

**FEDERAL AID  
ANNUAL PERFORMANCE REPORT**

ALASKA DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND GAME  
DIVISION OF WILDLIFE CONSERVATION  
PO Box 25526  
Juneau, AK 99802-5526

**REFUGES AND OTHER SPECIAL AREAS MANAGEMENT  
PERFORMANCE REPORT**

**STATE:** Alaska

**GRANT AND SEGMENT NO.** W-33-12

**WORK LOCATION:** Statewide (Regions I, II, and III)

**PROJECT NO.** 30.0

**PERIOD:** 1 July 2013 – 30 June 2014

**PROJECT TITLE:** Refuges and other Special Areas Management

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**Project Activities and Accomplishments**

**Regions II and IV**

**Objective 1:** Manage Special Areas in southcentral and southwestern Alaska to protect and conserve wildlife populations and their habitats.

**OBJECTIVE 1A:** Participate in a public and interagency planning process for creating or revising Special Area management plans.

**Accomplishments:** Coordinated planning efforts for all department Special Areas management plans were suspended while Division of Habitat evaluated and revised their process for developing these plans.

**OBJECTIVE 1B:** Consult with other state departments and other agencies with responsibilities for permitting and land management to assure development and land use activities in Special Areas do not significantly impact wildlife and their habitats.

**Accomplishments:** Staff conducted many consultations with department permitting staff from the Habitat Division, which issued 124 Special Area Permits during this reporting period. Consultations with other entities have included discussions with developers and permitting authorities with the Municipality of Anchorage regarding development adjacent to the Anchorage Coastal Wildlife Refuge or within the refuge's watershed; oil and gas maintenance, exploration and extraction activities in Cook Inlet and potential impacts to eight Cook Inlet Special Areas.

Land acquisition efforts were finalized with a local land trust for approximately 976 acres of high value wetlands. These lands were transferred to state ownership for future additions to the Palmer Hay Flats refuge. Staff also worked with the Kachemak Moose Habitat, Inc. a local non-profit organization that acts as a land trust to help protect and

enhance moose habitat on the southern Kenai Peninsula. Staff also worked with the Quayasiq Walrus Commission on walrus management and habitat issues in Bristol Bay.

OBJECTIVE 1C: Conduct field projects, public education and other efforts to assure public use of lands is consistent with protection of wildlife populations and their habitats. This will be coordinated with other state departments, other agencies, and public organizations such as citizen support groups (e.g. Alaskans for Palmer Hay Flats, Friends of the Anchorage Coastal Refuge, Friends of McNeil River, etc).

**Accomplishments:** Efforts continued to reduce impacts from an authorized ATV trail in the Cottonwood Creek area of the Palmer Hay Flats refuge and to prevent ATV use in unauthorized areas. Additional regulatory signs were installed and/or replaced and additional trail markers were installed. A camper host was hired to provide information to visitors and serve as onsite department representative.

Trails in the Reflections Lake area of the Palmer Hay Flats refuge were maintained and a site host was hired to oversee the area, educate refuge users, and deter activities harmful to refuge resources.

Boundary marking continued at Palmer Hay Flats refuge, particularly along the Matanuska River floodplain where illegal off-road use of vehicles is impacting anadromous fish streams and wetland habitats.

Staff participated in educational programs addressing the Palmer Hay Flats and Anchorage Coastal refuges, and the McNeil River sanctuary. Staff visited the Redoubt Bay CHA to monitor heavy use by the public (approx 10,000 annual visits) and to survey potential user conflicts and resource impacts from boats and other use.

**Objective 2:** Maintain and enhance compatible public uses in special areas in southcentral and southwestern Alaska.

OBJECTIVE 2A: Work with user groups, individuals and other entities (e.g. retriever, hunting, hiking, boating and birding clubs) to encourage appropriate uses of Special Areas.

**Accomplishments:** Staff have continued to coordinate with refuge user groups (Alaskans for Palmer Hay Flats Refuge, Wasilla Soil and Water Conservation District, area community councils, and others) to eliminate inappropriate use at refuge access points (garbage dumping, target shooting, off-road vehicle use, etc) in the Palmer Hay Flats refuge. Road, trail and parking lot improvements continued at Reflections Lake, Cottonwood Creek and Rabbit Slough.

Efforts have continued with federal, state, local, and nongovernmental entities to address access issues and illegal activities in the Goose Bay refuge. Limited road improvements were conducted and a new walking trail was improved.

Information was provided to members of the public inquiring about opportunities to enjoy refuge resources, access issues, laws and regulations, etc.

OBJECTIVE 2B: Create educational materials (signs, brochures, etc) to promote public use compatible with the purposes of the special areas.

**Accomplishments:** Continued participation with a multiagency and public group to create and promote a “water trail” in the Kachemak Bay CHA. Final layout of a website completed. An interpretive concept plan was finalized for a popular highway pullout along the Sterling Highway near Homer. The plan provides information and educational materials on many public land areas in southern Cook Inlet including five department Special Areas.

Several interpretive panels were installed at the Homer Airport CHA, near the Izembek state refuge, and plans for additional panel installation at the Anchorage Coastal refuge continue. Weekly natural history walks were conducted at Potter Marsh in the Anchorage Coastal refuge.

**Objective 3:** Maintain and enhance public access to and within special areas in southcentral and southwestern Alaska.

**OBJECTIVE 3A:** Maintain and plan improvements to public access to special areas as needed.

**Accomplishments:** Staff continued to assess visitor facilities and needs within these refuges and have consulted with state and local agencies to address legal access issues. Minor trail repairs and improvements continued at the Reflections Lake and Cottonwood Creek in the PHF refuge, and at the Goose Bay refuge access road.

A user survey was conducted at Cottonwood Creek to quantify modes of access and user activities during the fall waterfowl hunting season. This information will be used to help direct future management of this site.

Planning to improve trails within the Fox River Flats and Anchor River/Fritz Creek CHAs continued during this reporting period. Efforts continued to enhance access to a the Homer Airport CHA including the installation of directional signs at several access points.

Working with community partners, an educational pavilion at Reflections Lake in the Palmer Hay Flats refuge was completed. Planning for an elevated viewing tower at the lake continued and construction was initiated by driving support piles; tower installation is anticipated to begin during winter 2014/15. Several informational kiosks were installed at two access sites.

Abandoned cabins in the Tugidak Island CHA were repaired and made suitable for use as public use cabins. New access trails in the Goose Bay refuge and Potter Marsh in the Anchorage Coastal Wildlife Refuge were constructed. Access road improvements at Goose Bay refuge were planned and preliminary work was initiated.

**OBJECTIVE 3B:** Encourage public access to special areas by placing sign along access routes, creating brochures and maps, and through other educational programs.

**Accomplishments:** This is an ongoing effort. Various refuge directional signs were replaced when damaged or vandalized. Volunteer refuge hosts were stationed at several refuge access sites in the PHF refuge. Their duties including providing information to refuge users and alerting managers to issues of concern.

Project No. 30.0 - Refuges and other Special Areas Management  
FY14 Annual Performance Report

OBJECTIVE 3C: Work with neighboring landowners, and state/local agencies to assure legal public access to special areas is maintained or improved.

**Accomplishments:** Staff continued to coordinate with other agencies and private land owners to manage public access to lands along the eastern border of the Palmer Hay Flats refuge.

Regular consultations were made with staff from the Habitat Division in their review of state/local land disposals, easement and right-of-way vacations, and other actions to assure public access is maintained to these refuges.

Prepared by: Joe Meehan, Lands and Refuge Program Coordinator

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