

Kenai Watershed Newsletter

Name Contest
Help us name our newsletter
See back page.

From the Kenai Watershed Forum

Valuable when wet

Kenai River Flats play year-round role in health of fish and birds



Rain, melting snow and high tides keep the Kenai River Flats wet for most of the year. These wetlands are vital to the river's health.

Visit the Kenai River Flats near the end of April and it's easy to see the importance of these estuary wetlands. Thousands of ducks and geese stop near the mouth of the Kenai to rest and refuel before continuing their annual journey north.

But long after the migrating waterfowl leave, the Flats continue to serve a vital role in the health of the Kenai and its birds and animals. From producing food for fish, to providing nesting grounds for birds, to serving as a giant sponge during periods of high water, the Flats are much more than just a swamp.

Despite their biological and geological importance, there's no guarantee the Kenai River Flats will remain as they are. A major road already dissects the Flats, and the city of Kenai has zoned some of the area for industrial development.



Flats Facts

Location: Surrounds the lower seven miles of the Kenai River.

What Flats do:

- Detritus (dead vegetation) gets washed into the river where it's eaten by zooplankton. The zooplankton are eaten by fish.
- Insects living in the Flats get washed into the river and eaten by fish.
- Flood Control
- Water purification (filtration)

Lots O' Fish: More than 37 species of fish live in the lower few miles of the Kenai. Salmon and hooligan swim past, and traditional saltwater fish such as Pacific Herring, Rock Greenling, Soles and Flounder also live in the estuary.

Come back, snow geese: The number of snow geese visiting the Flats has declined in the last few years, but the population of the birds remains healthy. Instead of visiting the Kenai, the birds are feeding elsewhere in Cook Inlet. Biologists aren't sure why this is happening, but it could be a result of weather, food supply or human activity.

Activities:

- **Birders** will find many species of shorebirds and migratory waterfowl. As many as 1,200 sandhill crane use the area and can be seen doing their courtship dance in the spring. Owls, osprey, falcons also inhabit the Flats.
- **Hunters** use the area in the fall in search of ducks and geese.
- **Photographers** can often get snapshots of caribou and moose. Sometimes lynx, coyote and bears wander into view.

FROM THE CHAIR

Welcome to our first Kenai Watershed newsletter. The Kenai Watershed Forum is a citizens' group which began a year and a half ago as one of the recommendations from the Kenai River Community Forum — "Forces of a River". Everyone has learned a lot since then, especially since many of us hardly knew how to define "watershed".

Now I know: A watershed is the drainage area around the Kenai River where slopes of the mountains and land cause water to flow towards the river. Snowmelt, rainfall and groundwater all contribute to the flow. This flow of water transports nutrients to all living things along the way. Each aspect of the watershed has an important function in the overall system, from upland forests to brackish wetlands. When the system is functioning properly, we get many direct benefits, including:

- ◆ fish habitat
- ◆ recreation opportunity
- ◆ water filtration
- ◆ flood containment
- ◆ increased real estate values
- ◆ aquifer recharge (for our wells), and
- ◆ wildlife habitat.

Participants in the Kenai Watershed Forum believe that the unmitigated effects of population growth, commercial and private development, and recreational use of the watershed will inevitably lead to the loss of the benefits we enjoy, starting with salmon. Loss of bank vegetation and erosion have received the most attention in recent years, but we are learning that this may be relatively insignificant when compared to other looming problems, such as water quality.

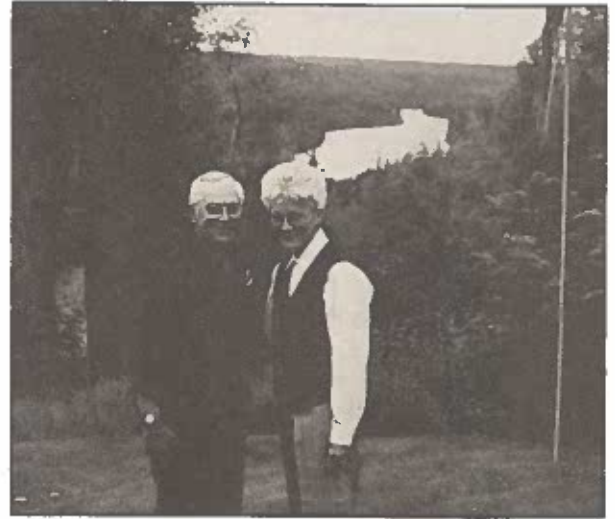
We don't have the answers — we are still learning the questions. One thing we are confident about is that an informed, knowledgeable community will be in a better position to make decisions about the future. This newsletter is one way we hope to provide information about the watershed.

