

# Wildlife Restoration MULTI-YEAR GRANT FINAL PERFORMANCE REPORT

ALASKA DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND GAME  
DIVISION OF WILDLIFE CONSERVATION  
PO Box 115526  
Juneau, AK 99811-5526

## Alaska Department of Fish and Game Wildlife Restoration Grant

**GRANT NUMBER:** AKW-B-SW-2020 Amendment #1

**PROJECT NUMBER:** P30.0

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

**PERIOD OF PERFORMANCE:** July 1, 2019 – June 30, 2021

**PERFORMANCE YEAR:** July 1, 2020 - June 30, 2021; year 2 of a 2-year grant

**REPORT DUE DATE:** September 1, 2021

**PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR:** Joe Meehan

**COOPERATORS:** U.S. Forest Service (Admiralty Island National Monument), Municipality of Anchorage, Alaskans for Palmer Hay Flats, Friends of the Anchorage Coastal Wildlife Refuge, Friends of McNeil River, Friends of the Walrus Islands Sanctuary, Bristol Bay Native Association, various conservation groups (e.g. local Soil and Water Conservation Districts, local and regional land trusts, etc.).

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Authorities: 2 CFR 200.328  
2 CFR 200.301  
50 CFR 80.90

### I. PROGRESS ON PROJECT OBJECTIVES DURING PERFORMANCE YEAR

**Objective 1:** Manage special areas to protect and conserve wildlife populations and their habitats.

**Job/Activity a:** Through internal review and/or participation in public and interagency planning processes, create, review and/or revise special area management plans and strategies to address current issues and problems.

**Accomplishments:**

- Policies in the draft Willow Mountain Critical Habitat Area management plan were finalized and released for public review and comment. Draft goals and policies were refined during this reporting period for the revision of the management plan for the Kachemak Bay Critical Habitat Area and the Fox River Flats Critical Habitat Area.

**Job/Activity b:** Consult with Division of Habitat, 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:**

- Division management staff reviewed and commented on various development projects potentially affecting refuge lands and wildlife resources including 114 project proposals that resulted in the issuance of 111 Special Area Permits by the Division of Habitat.
- Consulted or monitored various development projects within or near special areas including: oil and gas drilling activities in the Susitna Flats refuge; Seward Highway road and safety improvements through Potter Marsh (Anchorage Coastal refuge); sanitary sewer line replacement at Campbell Lake adjoining the Anchorage Coastal refuge; Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation contaminated site list; potential impacts to wildlife from installation of communication towers near Kachemak Bay Critical Habitat Area; bridge replacements on the Glenn Highway near Palmer Hay Flats refuge; and application for an RS2477 public access easement through the Fox River CHA.
- Staff continued to review and provide comments on a large housing development being built on private land between Egan Expressway and the Mendenhall Wetlands refuge boundary. The potential for drainage and runoff from the development to effect water quality on the refuge was the primary issue.
- Consulted with Great Land Trust staff on options for acquisition of four wetland parcel totaling 415 acres in or adjoining the Palmer Hay Flats refuge.
- Staff also worked with the Kachemak Heritage Land Trust and the Kachemak Moose Habitat, Inc. (KMHI) to help identify parcels for potential acquisition containing important moose habitat on the southern Kenai Peninsula near the Homer Airport CHA. Consultation and field visits were made to KMHI land holdings to address joint management concerns.
- Staff worked with the Quayasiq Walrus Commission on walrus management and habitat issues in Bristol Bay including management of a traditional harvest of walrus at the Walrus Islands sanctuary.
- Staff attended online symposia and conferences to gain a better understanding of managing wildlife, habitats, and public uses. These included the Alaska Marine Science Symposium, Alaska Trails Conference, Matanuska-Susitna Borough Salmon Conservation Symposium, and Confluence Outdoor Summit.
- Assisted Division of Habitat staff with the department's ongoing consultations for the proposed Pebble Mine located in southwest Alaska near the McNeil River sanctuary and refuge.

