling

Eric Huebsch
Olof Jacobsson
Edna Lyons
Phyllis McCutchan
Tom McCutchan
Willis Thayer
Joyce Thompson
Robbie Williams

Develop funding mechanisms

Al Thompson
Joyce Thompson

How to Get Involved

1. Volunteer your time with an organization active in the Kenai River watershed, such as:

The Kenai Watershed Forum
Contact: Catherine Cassidy at 262-6189

Kenai River Sportfishing, Inc.
Contact: Ben Ellis at 1-800-478-0724

King Salmon Fund, Inc. and/or
Kenai Peninsula Fishermen's Association
Contact: Peggy Moore at 262-2492

Trout Unlimited Alaska
Contact: Dennis Randa at 262-9494

Alaska Flyfishers
Contact: Bill Stockwell at 274-1288

Kachemak Heritage Land Trust, Kenai River
Region
Contact: Barb Seaman at 235-5263

Kenai River Property Owners Association
Contact: Will Josey at 262-2305

The Nature Conservancy of Alaska
Contact: Michelle Brown at 276-3133

Cook Inlet Aquaculture Association
Contact: Tom Mears at 283-9433

United Cook Inlet Drift Association
Contact: Theo Matthews at 283-3306

Alaska Department of Fish & Game
Contact: Lance Trasky at 267-2466

Streamwatch Program
Kenai River Sportfishing, Inc.
Contact: Ben Ellis at 1-800-478-0724

Adopt-a-Stream Program
Contact: Gary Sonnevil, USFWS, at 262-9863

Alaska State Parks
Kenai River Special Management Area Office
Contact: Chris Degernis at 262-5581

Kenai River Festival Committee
Kenai River Center
Contact: Lori Landstrom at 260-4882

- 2. Get involved with planning efforts happening in the watershed. You can: review plans, provide input, and help keep these efforts on track.**
- 3. Inform yourself on the issues, and inform others.**
- 4. Elect representation that will help establish the supportive policies and environment needed to achieve your vision for the watershed.**

Special Thanks

Steering Committee

Brannon Ames
Sanne Berrig
Michelle Brown
Emily Dekker-Fiala
Ken Lancaster
Lori Landstrom
Glenda Landua
Jack LaShot
Ken Marlow
Linnell McCrum
Peggy Mullen
Vince O'Reilly
Charles Quarre
Curt Shuey
Deb Swanson
Ken Tarbox
...and many more

Round-table Recorders

Jane Angvik; DNR, Director, Division of Lands
Chris Degernes; Alaska State Parks
Al Ewing; EPA, Alaska Region Director
Duane Harp; USFS, Seward District Ranger,
Chugach National Forest
Janet Hohn; USFWS, Director of Habitat
Division

Debra Horne; Kenai Peninsula Borough
Assembly
Janet Kowalski; ADFG, Director of Habitat
Division
Ana Rappaport; USFWS, Ecological Services
Jim Richardson; KRSMA, Advisory Board
Chairman
Jim Stratton; DNR, Director of Parks
Robin West; USFWS, Kenai Refuge Manager

Presenters and Panelists

Terry Bendock; Alaska Department of
Fish & Game
Dick Bower, Jr; Shagela Construction
Dan & Heidi Chay; Horizon Mediation
Services
Chris Degernes; Alaska State Parks
Chris Frissell; University of Montana
Eleanor Huffines; National Outdoor
Leadership School
Dean Hughes; Alaska Department
of Fish & Game
Jabila'ina Dance Group
Fritz Krauss; Alaska Department
of Fish & Game
Gloria Larson-Sweeney and her 6th grade class,
K-Beach Elementary School
June Lindgren Gagnon
Dan'l Markham; The Willapa Alliance

More on next page

Special Thanks (Cont'd)

Presenters and Panelists (Cont'd)

Nancy Moore; Alaska Department
of Fish & Game
Lisa Parker; Kenai Peninsula Borough
Luther Propst; The Sonoran Institute
Susan Ruddy; The Nature Conservancy of Alaska
Stan Steadman; Kenai Peninsula Economic
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Clare Swan; Kenaitze Tribe
Doug Vincent-Lang; Alaska Department
of Fish & Game
Ted Wellman; Kenai River Property Owners
Association

Contributing Businesses and Organizations

AAA Alaska Cab
Alaska Graphics Workshop
Alaska Wildland Adventures

Mark Burgener
Christ Lutheran Church Youth Group
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Fred Meyer
Gary King's Sporting Goods
Icicle Seafoods
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Marlow's on the Kenai
Northcounty Fair
Rockrest Adventures
Salamatoff Seafoods
Skyview High School
Sweeney's Clothing
The Nature Conservancy of Alaska
Through the Seasons Restaurant
UNOCAL Agricultural
Wilderness Way

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The Kenai Watershed Forum is a citizen's group whose mission is to maintain the health of the Kenai River watershed; to promote sustainable development and quality of life for the community; and to seek local solutions to environmental and economic issues.



The mission of The Nature Conservancy is to protect the diversity of life in Alaska in ways that allow people and nature to flourish.



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