



# Matanuska-Susitna Basin Salmon Habitat Partnership Newsletter Full Articles ~ Winter 2012/2013

*The Matanuska-Susitna Basin Salmon Habitat Partnership is a broad-based, cooperative effort to better steward our salmon resources while maintaining economic prosperity.  
Our vision – thriving fish, healthy habitats, and vital communities in the Mat-Su Basin.*

## **Win-win Project for ATV/ORV Users, Fish, and Anglers:**

The Little Susitna River supports one of the state's largest sport fisheries for coho salmon. Their nursery? Look to the tributaries! One such tributary, Swiftwater Creek, contains valuable spawning and rearing habitat for coho salmon (and of course other native species like dolly varden char, pink salmon, chum salmon, and sculpins).

Don't be fooled into thinking there are no fish in the streams (or wetlands, lakes, and clearwater side channels for that matter) when adult salmon aren't passing through. Fish are great at using camouflage and cover to avoid detection. Juvenile coho are no exception and try hard to avoid being eaten during their two-year freshwater life stage. They must survive until it's time to migrate to sea to get fat before returning to spawn.

If you enjoy fishing for salmon in the Mat-Su there's also a good chance you enjoy the available trail networks. All-terrain/off-road vehicle (ATV/ORV) trail riding is a popular activity here—since the 1970s, advancements in the design, versatility, reliability, and affordability of ATVs/ORVs has resulted in a steadily expanding number and variety of users accessing increasingly remote areas.

Many folks that enjoy riding also enjoy fishing, or benefit indirectly from healthy Mat-Su fisheries. Where ATV/ORV crossings intersect streams, however, is a known source of salmon habitat degradation in Alaska...habitats fish depend upon to complete their freshwater life cycle. There are ways to reduce these impacts while maintaining access and valued trail features for ATV/ORV users.

A win-win project for ATV/ORV users, fish, and anglers: With funding support from the Mat-Su Salmon Habitat Partnership, the Wasilla Soil and Water Conservation District is partnering with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to learn what experiences ATV/ORV users value and how to cooperatively improve stream-side trail systems to accommodate user access/values and maximize quality salmon rearing habitat. Over 60 users were surveyed at the Swiftwater Creek trailhead or along the trail itself in 2012. A user workshop about fish-friendly trail options and the first phase of a streambank restoration project is scheduled for 2013 pending landowner approval.

For updates or more information on this project contact the Wasilla Soil and Water Conservation District [distmgr@wasillaswcd.org](mailto:distmgr@wasillaswcd.org) or Katrina Mueller at the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service [katrina\\_mueller@fws.gov](mailto:katrina_mueller@fws.gov).

## ***Fish Habitat Restoration & Trail Maintenance***

By Brian Winnestaffer, Chickaloon Native Village

Chickaloon Native Village teamed up with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), Mat-Su Trails Council, the Mat-Su Borough, and Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G), to rehabilitate an ATV trail that had eroded the banks of McRoberts creek and caused half of the flow of the Creek to divert down the ATV trail.

We worked with the State Department of Forestry's Intern Crew to rebuild the mangled stream bank with direction from USFWS and ADF&G. With willow brush layering, coir logs, and veg matting, we were able to direct most of the flow back into the original stream corridor.

The next step was to re-establish the old ATV trail onto higher ground and out of the new wetlands that were created because of the stream diversion. We rebuilt about 800' of trail and imported rock to harden the surface. A small culvert crossing was installed in a side-channel area and we created low hardened areas in the trail to handle sheet flow when things really get rocking out there during a flood. As evidence of solid design, even the floods of 2012 did not notably impact this work!

The crossing over McRoberts Creek does have a bridge and we rebuilt the ramps to access this bridge, however it is too narrow for large vehicles (trucks and jeeps) to cross it. Chickaloon and our partners are exploring options to allow for larger vehicle use on the bridge.

To learn more about this project contact Brian Winnestaffer at [brian@chickaloon.org](mailto:brian@chickaloon.org).

## ***2012 Salmon Symposium***

The 2012 Mat-Su Salmon Science and Conservation Symposium was a great success. Over 120 participants representing dozens of private, non-profit, governmental, and tribal entities met in Wasilla November 7-8 for the 5th annual symposium. Keynote speaker Dr. Bob Lackey from Oregon State University kicked off this year's event and generated lively discussion with lessons learned from the Pacific Northwest in his presentation titled "Straight Talk about the Future of Salmon."

Over 20 researchers shared their work through presentations covering a variety of topics including planning and economic valuation, hydrology and wetlands, fish passage, climate change and invasive species, and salmon distribution and habitat use. True to a spirit of collaboration, during an open space discussion period the Partnership took the opportunity to gain input from the diverse partner organizations and participants in updating the Mat-Su Salmon Habitat Partnership's strategic plan.

This 2-day event, organized by the Mat-Su Basin Salmon Habitat Partnership, provides a forum for the sharing of information and lessons learned, celebrating of successes, and planning for the future of salmon and their habitat in this region. Every year the event continues to mature and improve with great feedback from participants and media coverage. This year we had more people registered than ever.

[Read more ....](#)

## ***National Award Received at 2012 Salmon Symposium***

This year's Mat-Su Salmon Symposium was particularly special because Corinne Smith, Mat-Su Basin Program Director for The Nature Conservancy, received national recognition for her contribution to aquatic resource conservation. "Corinne has done so much for habitat conservation and scientific research not only in the Mat-Su Basin, but all of Alaska. Congratulations on a well-deserved award" said the National Fish Habitat Board Chair Kelly Hepler. "On behalf of the National Fish Habitat Board, it is an honor to award her with the 2012 Scientific Achievement Award."

The Scientific Achievement Award honors outstanding achievement in the use of science to improve fish habitat conservation. Corinne spearheaded the development of the Mat-Su Partnership in 2005 and initiated its strategic planning process. Additionally, she and Marcus Geist developed a map atlas to prioritize conservation of salmon watersheds in the Mat-Su Basin. Through her leadership and advancement of science applications, the accomplishments of the Mat-Su Partnership have steadily expanded.

