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## **PRESS RELEASE**

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### **Cottonwood Creek Bridge Replacement, Palmer Hay Flats State Game Refuge**

(Juneau) – The Alaska Department of Fish and Game reminds all users of the Palmer Hay Flats State Game Refuge in the Cottonwood Creek area that the bridge over Cottonwood Creek will remain closed to all trail users. We anticipate a new bridge will be open before midsummer in 2013. With the upcoming Sept. 1 opening of the waterfowl hunting season, users are reminded that ATVs will not be able to cross the creek while those traveling on foot will need to find an alternative access route to these wetlands. Alternate access may include crossing the creek by small boat, walking upstream for ½ mile to a suitable wading location, or by boat from a different access point such as Rabbit Slough.

The existing bridge has been condemned due to safety concerns and is no longer available for public use. These concerns stem from structural issues related to corrosion and vandalism. Funds from a legislative Capital Improvement Project and a federal aid Wildlife Restoration Grant have been secured to replace the bridge.

In conjunction with the bridge replacement, the Department is seeking additional funds to address and mitigate habitat impacts from ATV use on the area's wetlands. Potential solutions may involve rerouting the ATV trail to less sensitive areas.

The Palmer Hay Flats State Game Refuge encompasses approximately 45 square miles of freshwater, brackish and saltwater wetlands; forest; lakes; tidal sloughs and mudflats in Upper Cook Inlet. The refuge was established to "protect and preserve the natural habitat and game populations" of the area and it provides important habitat for tens-of-thousands of migratory waterbirds including ducks, geese, swans, shorebirds and sandhill cranes. It also provides habitat for large numbers of muskrats, moose, bears and other wildlife; and for five species of Pacific salmon and other fish. The refuge provides varied opportunities for outdoor activities and is popular for fishing, hunting, trapping, wildlife viewing, photography, nature study, hiking, skiing, canoeing, boating and other activities.

The Cottonwood Creek area provides access to one of the primary freshwater wetland complexes in the refuge and encompasses approximately ten square miles of mostly open water habitat. Facilities at the site include an access road, several parking areas, a vault toilet, uplands hiking trails, a covered overlook shelter, interpretive panels, the decommissioned bridge over Cottonwood Creek and the trailhead for a 7-mile long wetlands trail along Palmer Slough. The bridge has been used by thousands of visitors engaged in sport fishing, fall waterfowl hunting, wildlife viewing, and hiking.

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