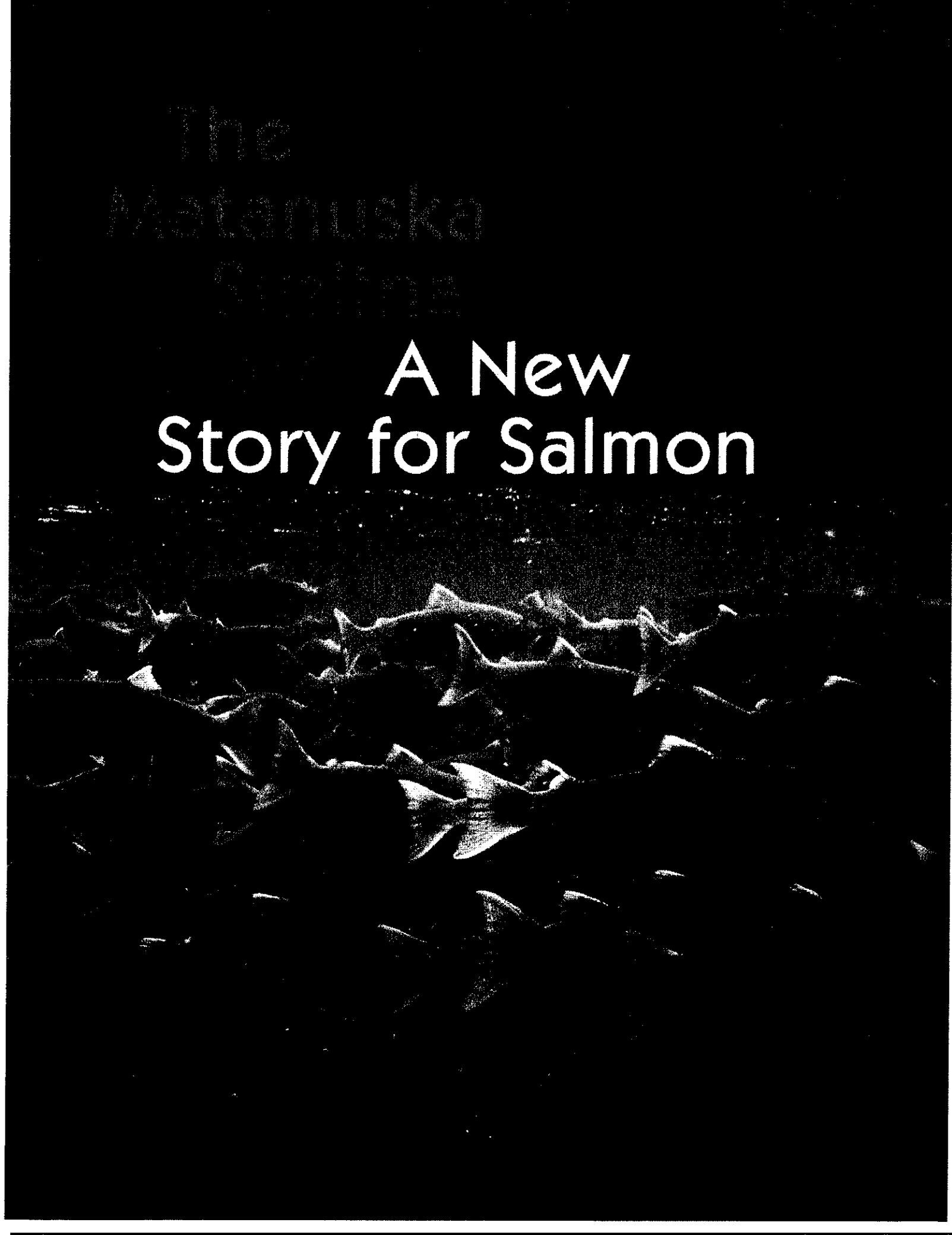


The
Matanuska
Basin

A New Story for Salmon





The Matanuska Susitna Basin Salmon Conservation Partnership

Every year, the streams of the Matanuska Susitna Basin (Mat-Su) fill with hundreds of thousands of salmon returning to their natal homes to spawn. Ocean-bright Chinook, coho, sockeye, pink and chum pour into the rivers, feeding everything from world-class rainbow trout, char and grayling to bald eagles, brown bears and humans.

