

**HB**

**37**

# ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE



REPRESENTATIVE LES GARA

## **HB 37: State Land Trades/Purchases With Willing Landowners To Regain Fishing Stream Access** (Revised March 31, 2005)

Alaska's rivers are a treasured resource for fishermen, boaters, hunters, hikers, and people of all walks of life. We need to protect the public's access to them. House Bill 37 aims to ensure future public access to Alaska's fishing streams by putting in place a mechanism for **voluntary** land exchanges (or purchases) between the State and private owners along important recreational rivers. The program would be facilitated by the Department of Natural Resources and would be completely voluntary. The purchases or trades would only occur if a landowner is willing to engage in trade or sale voluntarily.

There are currently large stretches of private land on streams such as the Anchor River, Deep Creek, Parks Highway Streams, the Salcha River and others throughout the state. Today the public uses these streams, and has access to them. Once they're developed, we'll never be able to afford to get them back. HB 37 requires the state to identify private lands along certain high value recreational waters for possible easement or land purchases or trades.

To avoid costly litigation, it requires the state to use its expertise within the Departments of Fish and Game and Natural Resources to identify the most desirable lands for purchase or trade, after public input. But the bill does not allow legal challenges of those determinations.

Other states have waited too long to take steps like the ones proposed by this bill. In Montana, for example, fishermen have to pay for public access to some rivers. One hundred eighty miles of the Missouri River have been lost to public access, and that state now budgets \$300,000 per year to buy back parcels of riverbank land.

HB 37 will help insure that unparalleled recreational opportunities in our vibrant river corridors remain accessible, for our own and for future generations. It provides that the state should keep a registry of lands for possible trade or purchase.

The bill does not mandate any funding for trades or purchases, and therefore will lapse, in effect, once the state determines there is no longer a need to trade for or purchase public access.

# ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE



REPRESENTATIVE LES GARA

## **HB 37: Sectional Analysis State Land Trades/Purchases To Regain Fishing Stream Access From Willing Landowners**

The Bill's sections provide as follows:

### **Section 1: Findings.**

**Section 2.** This section gives the Commissioner of DNR the authority to prioritize lands that provide important public fishing stream access after public comment and consultation with the Department of Fish and Game. To prevent unneeded expense, the Commissioner's determinations are not appealable. The Commissioner is given the leeway to make these decisions, and is allowed to make the decisions upon available agency knowledge and public comment without engaging in expensive study.

**Section 3.** The state is encouraged to develop a registry of lands that are important for public fishing access, and to try to arrange a trade with willing landowners for other state lands, purchase the land outright, or purchase easements on it. The bill specifically requires that if landowners do not want to be listed, or approached with a trade or purchase offer, their land must be removed from the list. It further clarifies that eminent domain cannot be exercised under this section, as any purchases or trades will be purely voluntary under this bill.

**Section 4.** The Commissioner is encouraged to seek land purchases or exchanges on important fishing streams prior to private development on those streams, at which point such a transaction would become prohibitively expensive. Streams with undeveloped private lands that, if developed, would impede important public access, include the following prized trout/steelhead/salmon fisheries: Montana and Willow Creeks above the Parks Highway in Southcentral Alaska; the Anchor River and Deep Creek on the Kenai Peninsula; and the Salcha River south of North Pole. The Commissioner is encouraged to seek to obtain public access on these and other streams that provide important public fishing opportunities.

### **SECTIONAL ANALYSIS**

*Carried*

AMENDMENT

OFFERED IN THE HOUSE  
TO: CHHB37(FSH)

Page 3, line 14, following "use,":

Insert: "sport"

# FISCAL NOTE

**STATE OF ALASKA**  
**2005 LEGISLATIVE SESSION**

Fiscal Note Number: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Bill Version: HB037-DNR-Title-03-18-4  
 ( ) Publish Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Revision Date/Time (Note if correction): \_\_\_\_\_ Dept. Affected: Natural Resources  
 Title: Public Access to Fishing Streams RDU: Resource Development  
 Component: Title Acquisition & Defense  
 Sponsor: Rep. Gara  
 Requester: (H) FSH Component No.: 2459

**Expenditures/Revenues** (Thousands of Dollars)

Note: Amounts do not include inflation unless otherwise noted below.

