

# Alaska Sustainable Salmon Fund Statement of Work

*Revision #1: Extend project period to 11/1/15; amend project title, update SOW*

*Revision #2: Change end date to 5/1/15; close out*

**I. Project Title:** Strategic Conservation of Important Salmon Habitat in Southcentral Alaska – Phase 1

**II. Project Number:** 44712                      **PCSRF Objective:** HP&R

**III. Principal Investigator**

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**IV. Project Period:** 4/1/12 – 5/1/15

**V. Project Description**

1. Synopsis

This project will work with willing landowners to permanently protect priority salmon habitat in the Matanuska Susitna Borough (MSB). Critical salmon migration, spawning, rearing, and overwintering habitat will be protected via permanent conservation easements from future subdivision as well as other residential, commercial, and industrial developments. *See related AKSSF projects 44806 and 44159.*

2. Introduction

The MSB's rich landscape and healthy fish and wildlife populations have enticed thousands of people to call the MSB home. The MSB is the fastest growing region in Alaska and one of the fastest growing in the country. The MSB's "core area" between the cities of Palmer and Wasilla is expected to double in population by 2025.

Along with a boom in population growth, MSB is also fast becoming known as the industrial development center of Alaska. Permitted and proposed strip, open pit and tunnel coal, gravel, and other hard rock mining, as well as oil and gas developments

cover the “core area.” Many of these new developments threaten the region’s important coastal, wetland, and riparian habitats.

As a result of the rapid growth and development, water quality concerns in some MSB watersheds have been increasing in the past decade. Specific impacts to water quality include: urban/surface runoff, faulty septic systems, open pit and surface mining, hydrocarbons from motorized water craft, fertilizers, animal waste, and street deicers as well as increased impervious surfaces, sedimentation, and bank erosion caused by removal of vegetation, uncontained storm water runoff, and unregulated private wells. Based on Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation (ADEC) standards, the MSB currently has four 303 D listed impaired water bodies and 11 high priority water bodies. The current water quality impairment throughout the region has been directly linked to fisheries declines for salmon species due to their sensitivity to water temperature and sedimentation.

The greatest risk to salmon and other freshwater fish in the MSB are the small actions on the part of individual landowners that compound over time, degrading riparian habitat and water quality, changing water flow and quantity, and blocking access to habitat. Unfortunately, local and regional governments have been unable to develop and implement a regulatory framework or adopt enforcement policies to effectively protect privately owned fish habitats from development encroachment. The lack of zoning combined with the desire of people to build homes and site businesses along streams and lakes, over time, has and will continue to degrade salmon habitat and water quality in the MSB unless greenbelts and development buffers are established to conserve these important areas.

GLT has been engaged in strategic conservation planning efforts in the MSB since 2005. The first MSB prioritization was completed in partnership with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS). For this prioritization GLT looked at inholdings within the Palmer Hay Flats State Game Refuge, identifying over 50 parcels with high conservation value. As a result of these efforts, the Goodman easement, a 10 acre parcel on the northern boundary of the refuge adjacent to the Parks Highway, was finalized in 2006. The property contains portions of Spring Creek and the Spring Creek Wetland Complex that provide critical over-wintering habitat for coho salmon.

In 2009, an additional prioritization in cooperation with the USFWS was completed. Parcels in southern Mat-Su along Knik Arm with high value salmon and beluga habitat were identified as appropriate for conservation. The project area assessed 17,298 parcels and ranked them based on extent of anadromous waters, open water wetlands, estuarine or tidal influenced wetlands, and proximity to protected areas. As a result, six parcels turned into official conservation projects. Once each of the six projects are completed they will total over 6,000 acres of permanently protected lands in and around Palmer Hay Flats Refuge.

In partnership with the MSB government, GLT developed another GIS based prioritization tool in 2012 to identify and prioritize potential conservation projects

throughout the whole MSB. The prioritization assessed over 100,000 individual parcels including private, MSB government, Mental Health Trust, and University lands. State and federal lands were excluded from the assessment. The conservation criteria used to rank each parcel included identification of the most critical habitats for fish and wildlife as well as important wetlands necessary to maintaining regional water quality; parcels that provide connectivity to essential recreational and wildlife corridors; plus parcels within or adjacent to protected areas throughout the region. Results of the analysis are displayed in an atlas of maps that ranks and highlights parcels with the highest community and conservation values. The data from this prioritization is used by GLT to identify and evaluate conservation projects and by the MSB government to inform their wetlands and stormwater management planning process. Additionally, the results may be used to determine suitability for development, locate high quality fishing areas, and aid in wetland permitting. The prioritization highlights not only the ecological values of particular land parcels, but also community values such as clean water, good fisheries habitat, and proximity to community infrastructure.

GLT updates the prioritization tools as new data becomes available such as annual information from the anadromous waters catalogue. The creation of data and maps for this prioritization project involved guidance from several steering committee meetings involving participants from the Environmental Protection Agency, MSB, USFWS, Army Corps of Engineers, ADF&G, and The Nature Conservancy. GLT identified the top 1,500 parcels containing important salmon habitat in the three main watershed areas of the MSB: Knik/Matanuska, Wasilla Creek/Fish Creek/Little Su, and Susitna. The search for the best candidate lands to protect with this project will be narrowed by identifying roughly 66 parcels in each watershed area, ground-truthing the parcels, and targeting interested landowners identified in a previous AKSSF project. Once relationships have been developed with willing landowners, GLT will work to secure permanent conservation easements or acquire fee-simple title on four or more privately owned parcels to permanently protect important salmon habitats from future impacts caused by increasing residential, commercial, and industrial development.