People travel from around the world to fish for these salmon and trout and to view the wildlife that feed on them. Alaskans depend on these fish for sportfishing, subsistence, commercial fishing and the economic benefits of tourism. Salmon are at the heart of the Alaskan economy and way of life.

The greatest risk to salmon and other freshwater fish arises from many small actions compounding over time to degrade riparian habitat and water quality, change water flow and quantity, and block access to habitat. This steady loss of valuable habitat is the story behind declining and extinct wild fish in the rest of the country.

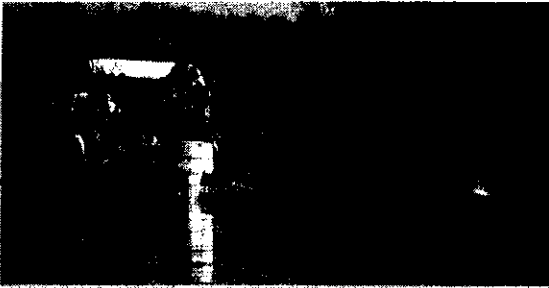
With rapidly growing communities and increased demand for natural resources in the

basin, Mat-Su citizens now have the opportunity to write a different story, one that combines economic prosperity with healthy salmon and fish habitat. That story is beginning now with the Mat-Su Basin Partnership, which is comprised of local communities, landowners, agencies, businesses and non-profit organizations.

The new story for salmon is a story of balance—a story of thriving fish and wildlife, healthy sport, commercial and subsistence fisheries, economic growth, and dynamic human communities. We believe this work can be accomplished cost effectively with sufficient planning, wise development and modest investment in fish habitat protection, restoration, and enhancement.

Few opportunities remain in the world to do it right the first time around. Conservation funding is limited. We must invest in places where there is great likelihood of strong return and success on the ground. The Mat-Su Basin is one of those places and the timing couldn't be better for this effort.

Denali, North America's highest mountain, reigns supreme over the headwaters of the Susitna. The king of salmon—the Chinook—also thrives in this watershed; the Susitna and its tributaries host the fourth largest run of Chinook in Alaska. Though the upper watershed includes some of the country's wildest lands, the lower watershed is one of the most densely populated areas in Alaska.



Ken Graham / Accommodate.com

The basin offers world-class fly-in and road-accessible sportfishing, a pillar of the local economy. Many Alaskans rely on these fisheries to put food on the table, harvesting roughly 115,000 Chinook and coho from area streams each year. More than 160,000 rainbow trout are caught annually. Each year, the Mat-Su Basin sees nearly 300,000 angler days of sportfishing effort.

