



Kenny Lake Locals Donate Land for Conservation and Education



An aerial photo showing one of the ponds formed by a beaver dam. Note the two swans in the middle left. Photo by Zak Melms.

An important piece of protected wildlife-rich habitat near the confluence of the Tonsina and Copper Rivers is growing in acreage, thanks to a generous donation by a local couple, and a continued partnership between Great Land Trust and a local science and education nonprofit.

In 2018, Ruth McHenry and Cliff Eames donated a 40-acre property to the Wrangell Institute for Science and Environment (WISE) with a conservation easement held by Great Land Trust. This year, the couple has donated an additional 20 acres of land adjacent to the original conserved property, bringing the total conserved area to 60 acres.

Cliff and Ruth wanted to see the land remain in a relatively natural state to safeguard this habitat for wildlife and provide a space for WISE to implement its goals of doing research, environmental education, and stewardship.



Photo by Great Land Trust

An influx of groundwater at the property creates rare, clear water streams that remain open through winter and encourage rich species diversity. During the years they have visited the property, Ruth and Cliff have seen and documented a diversity of migratory and resident birds, small and large mammals, and three species of salmon at multiple life stages.

One of Ruth's favorite memories is of canoeing downstream and seeing a family of mink run across the top of a beaver dam. Another memorable moment was in the winter of 2015, with mild conditions that allowed Ruth and Cliff to see a belted kingfisher, a species known to have existed for at least 2 million years and a rare winter occurrence for this region of Alaska that was only possible due to the presence of open water and riparian habitat.

In 2018, WISE wanted to give the conserved property an appropriate name, and out of respect for the traditional Ahtna use of the area, Ruth and Cliff suggested an Ahtna name be used. Robin Mayo, WISE Executive Director, agreed and in researching Ahtna place names for the area discovered the area was described as "Nic'anilen Na." Nic'anilen Na' translates as "current flows out from shore creek" and describes the stream on the property where it flows into the Copper River. The newly expanded property will keep this same name.





Salmon swim in the stream on the Nic'anilen Na' property. Photo by Great Land Trust.

WISE is a nonprofit organization that has been providing science and environmental education in the Copper River Basin since 2002. Since the original donation in 2018, they have begun to develop a plan for the property, including trails, interpretive signs, and visitor facilities such as outhouses and a pavilion. They hope to ultimately host field trips and camps onsite to share this fascinating and beautiful place with the public.

This project was facilitated by Great Land Trust and made possible with funding from the Alaska Sustainable Salmon Fund, the US Fish & Wildlife Service Coastal Program, the generosity of the local couple, and a partnership with WISE.

The non-profit Great Land Trust was founded by Alaskans for Alaskans with a mission to conserve and steward lands and waters essential to the quality of life and economic health of Alaskans. For more information visit our website at www.greatlandtrust.org.

Article by The Great Land Trust

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