**Job/Activity c:** Conduct public education, field projects, and other efforts to assure public use of lands is consistent with protection of wildlife populations and their habitats.

Coordinate these efforts with other state departments, other agencies, and public organizations such as citizen support groups and conservation organizations.

**Accomplishments:**

- Provided an on-line training program that waterfowl hunters in the Mendenhall Wetlands SGR are required to complete prior to being issued a refuge waterfowl hunting permit. When issuing permits management staff also discussed current refuge management issues and cautioned hunters to be considerate of adjacent landowners.
- Through media outlets, informational signs, interpretive panels, informational kiosks, brochures, websites, staff field presence, meeting with user groups (generally online during this reporting period), and other means; provided the public with general and detailed information on refuge resources, appropriate uses, and activities that are consistent with protecting habitats, wildlife resources, and existing public uses.
- Volunteer camper hosts were hired at the Anchorage Coastal refuge to provide refuge related information to visitors (including hunting, fishing, wildlife viewing and general recreational opportunities), provide basic security, maintenance duties, and serve as onsite department representative.
- Conducted public events at Palmer Hay Flats refuge to cleanup refuge access sites and roadways.
- In partnership with community organizations, stabilized and rehabilitated stream bank habitat at one site on the anadromous Wasilla Creek in the Palmer Hay Flats refuge where public use was trampling the stream bank.
- Staff participated in online educational programs addressing the Palmer Hay Flats refuge and the McNeil River sanctuary.
- Materials including abandoned vehicles, illegal structures (e.g. hunting blinds and abandoned camps), and discarded waste (household garbage and hazardous materials) were removed from several refuge areas including Palmer Hay Flats, Anchorage Coastal, and Goose Bay.

**Objective 2:** Promote community and individual stewardship of special areas through public participation and multi-use of special areas.

**Job/Activity a:** Assist the public in being active and informed participants in the special areas planning processes and conservation strategies.

**Accomplishments:**

- Management staff maintained contact with the Mendenhall Wetlands refuge advisory committee and provided educational brochures and interpretation to a variety of refuge users.
- Concerned members of the public that called or walked into regional offices were given advice on the Alaska Board of Game proposal process for changes to hunting boundaries and rules in refuges.

- Coordinated refuge management and public outreach efforts with several refuge-related community organizations including Alaskans for Palmer Hay Flats, Friends of the Anchorage Coastal Refuge, Friends of McNeil River, Friends of Kachemak Bay, and Friends of the Walrus Islands.

**Job/Activity b:** Work with the public, neighboring landowners, and state/local agencies to assure legal public access to special areas is maintained or enhanced; and conflicts between refuge users and neighboring landowners are minimized.

**Accomplishments:**

- Staff continued to monitor conflicts between waterfowl hunters and adjacent homeowners at Mendenhall Wetlands and Anchorage Coastal refuges.
- Provided an on-line training program that waterfowl hunters in the Mendenhall Wetlands refuge are required to complete prior to being issued a refuge hunting permit. When issuing permits management staff also discuss current refuge management issues and caution hunters to be considerate of adjacent landowners. Staff also educated refuge users about quiet title claims by upland landowners and ongoing changes to the boundary between refuge and private lands.
- Staff continued to coordinate with other agencies and private landowners (including Native Corporation, borough, homeowners, and businesses) 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.
- Continued coordination with Alaska Department of Natural Resources and Hillcorp Energy Corp. to address maintaining public access to the Susitna Flats refuge along the 5.6-mile Stump Lake Road and bridge which is subject to removal as Hillcorp abandons their natural gas extraction well at this site.
- Continued discussions with Cook Inlet Regional Corporation (a neighbor to the Palmer Hay Flats refuge) to assess public use and access on their private lands.
- Participated in agency and private (including NGOs) planning for developing the “Alaska Long Trail” from Seward to Fairbanks which could pass through several state refuge areas including Anchorage Coastal, Palmer Hay Flats, and Willow Mountain.

**Job/Activity c:** Manage, maintain, enhance, and promote compatible public uses of special areas (including hunting, trapping, fishing, wildlife viewing, and others) and minimize conflicts between user groups.