Our vision is: *Working Together for Community Vitality in a Healthy Watershed*. We welcome ideas for future issues of this newsletter and we encourage everyone to get involved with the Kenai Watershed Forum at any level of participation. Our current Board includes Bob Correia, Benjamin Jackinsky, Ken Marlow, Peggy Mullen, Charles Quarre, Brenda Stoops and myself. We are in the midst of a strategic planning process and need your ideas and participation. Call us at 260-5449.

In this process there is no "them". Each of us who lives here is part of the solution.

Catherine Cassidy
Chair of the Kenai Watershed Forum

GIVING BACK



Forty-six acres along the Kenai River will be protected from development thanks to Calvin and Jane Fair.

You can see the Kenai River from Calvin and Jane Fair's house, but it's not easy to get there. Hike down a steep bluff, wade through a swamp, duck through spruce trees and 15 minutes or so later you're at the river's edge.

Calvin and Jane didn't have to build so far from the river. But developing critical wetlands doesn't fit with the Fairs' philosophy of private property.

"I understand that most people think that when you own a piece of property you can do with it anything you want to. You can bulldoze it and turn it into a mud pit if you want to. I don't subscribe to that. I feel I'm a temporary owner," said Calvin.

He may be a temporary owner, but he has made himself a permanent protector of his piece of land near Mile 28 of the Kenai River. Forty-six acres, including nearly one-quarter mile of riverbank, will remain protected forever thanks to a conservation easement designed by Calvin and Jane in 1996 in cooperation with the Kachemak Heritage Land Trust.

Note: The Kenai River region of Kachemak Heritage Land Trust is working to preserve land of significant natural, recreational or historical value. If you would like to learn more about the program, contact Pam Houston at 260-1999.

WHAT'S HAPPENING

- Nov. 3 — KWF meeting; 260-5449
- Nov. 14 — Comment deadline for Chugach National Forest Plan Revision
- Nov. 11 - Water quality coalition Michelle 262-6377
- Nov. 14, 15 — Chugach National Forest Plan public forum in Anchorage. A date for the Seward forum has not yet been announced.

Kenai River Poster On Sale

Here's a perfect Christmas gift.

This full-color poster, painted by renowned artist Larry Eifert, features the Kenai River in all its summer glory.

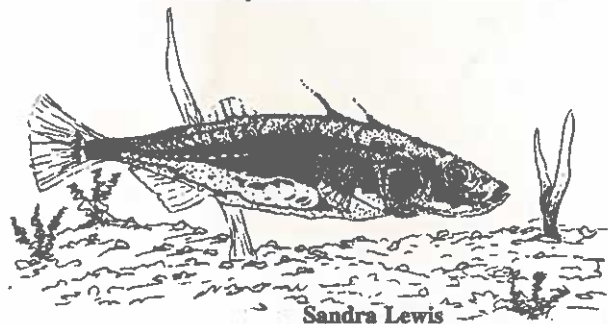
The back of the poster gives a description of the river and identifies all 81 plants and animals featured on the front.

The cost of the 2x3 poster is only \$15. You can buy yours by contacting the Kenai River Center at 260-4882.



F O R G E T

Forget Me Not is a feature that focuses on lesser-known creatures and plants in the Kenai watershed.



Here's a fish for the '90s. Not only does the male stickleback make a nest for his mate to lay her eggs, he's also the primary care giver once the little ones hatch.