OPERATING EXPENDITURES	FY 2006	FY 2007	FY 2008	FY 2009	FY 2010	FY 2011
Personal Services	40.2	40.2	40.2	40.2	40.2	40.2
Travel	2.0	2.0	2.0	2.0	2.0	2.0
Contractual	2.0	2.0	2.0	2.0	2.0	2.0
Supplies	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0
Equipment						
Land & Structures						
Grants & Claims						
Miscellaneous						
<b>TOTAL OPERATING</b>	<b>45.2</b>	<b>45.2</b>	<b>45.2</b>	<b>45.2</b>	<b>45.2</b>	<b>45.2</b>

<b>CAPITAL EXPENDITURES</b>						
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<b>CHANGE IN REVENUES ( )</b>						
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**FUND SOURCE** (Thousands of Dollars)

1002 Federal Receipts						
1003 GF Match						
1004 GF	45.2	45.2	45.2	45.2	45.2	45.2
1005 GF/Program Receipts						
1037 GF/Mental Health						
Other (Specify type--Do not abbreviate)						
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>45.2</b>	<b>45.2</b>	<b>45.2</b>	<b>45.2</b>	<b>45.2</b>	<b>45.2</b>

Estimate of any current year: (FY2005) cost: 00  
 Check this box (X) if funding for this bill is included in the Governor's FY 2006 budget proposal:

**POSITIONS**

Full-time						
Part-time	1	1	1	1	1	1
Temporary						

**ANALYSIS:** (Attach a separate page if necessary)  
 This bill requires DNR, working with the Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G), to identify private lands that the state should acquire to provide public access to and along popular fishing streams, and then directs DNR to pursue acquisition through purchase of easements, land exchanges, and or fee simple purchase.  
  
 Section 2 of the bill requires ADF&G to identify undeveloped land along popular fishing streams for possible acquisition. The bill identifies three areas where this process will look at first, but envisions an ongoing, statewide process. ADF&G then submits the list of parcels to DNR to acquire the land. This fiscal note does not include the actual cost to negotiate and appraise individual acquisitions, and does not include funding to pay the purchase price for acquisitions.

Prepared by: Bob Loeffler, Director Phone 269-8625  
 Division: Mining, Land & Water Date/Time 3/18/2005  
 Approved by: Tom Irwin, Commissioner Date 3/18/2005  
 Agency: Natural Resources

## FISCAL NOTE

STATE OF ALASKA  
2005 LEGISLATIVE SESSION

BILL NO. HB037-DNR-Title-03

### ANALYSIS CONTINUATION

This fiscal note assumes that ADF&G will provide DNR with a list of parcels, maps of the parcels, names and addresses of property owners, and other information about the parcels. ADF&G will submit a separate fiscal note for these costs.

Section 3 of the bill directs DNR to acquire the lands identified by ADF&G. This fiscal note only includes DNR's costs to conduct initial land title work, field inspections of parcels to be acquired, and preliminary discussions with the owners of parcels that the state desires to acquire.

After these preliminary discussions, DNR would then request appropriations from the legislature to fund work on each parcel or group of parcels, including costs for negotiation, appraisals, surveys, complete land title reviews, and purchase of the land. If the specific acquisitions are not funded, DNR would not be able to pursue the acquisitions further.

DNR's initial costs that are included in this Fiscal Note are:

#### PERSONAL SERVICES COST - \$40.2

Natural Resource Specialist (NRS) III and Land Appraiser II (range 18s) - total 2 months @ \$6.0/month = \$12.0 - to discuss acquisitions with property owners and estimate costs associated with individual parcel acquisitions.