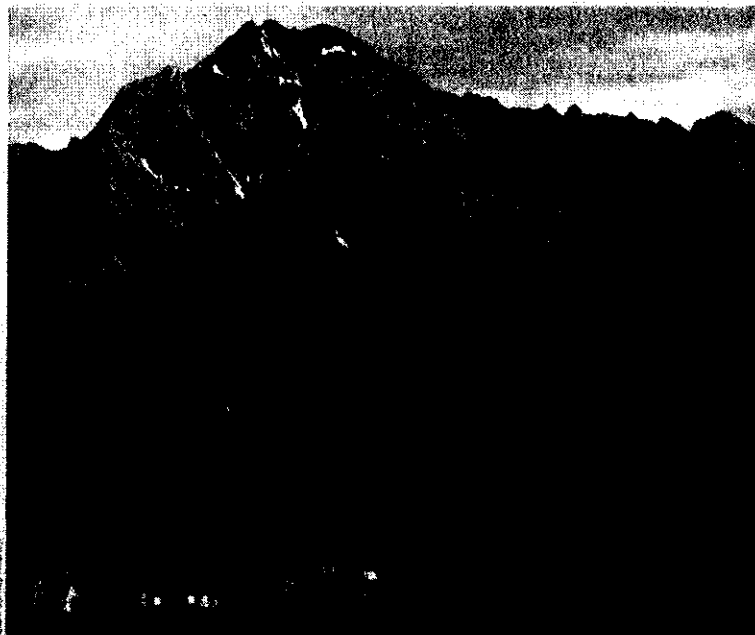


Ken Graham / Accommodate.com

The region's many lakes, rivers, streams and creeks are abundant with fish; they are also desirable places to site homes and businesses. With its convenient location near Alaska's largest city and its wealth of recreational opportunities and extraordinary scenery, the Mat-Su is one of the fastest growing areas in the U.S. From 1990 to 2000, the basin grew at a rate of 49 percent—nearly four times the statewide growth rate of 13 percent. In 1990, the population was roughly 40,000. The borough projects that before 2025 the population will top 100,000 people.

Our Vision:

With its rich history of farming, the Mat-Su Basin is Alaska's heartland. As in many places in the U.S., however, agricultural areas are rapidly being converted to residential and recreational subdivisions, with accompanying commercial development. Moreover, the basin boasts mineral, timber, petroleum and other natural resources. As populations grow and resource demand soars, the potential impacts to fish habitat rise. Citizens, developers, and agencies are challenged to address issues of water quality, water quantity, and habitat degradation and fragmentation. Cooperative local actions are necessary now so that the Mat-Su develops responsibly—balancing economic growth with the fish habitat conservation necessary to maintain bountiful fish for future generations.



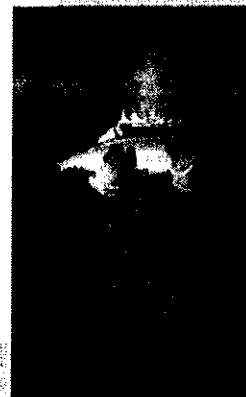
MAT-SU BASIN / ALASKA/REDFER.COM

CLAY SPRING MOUNTAIN

The Mat-Su Basin's rivers, lakes, wetlands, tundra, boreal forest, glaciers and mountain ranges cover an area of 24,500 square miles, roughly the combined size of Vermont, New Hampshire and Massachusetts. From small cities and suburban homes to recreational subdivisions and isolated cabins, the basin possesses one of the most diverse and fragmented land ownership patterns in Alaska. Cooperation and partnership among stakeholders is essential for habitat conservation success.



The Nature Conservancy



Alaskans love their fish. In some areas of the Mat-Su Basin, Alaskans inadvertently risk losing fish habitat to death by trampling or removing important riparian habitat when fishing or improving lake and stream views. Local efforts to restore trampled vegetation and streambanks and to couple better fishing access

with stream bank management are underway with great success. Residents are learning easy, everyday techniques for fish habitat conservation, from siting homes and other structures back from lakeshores and streambanks to avoiding ATV use in spawning streams. Education and outreach are vital to this effort.





Taking Action

In the next five years, the Mat-Su Basin Partnership will:

- Complete a comprehensive assessment of Mat-Su watersheds, including a prioritization of fish habitat protection, restoration and enhancement needs;
- Coordinate an outreach and education campaign, and establish an organized network of volunteers, organizations, agencies and businesses working on watershed issues;
- Restore key fish habitat by revegetating damaged stream banks, creating fish-and-people-friendly fishing areas, removing barriers to fish passage, and reestablishing natural stream structure and flow;
- Protect threatened essential fish habitats and public access by working with willing landowners to acquire habitat and conservation easements;
- Improve management of habitat on public lands by increasing coordination between local, state and federal partners; and
- Leverage significant private and public funding in the achievement of the partnership goals for watershed and salmon conservation.