Beginning in early summer, male sticklebacks in the Kenai River collect bits from the river's bottom. Using a cement secreted from his kidney, the male stickleback builds a barrel-shaped nest.

The male stickleback then attracts a female by doing a zigzag dance and leading his mate to the entrance of the nest.

A few weeks later the young are born. While mom is nowhere to be found, dad is kept busy catching the restless babies in his mouth and spitting them back in the nest. Once the young can swim competently, they follow dad around for a few days before dispersing.

Species - Three-spined stickleback

Vitals - Mottled brown or greenish in color, up to 10 cm in length, two to four spines on back.

Habitat - Found in both freshwater and saltwater in Europe, Asia, North America and Africa.

Diet - Mostly zooplankton and insects.

Stickleback sometimes compete for food with juvenile salmon.

Enemies - Often an important food for fish such as Rainbow trout and Dolly Varden and birds.

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NO KIDDING

MOOSE PASS GETS FUNDING FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Margaret Paty isn't kidding around when she says she wants to make a go of making goat cheese in Moose Pass.

Paty already raises goats and uses their milk to make cheese. So far, though, it's just been a hobby. Now, with the help of a U.S. Forest Service grant aimed at encouraging economic development, Paty will find out if she can turn her hobby into profit.

In all, Moose Pass will receive about \$20,500 from the Forest Service program, which helps communities that have lost timber jobs because of limited logging in national forests. In addition to the \$1,500 Paty will pocket to study the feasibility of her business idea, the Moose Pass Chamber of Commerce will receive \$10,000 to start a visitors center, and the volunteer fire department will get about \$9,000 for equipment.

Moose Pass resident Jeff Hetrick said the community is still waiting on the money, but he's heard the check is in the mail. Hetrick is the Moose Pass representative on the board of the Resource, Conservation and Development District, which helped the community apply for the grant.

The \$10,000 for the visitor center will go mostly to paying for rent and supplies, said Hetrick. The center should be open next summer for the tourist season. The fire department will spend its \$9,000 on two safety suits and a defibrillator.

All communities within the Kenai River Watershed are eligible for funding through this program. Call Mark Weatherstone at the RC&D office, 283-8732.

Pull your boats, docks

It's time again to winterize your Kenai River property. Here is a checklist to help you get started.

- Remove floating docks, walkways and stairways that could get caught in the Kenai River's ice. Be careful not to cause erosion by dragging structures across the bank.
- Secure moveable structures to a tree or fasten them down with earth anchors in case of a flood.
- Anything that is not water-based should be stored safely away from the river.
- Remove boats from the river.
- Secure all fuel tanks.
- If you're leaving town, swap phone numbers with a neighbor who is willing to keep an eye on your property.

Name Our Newsletter Contest

Send us your idea for a name. If your suggestion is picked, you'll receive a signed, framed copy of Larry Eifert's Kenai River poster shown on the previous page. Send to address shown below by 12/15/97

- If you didn't receive this newsletter in the mail, then you're not yet on our mailing list. To receive future newsletters in your mailbox, call us (260-5449) or write us at: KWF, P.O. Box 2937, Soldotna, Ak, 99669.

CURRENT EVENTS

Bear habitat protected

Forty acres of important bear habitat along the Killey River has been donated to The Nature Conservancy of Alaska.

Frederick and Lois Reeb of Bellevue, Wash., donated the land, which is part of a corridor used by brown bears migrating between Skilak Lake and the Killey River.

The Killey is one of the Kenai River's largest tributaries. It also provides spawning grounds for the Kenai's early run of king salmon.

Flyfishers clean up



Dave Atcheson throws another bag of garbage onto the heap. Alaska Flyfishers sponsor the annual fall cleanup of the Upper Kenai River.

Chugach plan in works

The U.S. Forest Service has started its work to revise the Chugach National Forest management plan.

This summer, the Forest Service met with groups and organizations. Forums will be held to teach the public about the forest and to gather opinions. The Anchorage forums will be on Nov. 14 and 15. A date for Seward's forum has not been decided yet.

The Kenai Watershed Forum
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