Natural Resource Specialist (NRS) I (range 14) - 6 months @ \$4.7/month = \$28.2 - to conduct initial land title, preliminary valuation, and other research for all parcels.

TRAVEL, CONTRACTUAL, SUPPLIES - total \$5.0 - includes travel to sites (initial areas are all road accessible), research of municipal title records, office supplies, etc.

#### LONG TERM COSTS ASSOCIATED WITH ACTUAL ACQUISITIONS - Not Included in Fiscal Note.

This fiscal note does not include the cost associated with negotiating the land purchase or exchanges, land appraisals, preparing and recording title documents, any necessary survey costs, and other related costs. DNR's experience with recent land acquisitions indicates that one NRS III position can negotiate and coordinate about four acquisitions per year. Some support staff time is also needed for document preparation, record keeping, additional title research, etc. Based on this, the estimated cost for each purchase is \$40.0 (\$25.0 for personal services and \$15.0 for contractual services including appraisal and environmental audit). Land exchanges are significantly more labor intensive, based on recent experience the cost for land exchanges is \$50.0 to \$100.0 per parcel.

Actual acquisition costs will vary by area and size of parcels. DNR estimates that parcels that provide access to Montana and Willow Creeks along the Parks Highway will cost about \$7,500 per acre for 5-10 acre parcels (\$37.5 - \$75.0 per parcel). Recent ADF&G purchases of parcels for access along the Anchor River and Deep Creek on the Kenai Peninsula were higher, averaging about \$100.0 per parcel.

# FISCAL NOTE

**STATE OF ALASKA**  
**2005 LEGISLATIVE SESSION**

Fiscal Note Number: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Bill Version: H.B. 37  
 ( ) Publish Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Revision Date/Time (Note if correction): \_\_\_\_\_ Dept. Affected: Fish and Game  
 Title An act relating to public access RDU Sport Fisheries  
to fishing streams Component Sport Fisheries  
 Sponsor Representative Gara  
 Requester House Special Committee on Fisheries Component No. 464

**Expenditures/Revenues** (Thousands of Dollars)

Note: Amounts do not include inflation unless otherwise noted below.

OPERATING EXPENDITURES	FY 2006	FY 2007	FY 2008	FY 2009	FY 2010	FY 2011
Personal Services						
Travel						
Contractual						
Supplies						
Equipment						
Land & Structures						
Grants & Claims						
Miscellaneous						
<b>TOTAL OPERATING</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>0.0</b>

<b>CAPITAL EXPENDITURES</b>						
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<b>CHANGE IN REVENUES ( )</b>						
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**FUND SOURCE** (Thousands of Dollars)

1002 Federal Receipts						
1003 GF Match						
1004 GF						
1005 GF/Program Receipts						
1037 GF/Mental Health						
Other (Specify Type-Do not abbreviate)						
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>0.0</b>

Estimate of any current year (FY2005) cost: 0.0

Mark this box (X) if funding for this bill is included in the Governor's FY 2006 budget proposal:

**POSITIONS**

Full-time						
Part-time						
Temporary						

**ANALYSIS:** (Attach a separate page if necessary)

This bill requires the Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G) to annually compile a list of land along fishing waterways where access to the waterways is impeded by private land ownership. In compiling this list, ADF&G is required to take public input and consider a number of conditions outlined in this bill. Once completed, ADF&G will submit this list to the Commissioner of the Department of Natural Resources for consideration. ADF&G is able to comply with the provisions in this legislation without additional funding and/or staff.

Prepared by: Sarah Gilbertson Phone 465-6137  
 Division Legislative Liaison Date/Time 1/28/05 8:35 a.m.  
 Approved by: Acting Commissioner Wayne Regelin Date 1/28/2005  
 Agency Alaska Department of Fish & Game



Sec. ~~38.05.127~~. Access to navigable or public water.