3. Location  
Latitude: 61.565346 N      Longitude: 149.089316 W
4. AKSSF Objective  
Central: 1A-7

## **VI. Objectives**

1. Project Objective  
Work with willing landowners to place up to four conservation easements on important salmon habitats in the MSB
2. Methods
  - A. GLT will follow up with landowners who expressed interest in donating a conservation easement on their property, determine the best four projects for this funding, and get engagement letters from each landowner.

- B. GLT will meet with landowners to negotiate and draft conservation easements or acquisition negotiations, manage each project, manage contractors, and draft a baseline report for each project.
- C. GLT and contractors will work to complete due diligence for each project through the following tasks:
- Title search: complete a title report to ensure that there are no complications with conveyance of the easement
  - Survey: if necessary, complete a survey of the property
  - Environmental Hazard Assessment: complete a Phase I Report to ensure that there are no complications with environmental contamination on the property
  - Appraisal: complete an appraisal that meets Uniform Standards of Professional Appraisal Practice (USPAP) and Uniform Appraisal Standards for Federal Land Acquisition (UASFLA) standards to determine property value before and after the easement
  - Appraisal Review: complete appraisal review by a state approved review appraiser and receive approval letter from review appraiser
  - Fundraising: raise funds necessary for GLT to complete the easement through GLT's wetland conservation fund and private donations
  - Legal review: work with attorneys to draft a review of the conservation easement
  - Negotiations: negotiate the terms of the easement with the landowners
- D. GLT will identify the cost for the conservation easement or acquisition necessary to place private lands in conservation. GLT always requests a one-time donation to GLT's stewardship fund for each easement GLT holds. Sometimes landowners are able to pay the stewardship costs and other times GLT raises special grant funds to cover the costs. This fund is necessary to cover staff time and expenses relating to annual monitoring of the property as well as possible legal costs associated with defending the terms of the easement. GLT has developed a formula that calculates the amount of the fund which is based on a number of factors related to the easement including the number of reserved rights and property location.
- E. GLT will close on up to four conservation easements or acquisitions and publish a special newsletter highlighting salmon conservation in the MSB. The conservation easement will be recorded at the State Recorder's office.

## **VII. Benefits**

This project will identify and permanently conserve lands and waterways critical for healthy salmon populations in the Mat-Su. Existing local, state, and federal habitat conservation planning efforts will be built upon to ensure sustainable salmon populations for the Mat-Su into the future.

## **VIII. Products, Milestones, and Timelines** (*Revision #1 extends the project period to 11/1/15*)

April 2012 – December 2012:

- Identify specific projects out of the 200 top parcels in the region
- Contact landowners

- Have landowners sign willingness statements to move forward with a project
- Identify funding sources for stewardship funds for each project and additional acquisition funds

April 2012 – April 2014:

- Complete title reports
- Complete environmental hazard reports
- Draft conservation easements
- Complete appraisals and identify the match value for each project
- Complete baseline report for each project
- Obtain commitment from private funders for stewardship funds for each project

April 2012 – September 2015:

- Close on conservation easements or acquire fee simple title
- Publish a GLT newsletter highlighting the parcels conserved with AKSSF funds

**IX. Partners**

The MSB government and the USFWS Coastal Program will provide support for GLT staff time to work with willing landowners to protect land with high ecological and community value (MSB government) and important fish and wildlife habitat (USFWS). The Mat-Su Basin Salmon Habitat Partnership Steering Committee will provide project review once potential conservation projects are identified.

**X. Project Budget (unchanged with Revision #1)**

GLT	Total
100 Personnel	\$0
200 Travel	\$0
300 Contractual	\$240,000
400 Supplies	\$0
500 Equipment	\$0
Total	\$240,000

Budget Narrative:

Line 300: Contractual (\$240,000)

- Title reports: (up to) 4 reports @ \$1,500/report = \$6,000
- Environmental Hazard Assessment Phase 1 Report: (up to) 4 assessments @ \$5,000/assessment = \$20,000
- Appraisals (up to) 4 assessments @ \$7,000/assessment = \$28,000
- Surveys: (up to) 4 surveys @ \$7,000/survey = \$28,000
- Attorney consultations to review the drafts of the conservation easements: (up to) 4 consultations @ \$2,000/consultation = \$8,000
- Acquisition costs for projects that require GLT to purchase the development rights from landowners who are not able to donate their easement and/or purchase parcels from those who would rather not own and manage a property with a conservation easement on it: \$150,000

**XI. Match Budget** (*unchanged with Revision #1*)

<b>GLT (35%)</b>	<b>Total</b>
100 Personnel	\$0
200 Travel	\$0
300 Contractual	\$84,000
400 Supplies	\$0
500 Equipment	\$0
Total	\$84,000

Match Budget Narrative:

Line 300: Contractual (\$84,000)

GLT will match the contractual budget using the in-kind value of donated conservation easements. Each project will have a qualified appraisal that determines the monetary value of the easement. The easement value is determined by subtracting the parcel value without the easement from the parcel value with the easement: \$84,000.