



Conserving lands and waterways essential to the quality of life and economic health of Southcentral Alaska.

December 18, 2014

William Rice, PE  
Branch Chief, Habitat Restoration  
US Fish and Wildlife Service  
4700 BLM Road  
Anchorage, AK 99507

Re: Final Report May 30, 2012 – December 31, 2014  
USFWS Agreement # **F12AC00766** Project Title: NFHAP— *Matanuska River Clearwater Side Channel Conservation Project*

Dear Mr. Rice:

Please find the enclosed final report for Great Land Trust 2012 NFHAP award entitled “NFHAP— *Matanuska River Clearwater Side Channel Conservation Project*”. Highlighted below are performance milestones and outcomes. In this packet you will find more detailed information about project pursuant to the award agreement between USFWS and Great Land Trust, dated May 30, 2012. If you have any questions about this report please contact Kim Sollien, Mat-Su Program Director, at 907-746-6406 or via email at [ksollien@greatlandtrust.org](mailto:ksollien@greatlandtrust.org).

**Project Objectives: Conserve Important Salmon Habitat in Perpetuity**

**PERFORMANCE MILESTONES**

Complete the Phase 1 and Baseline for two conservation projects

**This was completed for the 170 Montgomery property and the 800 acre Mud Lake property owned by Eklutna.**

Draft the conservation easement for each property

**The Draft CE for the Montgomery Property was completed April 2012**

**Mud Lake property was completed in November 2014**

Complete the appraisal, title search, and legal review the easement documents. (Fall – Winter 2012)

**Title, Appraisal, and Legal Review were completed for Montgomery and Mud Lake properties and paid for using other funding.**

Finalize the easement and close on the project (Spring 2013 and Fall of 2014)

**Both easements have been finalized and recorded.**

Outcome of award:

**970 acres of land containing important salmon habitat were conserved as a result of this award.**

Sincerely,

Phil Shephard  
Executive Director



## **170 acre Montgomery Conservation Easement**



### **Project Narrative**

Carol Montgomery contacted the Great Land Trust in 2005 to discuss conservation options for her property that her late husband Joe Blaustein had acquired parcel by parcel over many years. In 2013 we closed on the conservation easement to protect the natural forested and wooded uplands and regionally significant riverine wetlands, and unfragmented habitat and open space from future development and subdivision.

### **Due Diligence Reports Completed with NFHAP funding**

For this project NFHAP funds were used to support staff time to manage identify two conservation projects. Once the Montgomery project was chosen, NFHAP funds were used to complete a baseline documentation report and phase one environmental review hazard report for the property. Additional funding was secured to complete the other due diligence requirements to finalize the conservation easement.

**Summary of Conservation Values on the Montgomery Easement:**The Property contains habitat and open space that are of great value to the owner or owners, the residents of the Matanuska-Susitna Borough, and the State of Alaska in general, and are worthy of preservation. Below is a summary of the conservation values.



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**Wetlands:**The Property contains significant aquatic resources primarily consisting of riverine wetlands associated with multiple channels of the Matanuska River. These wetlands provide anadromous fish habitat, bird and wildlife habitat, and help protect water resources from sediment and non-point source pollution and promote the infiltration, detention, and natural filtration of storm water. Field visits have illustrated significant seasonal and event variation of these riparian wetlands, both in extent and specific location. A seasonal creeks cross the Property from northeast to southwest, draining the uplands during breakup and storm events.

**Hydrology:**The property includes approximately 1.2 miles of seasonal stream and river frontage, as well as significant riparian wetlands within the Matanuska River flood plain. The property has clear water side channels to the Matanuska River that provide important wildlife habitat. Streams on the property feed these side channels.

**Relatively Natural Habitat:**The property contains relatively natural habitat including upland and riparian habitat. Forest and woodland resources promote biological diversity and allow for the growth of a healthy and unfragmented forest or woodland. The Property contains native species; continuous canopy with multi-tiered understory of trees, shrubs, wildflowers, and grasses; and natural habitat, breeding sites, and corridors for the migration of birds and wildlife. Intrinsic vegetative cover and limited development of near bluff areas limits cliff side erosion and displacement of material.

**Wildlife Resources:** The property contains and is adjacent to large intact areas of wildlife habitat and patches of wildlife habitat. This Conservation Easement protects habitat within and adjacent to the Matanuska River and its upland buffer. The area within the easement boundaries provides suitable habitat for wildlife species including moose, bear, fox, lynx, ermine, and other Native Species. Numerous fish species, including Chinook, Coho, Sockeye, Pink, and Chum salmon, have been observed within property streams and actively use the area. Several species of salmon have been observed using the gravels and cobbles in the lower stretches of creek draining from the property uplands to the Matanuska River flood plain for spawning.

**Open Space:**The property is situated at a unique, scenic corridor along the Matanuska River at the base of Lazy Mountain. The Property also provides valuable open space in the Mat-Su Valley, an area experiencing rapid population growth and development. The Property provides scenic views important to the character of the Matanuska Susitna Borough and can be seen from the Glenn Highway, Old Glenn Highway, Wolverine Road, Lazy Mountain, Matanuska River, and other surrounding areas.

**Recreation or Education:** The Property is privately-owned, and no public access is permitted as of the Easement Date. However, the Property's undeveloped frontage is visible to visitors and recreational users in the Mat-Su Borough area.