(a) Before the sale, lease, grant, or other disposal of any interest in state land adjacent to a body of water or waterway, the commissioner shall,

(1) determine if the body of water or waterway is navigable water, public water, or neither;

(2) upon finding that the body of water or waterway is navigable or public water, provide for the specific easements or rights-of-way necessary to ensure free access to and along the body of water, unless the commissioner finds that regulating or limiting access is necessary for other beneficial uses or public purposes.

(b) The department shall adopt regulations implementing this section.

(c) Nothing in this section affects valid existing rights or limits in any way the constitutional right of the public to use and have free access to the navigable or public waters of the state.

(d) Upon application by a municipality or an affected owner of land, the department may vacate, release, modify, or relocate an easement and right-of-way for public access to or along navigable or public waters reserved by the department in a patent issued under AS 29.65 or former AS 29.18, if the commissioner determines the action is consistent with the public interest.

(e) The establishment of easements or rights-of-way for oil and gas, gas only, and mineral leases under (a) of this section need not be made until the leases are ready to be developed.

(f) Rights-of-way or easements to waterways established under (a)(2) of this section shall be established approximately once each mile unless the commissioner makes a written finding that regulating or limiting access is necessary for other beneficial uses or public purposes.

(g) The commissioner may exchange land under AS 38.50 to create access to public water of the state.



Representative Los Gara  
State Capitol  
Juneau, AK 99801

April 20, 2005

Re: HB37

Dear Representative Gara:

The Kenai River Sportfishing Association (KRSA) supports the legislative objective of House Bill 37, an act relating to voluntary land trades and purchases to enhance public access to fishing streams.

Alaska is home to some of the best sportfishing, personal use and subsistence opportunities in the world, and HB37 is an important piece of legislation that provides ADF&G and ADNR a mechanism to ensure broad public access to these important public resources. HB37 places into statute a process that mandates the Commissioner of ADF&G list land along fishing waterways where access is impeded by private land ownership and the Commissioner of ADNR responsible for proceeding to acquire public access across those lands.

KRSA is a non-profit 501 (c) 3 conservation organization dedicated to ensuring the sustainability of the greatest sportfishing river in the world – the Kenai. Our goals are to conserve and rehabilitate fisheries habitat, promote predictable and meaningful sportfishing opportunity, encourage and foster fisheries research and provide public aquatic education. Over the past ten years we have raised and invested over \$5 million towards these goals.

While on the Kenai River (the primary focus of our organization) there is broad public access to its fishery resources, KRSA has been concerned with the privatization of public lands along other waterways in our state which reduces or eliminates public access to some of our prized sport fishing rivers and streams. On the Kenai Peninsula, we have public access concerns on the neighboring rivers of the Kenai, specifically the Anchor, Deep Creek and Kasilof. If public access is denied or severely restricted on these neighboring rivers, it will only serve to place more pressures on the Kenai itself, which is already the state's most popular sport and personal use fishery.

KRSA supports the public access mechanisms in place in the bill, such as using public easements and land trades as well as outright purchases of the land with voluntary private land owners, and we are also very encouraged that the right of eminent domain may not be exercised to acquire land or interest in land. The initial nominations, which include the Anchor and Deep Creek, could have a significant positive impact on public access to fishery resources in on the Kenai Peninsula as well as other areas of the state.

We appreciate your efforts and those of your colleagues in regards to HB37.

Respectfully,

  
Ron Rainey  
Board President

*Dedicated to preserving the greatest sportfishing river in the world, the Kenai.*

P.O. Box 1228 • 224 Kenai Ave., Suite 102 • Soldotna, Alaska 99669

Phone: (907) 262-8588 • Fax: (907) 262-8582 • [www.kenairiversportfishing.com](http://www.kenairiversportfishing.com) • E-mail: [info@kenairiversportfishing.com](mailto:info@kenairiversportfishing.com)



# ALASKA FLYFISHERS

Winners of the 1994 McKenzie Cup



March 9, 2005

Dear Representative Gara:

Based on our collective individual and organizational experience, the Alaska Fly Fishers strongly support the objective of House Bill 37.