Local community members and partner organizations work together to restore structure and vegetation to an eroded streambank during a recent restoration workshop.

On-the-Ground Results

First Project, First Success of the National Fish Habitat Initiative in Alaska

Athabascan Elders of the Chickaloon Tribe tell stories of Moose Creek abundant with five species of wild salmon. Those stories changed in the early 1900s when coal mining and associated railroad building caused extensive alterations to the creek, damaging in-stream habitat and cutting off the creek's meanders. The channel straightening caused the formation of a 10-foot high waterfall which blocked access by salmon and other fish to miles of upstream habitats. Salmon populations declined, leaving a few remnant Chinook and coho beneath the falls. In 2005, the Chickaloon Village Traditional Council, with support from Mat-Su partners, reconstructed the stream channel in the historic meander bend around the waterfall. Within days of

project completion, adult Chinook salmon were passing the project site, gaining access to more than five miles of reopened spawning and rearing habitats. Phase 2 of the project is scheduled for completion in August 2006. For more information, visit www.chickaloon.org.

Removing barriers to fish passage, such as improperly sited or sized road culverts, is an easy way to restore access to large areas of aquatic habitat. The Mat-Su partnership expects to improve or reopen 100 miles of salmon habitat in the Matanuska and Susitna watersheds through restoration over the next five years.



Unnatural waterfall obstruction prevented salmon passage to upper Moose Creek.



Construction of the new creekbed following the historic stream meander.



Chinook salmon return to upper Moose Creek within days of project completion.

The Matanuska Susitna Basin Salmon Conservation Partnership is the first National Fish Habitat Initiative (NFHI) project recognized in Alaska and is one of only five fish habitat partnerships selected nationwide as initial pilot programs for the initiative.

NFHI is an unprecedented partnership with a shared interest in protecting, restoring and enhancing the nation's waterways and fisheries. The initiative brings together anglers, farmers, local government planners, conservationists, tribes, community groups, private landowners, state and federal agencies, and many others to focus national attention on fish habitat. The vision: healthy fish, healthy habitats, healthy people and healthy economies.

The National Fish Habitat Initiative is:

- Non-regulatory and voluntary;
- Locally and regionally based, and driven by grassroots partners;
- Focused and targeted toward fisheries restoration in key watersheds;
- Based on a consolidation of the best scientific expertise on fisheries and habitat management;
- Linked nationally, to facilitate comprehensive coordination and evaluation of progress; and
- Sustainable and accountable, recognizing the need for long-term investments and demonstrable results.

*The Matanuska Susitna Basin Salmon Conservation Partnership is:
(as of April 6, 2006)*

Alaska Center for the Environment
Alaska Department of Fish and Game
Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation
Alaska Department of Natural Resources
Alaska Department of Commerce, Community,
and Economic Development
Alaska Department of Transportation and
Public Facilities
Alaska Railroad Corporation
Alaskans for Palmer Hay Flats Game Refuge
Bureau of Land Management
Chickaloon Village Traditional Council
ConocoPhillips
Cook Inletkeeper
Friends of Mat-Su
Glacier Ridge Properties

Great Land Trust
Knik River Watershed Group
Matanuska River Watershed Coalition
Matanuska-Susitna Borough
National Marine Fisheries Service
National Park Service Rivers, Trails and
Conservation Assistance Program
Native Village of Eklutna
Natural Resources Conservation Service
The Nature Conservancy
US Army Corps of Engineers
US Environmental Protection Agency
US Fish and Wildlife Service
US Geological Survey
USDA Forest Service
Wasilla Soil and Water Conservation District



Before



Perched culverts on Swiftwater Creek blocked fish passage and impaired stream structure. By replacing the culverts with a bridge, three miles of fish habitat were reopened for juvenile salmon and other species.



Local, on-the-ground partnerships are essential for successful restoration of fish habitat.

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