**Supporting Documentation Attached:** Montgomery and Slumber Conservation Easement and Final sf425







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## 800 acre Mud Lake Conservation Easement



**Project Narrative:** The 800 acre property was acquired by Eklutna, Inc. on September 28, 1993 through the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act. In 2010, Eklutna, Inc. approached the Great Land Trust to conduct a prioritization of all their land holdings in order to identify the most suitable and profitable lands for conservation, either through the sale of 1) conservation easements or access easements, 2) fee simple sale of land or 3) wetland mitigation including wetland mitigation banking. Five parcel areas were identified as areas of high priority, and suggestions were given for conservation of these priority areas. Following the successful collaboration in November 2011 between Eklutna, Inc. and Great Land Trust in conserving the 4,789 acre Knik River Islands priority area, and in 2012 conserving the 832 acre Eklutna River Estuary and the 523 acre Fire Creek Estuary, three new projects (Mud Lake, Eagle River Greenbelt, and Mink Creek) were identified as the next focus areas for conservation.

### **Due Diligence Reports Completed with NFHAP funding**

In the grant proposal we allocated NFHAP funds to support staff time to manage identify two conservation easement projects. Once the **Mud Lake** project was chosen we allocated NFHAP funds to complete a baseline report and phase one environmental review hazard report. Additional funding was secured to complete the other due diligence activities.





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**Summary of Conservation Values on the Mud Lake Easement:** The Property contains habitat and open space that are of great value to the owner or owners, the residents of the Matanuska-Susitna Borough, and the State of Alaska in general, and are worthy of preservation. Below is a summary of the conservation values.

**Hydrology:** The primary waterbodies on the property include portions of Mud Lake and a segment of McRoberts Creek. These waterbodies connect to the extensive system of waterbodies located on the valley floor of the system known as the Jim, Swan, Gull and Chain Lakes area. The property also consists of approximately 37% wetlands, described as freshwater forested/shrub wetlands and freshwater emergent wetlands.

**Aquatic Resources:** The primary waterbodies on the property include portions of Mud Lake and a segment of McRoberts Creek and provide important habitat for resident and anadromous fish populations. Because of the extensive wetlands and diverse waterbodies, this area is very productive fish spawning and rearing habitat (Knik River Public Use Area Management Plan). Sockeye salmon are present in McRoberts Creek and coho salmon are present and spawn in all the waterbodies in this area, which provides a popular coho salmon fishery. The Property currently contains freshwater forested/shrub wetlands and freshwater emergent wetlands, covering approximately 37% of the land. The Property encompasses 139 acres of freshwater emergent wetlands and 155 acres of freshwater forested/shrub wetlands.

**Relatively Natural Habitat:** The Property contains forest and woodland resources that promote biological diversity and allow for the growth of a healthy and unfragmented forest or woodland. The Property contains native species; shrubs, wildflowers, and grasses; and natural habitat, breeding sites, and corridors for the migration of birds and wildlife.

**Wildlife Resources:** The area is very productive wildlife habitat because of the diversity of vegetation types and extensive wetlands. The lakes, wetlands, and vegetated shorelands of the valley floor provides a rich habitat for a diversity of fish and wildlife species including waterfowl, moose, bear, wolves, and many small furbearers (Knik River Public Use Area Management Plan). The wetlands on this property and the extensive wetlands in the adjacent KRPUA are used for resting and staging during the spring and fall migrations of waterfowl and shorebirds. A number of these waterfowl stay to nest, rear broods, or use available habitat for the summer. This area often provides the only open water in the region for early-arriving or late-departing waterfowl. In 2008, the Audubon Society recognized the Jim Creek basin as an Important Bird Area (IBA) of state significance due to the high concentrations of trumpeter swans. The basin is an important waterfowl stopover site, where concentrations of trumpeter swans build up in spring each year. Swans also stop in the fall in good numbers, and a small number of swans and loons are known to nest annually in the area. Of the Audubon WatchList species, Hudsonian Godwits and Short-billed Dowitchers occur in small numbers, and Olive-sided Flycatchers and Rusty Blackbirds breed regularly. Of the State Species of Concern, both Townsend's and Blackpoll Warblers breed regularly in the area. In the waterbodies, sockeye salmon are present in McRoberts Creek and coho salmon are present and spawn in all the waterbodies in this area, which provides a popular coho salmon fishery. The lower elevations are commonly used by moose and bear for forage and rearing young. A moose calving concentration area has been identified by ADF&G in the area. Moose commonly over-winter in this area because of ample forage and minimal snow cover (Knik River Public Use Area Management Plan). Dall sheep can be found in the higher elevations of the adjacent property. Wolves are occasionally seen in the area.





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**Open Space (including forestland that is conserved):** The Property provides valuable open space, including forestland that is conserved. Chugach State Park, Mud Lake, Gull Lake, Jim Lake, the Knik River Valley, and the Knik River Public Use Area offer scenic views of the Property.

**Recreation or Education (including traditional Native subsistence activities):** This property and the Knik River Public Use Area are in close proximity to the most populous region of the state and have easy access, thus are heavily used for recreation and hunting and fishing. Maud Road is the northern boundary of this property and leads to Jim Lake Public Use Site, a newly constructed shooting range, and the popular Rippy Trail that are all within the adjacent KRPUA. The Knik River valley has been used extensively by Native Alaskans and early European settlers. Resources and artifacts related to the occupancy and use of the area by Alaska Natives cultures and early non-native settlers are present in the valley.

**Supporting Documentation Attached:** Mud Lake Conservation Easement