The Alaska Fly Fishers (AFF) was founded in 1973 at Anchorage with the objectives of "to preserve the sport of fly fishing, advance the principles of fair chase and fair catch, educate members and the public in the necessity of preserving our outdoor heritage, promote the ethical utilization of the resources of our woods and waters and to organize and unite the fly fishers of Alaska for mutual community benefit." AFF is one of the largest sport fishing organizations in Alaska. I feel we have consistently taken actions which support those objectives.

For nearly as long as AFF has existed, we have provided public education (at low or no cost), participated in conservation projects, and participated in organizations which contribute to Alaska's natural resources. Our public education includes annual seminars on fly fishing, fly tying, and donations of books to the public libraries. Conservation projects include an annual Kenai River Cleanup (for 11 consecutive years), bank stabilization of Campbell Creek, and bank stabilization at Jim's Landing on the Kenai River. The organizations our members have participated in include Fish & Game Advisory Committees and Regional Subsistence Advisory Councils.

An important element of maintaining our habitat and resources is public involvement and support. In order to do this, the public must have a vested interest. If they are denied access to these resources, we can't expect this broad support.

The AFF concludes that the objectives of HB 37 are mutually supportive of the objectives of AFF.

Sincerely,

  
Bob Fairchild  
President

SUPPORT

**Cindy Smith**

---

**From:** Phil Cutler [filcut@ak.net]  
**Sent:** Friday, March 18, 2005 9:40 PM  
**To:** Cindy Smith  
**Cc:** Jeff Parker  
**Subject:** HB 37 GARA

## **Alaska Sportfishing Association**

**P. O. Box 243106 Anchorage, AK 99524**

**Representative Les Gara  
State Capitol  
Juneau, AK 99801**

**Re: HB37**

**Dear Representative Gara,**

**I have presented HB37 at the latest Board of Directors meeting and the latest public membership meeting of the Alaska Sportfishing Association. After thorough discussion at both venues, I am pleased to relate that we enthusiastically support this legislation.**

**The Alaska Sportfishing Association has prided itself in being an organization that works to promote access to areas where sport fishing can be done in concert with sustained yield of the fishery and proper environmental safeguards. One of our longstanding concerns has been the privatization of public lands which in turn reduces or eliminates public access to some of our prized sport fishing rivers and streams.**

**HB37 places into statute a process that mandates that the Commissioner of Fish and Game nominate privately owned lands that might be returned to public ownership. It also makes the Commissioner of Natural Resources responsible to effecting the acquisition of the lands nominated.**

**Much of our discussions were centered on the methods SB37 promotes to acquire the land. Our fiscally conservative members were pleased that the bill endorsed using public easements and land trades as well as outright purchase of the land. The members were excited that your initial nominations could have a significant positive impact on sport fishing access in South-central and Interior Alaska.**

**We appreciate your efforts in sponsoring HB37.**

**Phil Cutler, President**

**Rep. Les Gara**

---

**From:** Brent Fenty [bfenty@earthlink.net]  
**Sent:** Sunday, February 27, 2005 5:42 PM  
**To:** Rep. Les Gara  
**Subject:** HB 37

Rep. Gara-

I just want to say thanks for your introduction of HB 37. I was particularly pleased to see that Montara and Willow Creek were prioritized in the bill as I think development threats loom in the near future for these terrific fisheries. Thanks again.

Tight lines,  
Brent

—  
Brent Fenty  
PO Box 142771  
Anchorage, AK 99514

(907) 770-9967  
bfenty@earthlink.net

**B****MOLLY IVINS LETS LOOSE**

Political columnist Molly Ivins will speak in Anchorage on July 21. Check out what she told the Daily News about both George Bushes, sodomy in Texas, tax cuts, her new book, and the Alaska-Texas rivalry. **Q&A in Opinion, Page 1-3**

# ALASKA

ANCHORAGE DAILY NEWS • www.adn.com

★ SUNDAY, JULY 13, 2003

## Prime fishing land might be sold off

■ **ANCHOR RIVER:** Sale of five-acre parcels could eliminate public access.

