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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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GREAT LAND TRUST ENHANCES PUBLIC ACCESS TO THE PALMER HAY FLATS GAME REFUGE THROUGH PURCHASE OF 917 ACRES

Wild Salmon Conservation and Recreation Top Priorities

Palmer, Alaska – For the benefit of all Alaskans, local non-profit Great Land Trust purchased and made public 917 acres of private land in the Mat-Su Valley. This purchase will permanently conserve valuable salmon and wildlife habitat. A three mile section of Wasilla Creek, home to important spawning, rearing, and overwintering habitat for all five species of salmon and 168 species of migratory birds, passes through the purchased land.

Over three years and with the help of a dozen partnerships with state agencies, foundations, and individuals, GLT raised \$1.5 million for the purchase. The land is located on the south side of Nelson Road directly across the street from Machetanz Elementary School and directly adjacent to the 29,000-acre Palmer Hay Flats State Game Refuge.

Joe Meehan, Refuge Manager for Alaska Department Fish & Game, emphasized the importance of the project's connectivity with Knik Islands and Chugach State Park: "The acquisition of this property is a significant achievement in protecting Cook Inlet's important coastal wetlands, which are a significant part of North America's Pacific Flyway." Alaskans will be able to use the new area for hunting, recreational fishing, wildlife viewing, and other activities.

Machetanz Elementary is a new school built to serve the largest subdivision development in the Mat-Su Borough. With this purchase, Machetanz is now connected to the Palmer Hay Flats State Game Refuge, one of the most significant year-round wildlife and outdoor recreational areas in the state.

With the purchase complete, GLT is now raising funds to build two new trailheads and a 4-mile rustic trail, furthering public access to the Refuge. The trail will extend from Wasilla Creek at Nelson Road through the Refuge and end at Machetanz Elementary. The students are eager to learn about science and play in this exceptional new outdoor classroom.

"This is a great example of how conservation benefits Alaskans," says Phil Shephard, Executive Director of Great Land Trust.

The Palmer Hay Flats/Wasilla Creek Conservation Project was made possible through funds raised by Great Land Trust. Funders and partners of the project include the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service Coastal Program, National Coastal Wetlands Conservation Grants, Alaska Department of Natural Resources, Alaska Department of Fish & Game, the Alaska Sustainable Salmon Fund, The Conservation Fund, Pacific Coast Joint Venture, Mat-Su Borough, Bullitt Foundation, M.J. Murdock Charitable Trust, the State of Alaska Duck Stamp program, Alaskans for Palmer Hay Flats, and hundreds of individual supporters.

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Wasilla Creek Conservation Project

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- In December 2013, Great Land Trust (GLT) purchased and transferred 917 acres to the State, the largest private inholding within the Palmer Hay Flats State Game Refuge (Refuge.)
- The land, previously in private ownership, is adjacent to the 28,000-acre Alaska Palmer Hay Flats State Game Refuge and 500,000-acre Chugach State Park.
- The land parcels are intended to be added to the Palmer Hay Flats State Game Refuge, and then managed by the Alaska Department of Fish & Game, through designation by the Alaska State Legislature.
- The land is located in the Matanuska/Knik River watershed and visible from the Glenn Highway.
- Rapid growth and urbanization in the Mat-Su Basin is threatening the fish habitat necessary to sustain healthy salmon populations and ultimately the quality of life for residents.
- Conservation of this land will conserve important wildlife habitat; maintain the connectivity of Wasilla Creek & Spring Creek, which run through the project area to the Refuge; and protect estuarine habitat at the mouth of the Knik and Matanuska Rivers.
- Three miles of Wasilla Creek will be conserved through this project, supporting all 5 species of salmon. Chinook, coho, sockeye, pink, and chum salmon all return in great numbers to the streams and lakes of the Mat-Su Basin each summer to spawn.
- The project will achieve the Palmer Hay Flats State Game Refuge management plan objectives through conserving this sensitive area.
- Numerous conservation plans support this project, including the National Fish Habitat Action Plan, Matanuska-Susitna Basin Salmon Habitat Partnership Strategic Plan, the Matanuska-Susitna Borough Recreation and Open Space Plan, Great Land Trust Mat-Su Borough Parcel Prioritization and the 2008 Conservation Plan for the Cook Inlet Beluga Whale.
- In 2010, in partnership with the Mat-Su Borough government, GLT developed a GIS based prioritization tool to identify and prioritize potential conservation projects throughout the region. This property ranked the highest out of the 100,000 privately owned parcels evaluated in the prioritization.



Macheranz Elementary School, home to over 400 students, sits in the middle of a growing residential development and the world-class Palmer Hay Flats State Game Refuge. Students currently have no access to the Refuge. Photo by Carl Johnson.



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"The mission of Great Land Trust is to work in partnership with willing landowners to protect Southcentral Alaska's, lands and waterways"

- Founded by and for Alaskans in 1995
- A local private non-profit land conservation organization
- Dedicated to collaborative efforts with willing landowners
- As an innovative nonpartisan organization, GLT partners with diverse interested parties including landowners, business developers, and conservationists.
- Serving the southcentral region, north of the Kenai Peninsula, from Denali Park to Cordova
- Permanently conserving important natural lands and open space through voluntary action
- Conserved over 9,000 acres of land including 40 miles of salmon streams, 5,000 acres of wetlands, six historic homesteads, seven municipal parks, three projects that provide access to Palmer Hay Flats Game Refuge, three trail development projects, two projects that provide access to Chugach State Park, and a historic 80-acre farm in Trapper Creek.

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