**Accomplishments:**

- Region I staff continued to monitor for conflicts between user groups, primarily on the Mendenhall Wetlands refuge. For the second year in a row no conflicts

were reported. We believe previous efforts to educate the public about appropriate refuge uses, hunting practices, and land ownership have paid off.

- Staff continued to coordinate with refuge user groups (various friends' groups, conservation organizations, 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 and Goose Bay refuges.
- Information was provided to members of the public inquiring about opportunities to enjoy refuge resources, access issues, laws, and regulations, etc.

**Job/Activity d:** Encourage public access to, and understanding of, special areas by placing signs (exempt) along access routes, creating brochures and maps, maintaining special areas websites, developing educational panels, and through other educational programs or promotional methods.

**Accomplishments:**

- Staff inspected and, in some cases, maintained existing signs, primarily at the Mendenhall Wetlands refuge. We also provided maps and educational brochures to special area users and answered user's questions.
- Continued participation with a multiagency and public group to manage the Kachemak Bat Water Trail in the Kachemak Bay CHA.
- Staff participated in the multiagency "Beluga Watch" event which encouraged the public to view, survey, and learn about Beluga whales in Cook Inlet. Viewing stations were staffed in the Anchorage Coastal and Goose Bay refuges.
- Staff continued to assess visitor facilities and needs within all refuges and have consulted with state and local agencies to address legal access issues.
- As part of an ongoing effort in many Special Areas, various refuge signs (directional, informational, and regulatory) were installed or replaced when damaged or vandalized. Volunteer refuge hosts were stationed at refuge access sites in the Anchorage Coastal refuge and their duties included providing information to refuge users and alerting managers to issues of concern.
- Continued efforts with other ADF&G programs and agencies to develop an interpretive educational panel addressing conservation issues related to beluga whales in the Anchorage Coastal refuge and throughout Cook Inlet.

**Job/Activity e:** Plan, maintain, and develop improvements for public access and other facilities to special areas as needed (e.g. trails, roads, bridges, parking lots, kiosks, and other facilities).

**Accomplishments:**

- Staff repaired or replaced signs, stairways, and boardwalks in the heavily used Mendenhall Wetlands refuge.

- Trail repair, and maintenance were conducted in the Palmer Hay Flats refuge (Reflections Lake trail and boardwalk, Cottonwood Creek trail, Scout Ridge trail, Wasilla Creek trail and boardwalk, and Swan Lake Trail and boardwalk) and in the Goose Bay refuge.
- Continued to coordinate planning and funding efforts to establish a Gold Star Monument Wayside and upgraded refuge access site at the Knik River in the Palmer Hay Flats refuge.
- Basic maintenance and upgrades continued on refuge facilities to encourage public use and included trails, roads, parking areas, restroom facilities, etc.
- Provided specific materials including grating, lumber and hardware in addition to staff time to construct a platform and boat dock on Rabbit Slough in the Palmer Hay Flats refuge.
- Informational kiosks at primary access sites were repaired and information was updated as necessary.
- Managed personal use cabin program in Cook Inlet area refuges including removal of dilapidated abandoned cabins and assessment of relinquished cabins for possible continued public use.

**Objective 3:** Conduct and support studies of various species of wildlife and wildlife habitat to support local refuge management and planning.

**Job/Activity a:** When possible and appropriate, develop and conduct studies to assist in management of refuges, address biological knowledge gaps, and improve management of wildlife and their habitats.

**Accomplishments:** no studies or coordinated monitoring programs were conducted during this reporting period; however, staff did consult with other agencies conducting work on refuge lands.

**II. SUMMARY OF WORK COMPLETED ON PROJECT TO DATE:** N/A

**III. SIGNIFICANT DEVELOPMENT REPORTS AND/OR AMENDMENTS:** N/A

**IV. PUBLICATIONS:** none.

**V. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THIS PROJECT :** none.

**Prepared by:**

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**Date:** August 27, 2021