By JOE GAY  
Anchorage Daily News

The beaches, banks and wetlands along one of the Kenai Peninsula's most popular fishing streams are being subdivided into five-acre parcels that, if sold, could eliminate public access to the lower Anchor River.

The owners say they've tried for years to sell the land to the state but could never agree on a price. Now it's time to move on, they say, and the first

step is chopping their two large parcels into 20 smaller ones.

They hope to win preliminary approval of their subdivision plan Monday night from the Kenai Peninsula Borough. The lots could be on the market later this summer.

Supporters of a buyout still hope the land can be purchased and put into public ownership. The landowners say they're still willing to sell. But time is drawing short, said Lynn Whitmore, a longtime local angler who just recently learned about the proposed subdivision.

"I'm going to urge that they try to convert this to public land, by whatever

■ **THE KENAI PENINSULA BOROUGH PLAT COMMITTEE** will hold a public hearing on the proposed Anchor River subdivision at 5:30 p.m. Monday in the Borough Building in Soldotna. For more information, go to [www.borough.kenai.ak.us/planningdept](http://www.borough.kenai.ak.us/planningdept), then click on Plat Committee, then Agendas.

means necessary," he said. "I want the (borough) mayor or somebody to sit down with these two sides and resolve this."

Anchor Point pioneer Vern Mutch homesteaded the area decades ago, selecting land that ran from atop the bluffs to the Cook Inlet beach, with the

river running through it. His son Paul, a commercial fisherman who lives in Ugashuk, now owns much of the land, including a 45-acre parcel just north of one of the river's most popular fishing spots, the Graas Hole.

The state Division of Parks owns the adjoining lot to the south, where it provides parking and a boat launch. But thousands of fishermen every year pass through the state land onto the Mutch property, where they camp on the gravel beach and tromp through wetlands to reach the river.

Many also walk or drive ATVs even farther north, toward the river mouth, where they trespass on a 12-acre parcel

owned by Jim Jacobs.

The parks superintendent on the lower peninsula, Chris Degernes, said it's difficult to imagine the private land suddenly being posted with no-trespassing signs. "The public has used that property so many years — as if it were public — that it will be difficult to keep the public off," she said.

The Division of Parks and the Alaska Department of Fish and Game have wanted to buy the Anchor River lands for years, she said. It's rich territory. About 50,000 to 60,000 people visit every year, she said, mostly to fish. The

See Page B-4, LAND

## Trees cut to reduce fire danger

■ **CLEARING:** Crews of firefighters at work in woods throughout city.

By TATABOLINE BRANT  
Anchorage Daily News

Firefighters cut down several tall trees in Kincaid Park last week and chopped them into firewood-sized logs, and officials say the work is just one small part of an ongoing federally funded effort to reduce the chance of a bad wildfire in Alaska's largest city.

About a dozen brush piles lined Reservoir Road near the

## WEST COAST WEATHER



## HUD funds for city in jeopardy

■ **GRANTS:** "It's at a critical stage," says Mayor Begich, who has stepped in.

By ROSEMARY SHINOHARA  
Anchorage Daily News

The new mayor's transition report last week pointed to a crisis in public housing. The city is in danger of losing federal Housing and Urban Development grants next year if it doesn't spend \$2.6 million by Nov. 2.

# LAND: Price undecided

Continued from B-1

season starts Memorial Day with king salmon, then continues through freezeup with runs of silver salmon, Dolly Varden and steelhead trout. Migrating birds stop by every spring and fall, and others spend the winter.

There is strong support for public ownership, Degernes said, but the stumbling block has always been the land appraisal.

"Land like that is difficult to appraise," she said. Comparable lands rarely sell, so there is little to base an estimate of land value on. And the land is impossible to develop because of its wetlands, the constantly changing river course and winter storm damage.

