

Wildlife-rich conservation habitat grows with donation

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Wildlife rich habitat with a conservation easement near the confluence of the Tonsina and Copper rivers has increased with an additional donation of 20 acres by Ruth McHenry and Cliff Eames. Photo courtesy of Great Lake Trust

Protected wildlife-rich habitat near the confluence of the Tonsina and Copper rivers has grown to 60 acres, thanks to the donation of an additional 20 acres to the Wrangell Institute for Science and Environment, with the conservation easement held by the Great Land Trust.

An influx of groundwater at the property donated by Ruth McHenry and Cliff Eames creates rare, clear water streams that remain open all winter and encourage rich species diversity, said Robin Mayo, executive director of WISE, and Ellen Kazary, executive director of the Great Land Trust, who announced the additional land donation on Feb. 23.

McHenry and Eames donated a 40-acre parcel to WISE in 2018, and then in 2021 an additional 20 acres. The couple wish to see the land remain in a relatively natural state to safeguard this habitat for wildlife and provide space for research, environmental education and stewardship by WISE.

In 2018 WISE wanted to give the donated acres an appropriate name and out of respect for traditional Ahtna use of the area, McHenry and Eames suggested use of an Ahtna name.

After researching Ahtna place names for the area, Mayo found the area was described as “Nic’anilen Na,” which translates to “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 name, she said.

WISE is a nonprofit entity that has been providing science and environmental education in the Copper River Basin since 2002. Since the first 40 acres was donated in 2018 WISE has developed a plan for the property, including trails, interpretive signs and visitor facilities, including outhouses and a pavilion. They hope to ultimately host field trips and camps onsite to share this land with the public.

The project was facilitated by Great Land Trust and made possible with funds from the Alaska Sustainable Salmon Fund, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service Coastal Program, the land donors and a partnership with WISE.

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