The Kenai Peninsula Borough appraises the Mutch property at \$16,500 and the Jacobs land at \$15,000. The owners believe the parcels are worth much more, as does the state, though neither side will reveal its offer. But they can't agree on a price, Degernes said.

"We can't just pay what the seller wants," she said. "It has to be based on fair market value, and that's been the stumbling block time and time again."

After negotiations with Fish and Game fell apart several years ago, The Nature Conservancy stepped in. The conservancy buys high-value land, often using a combination of government grants and private funds. It won a \$417,000 National Coastal Wetland Conservation grant to buy the Mutch and Jacobs properties, plus another large lot in the same area. A deal looked possible, according to both sides.

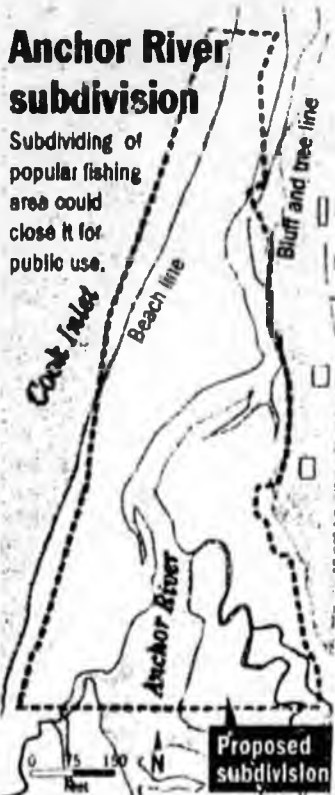
Then a new hurdle arose regarding the river bottom itself. Who owns it?

Surveyor Jerry Anderson, who represents the landowners, said previous court cases make it clear: "The water belongs to the state, but the land underneath (belongs) to the owner." By his reckoning, the two parcels add up to roughly 93 acres.

The Nature Conservancy isn't sure. It wants the issue cleared up to determine how much acreage really exists, said Kenny Powers, the group's director of land protection. "We're

## Anchor River subdivision

Subdividing of popular fishing area could close it for public use.



CHARLES ATKINS / Anchorage Daily News

turn the normally angler-friendly Anchor River into a comb fishery. More fishermen would likely cause more habitat damage on the grassy banks and stream, he said.

The closure would also block access to the river mouth key fishing area. Many anglers start fishing at low tide, walk steadily upstream and follow the fish as the water rises. Except at low tides, they could reach the river mouth with trespassing.

He understands the owners' frustration, Whitmore said. Rowdy teens and adults party on the land every Memorial Day, and even law-abiding fishermen trespass regularly. Nevertheless, he added, "it'd be an absolute catastrophe to have it developed."

Even if the two sides can agree on a price, a potential

land they own. It's just a question of who owns the river bed," he said.

Powers said he thinks a deal is still possible. "The public values are there and the resources are there that deserve public protection, so we're continuing to be interested," he said. All that remains is to agree on a price. "That's the million-dollar question," he said.

The sellers are broadening the market, Anderson said. "If (the state) isn't going to put the money up, they're going to sell it somebody else."

The land is too wet for homes or cabins, Anderson said, but people will buy the five-acre lots if only to have a place to park their recreational vehicles.

Local fishermen would hate to see no-trespassing signs appear on the lower river, said Whitmore, who has fished there 30 years. The new subdivision could close off about a mile of riverbank.

"If you lose access to that portion of river, it means you compress those 1,000 fishermen into one-third less space," he said. "The people will still come, but they'll have much less space to fish," which could

Murkowski, who has voiced philosophical objection to the government's buying private land, would have to approve the use of state or federal funds. Last month, he killed one such land deal on Afognak Island while approving another for ski trail land near Homer.

Powers, of The Nature Conservancy, said he doubts the governor would veto a deal. "The state has been very supportive of this acquisition, as has community, because of the high value of the resources," he said. "I'd be surprised if Gov. Murkowski did not support this project."

Daily News reporter Joel Gay can be reached at jgay@adn.com or at 257-4310.



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