

# INLETKEEPER®

...PROTECTING THE COOK INLET WATERSHED & THE LIFE IT SUSTAINS

www.inletkeeper.org Headquarters: 907.235.4068

Fall Quarter 2015



## Pick.Click.Give. Donations Break New Records

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During the 2015 PFD filing period Alaskans gave more than ever to a broad variety of charities across Alaska.

This year 539 organizations will benefit from Pick.Click.Give. donations and record amounts in excess of \$3.3 million will go to nonprofit causes across the state. Cook

Inletkeeper received 225 pledges totalling over \$15,000 for 2015, a new record for us.

THANK YOU!

If you missed Pick.Click.Give you can always give online:

[inletkeeper.org/donate](http://inletkeeper.org/donate)

...because you  
love Cook Inlet

**Lovalaska**  
Pick Click Give



## State Puts Salmon Second in Landmark Chuitna Decision

The Alaska Department of Natural Resources (DNR) issued a mixed decision on October 7 on applications filed by the Chuitna Citizens Coalition (CCC) to reserve water for salmon in Middle Creek, a tributary of the Chuitna River in Upper Cook Inlet. Inletkeeper and its partners have been working for more than a decade to protect the Chuitna watershed, because PacRim Coal wants to develop a large-scale coal strip that would be the first project in Alaska history to completely remove a wild salmon stream.

First, some background. In 2009, the CCC filed three applications to reserve water for salmon and wildlife in Middle Creek; these reservations covered the lower reach of Middle Creek, which did not fall within the boundary of the proposed Chuitna coal mine, and the middle and upper reaches of Middle



*You helped us build a "fish first" movement in Alaska. Your voices were heard, for the first time ever the state granted a water reservation to Alaskans for fish -- unfortunately water upstream of our reservation is now in limbo.*

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## Cold Water Habitat Use by Juvenile Salmon

In recent years our work in salmon streams has focused on identifying and protecting cold water refugia - places within a stream which are persistently colder than adjacent areas because of strong groundwater connectivity. We think of these connections as cold water faucets we want to keep turned on and see this strategy as a powerful adaptation measure to ensure that our cold water loving salmon have a foot hold in Alaska's warming future. We've been using thermal imagery to help us identify these critical places on the landscape. This summer we decided to head out to the Big Lake basin in the Mat-Su Valley to find out if juvenile Coho salmon are actually selecting these cold-water habitats for summer rearing in an effort to avoid warm and stressful conditions. With support from U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, we captured juvenile fish in minnow traps to measure



*Cook Inletkeeper's Heather Leba with USFWS biologists scouting out sampling locations on Fish Creek.*

growth rates, collected macroinvertebrates, conducted habitat assessments, and measured temperatures at three sites from July – October. We are working up the data now to see if there are measurable differences in fish use between habitats. Stay tuned - we will share our findings with you in a future blog and newsletter!



**Inletkeeper Welcomes  
Pat Dougherty  
to the Board**



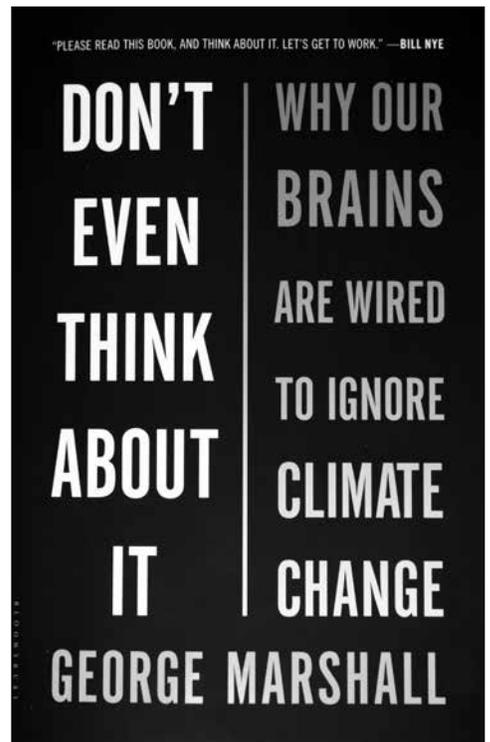
*Our new board member Pat Dougherty!*

**I**nletkeeper is excited to have Pat Dougherty join our board. Pat is an avid fly fisherman and a longtime journalist with a passion for protecting water quality and fish habitat around Cook Inlet. He worked for the Anchorage Daily News for 34 years and served as the paper's Executive Editor & Senior Vice President. He holds a Bachelors Degree in Journalism from Baylor University, and he was selected for a prestigious Nieman Fellowship at Harvard University. 

**Can Humans Respond to Climate Change?**

**I**n today's connected world, we're bombarded with information. And more likely than not, we chose to get our information from sources that reinforce our pre-existing values and beliefs. If you watch Fox News, there's a strong chance you vote Republican and don't believe humans are changing our climate. If you listen to NPR, you probably vote Democrat and recognize the human role in a changing climate. These are generalizations, of course, but they make the point that we're often siloed in an echo chamber that reverberates with the sounds we want to hear. And if we hear something we don't like, we humans have an uncanny cognitive capacity to brush it away if it does not fit into the frames and viewpoints that shape our perception of the world. In other words, facts and science don't matter. Despite what we'd like to believe, we don't make most decisions with our heads, but instead, we rely on a variety of deeply rooted experiences, relationships and preconceptions that shape how we see ourselves in the context of our families, our communities, and our world. These are but a few of the useful insights gleaned from George Marshall's book *"Don't Even Think About It: Why Our Brains Are Wired to*

*Ignore Climate Change.*" Despite the grim (and accurate) title, Brown takes us on a journey through linguistics, physiology, evolution and social science to conclude, convincingly, that we can in fact address climate change if we stop focusing on what makes us different, and start acting on what we have in common. For more information: [www.climateconviction.org](http://www.climateconviction.org) 



*Action on climate change is possible, but we need to focus on our similarities, not our differences.*

**Inletkeeper Gifts**

The giving season is here. Inletkeeper's online store has a selection of books, mugs and hoodies for the "keeper" in your midst. An Inletkeeper membership also makes a great gift for your friends and family.

Visit:

[www.inletkeeper.org/store](http://www.inletkeeper.org/store)

or

[www.inletkeeper.org/donate](http://www.inletkeeper.org/donate)



## Local Food Hub Pilot in Homer

The USDA recently awarded Inletkeeper a grant to pilot a food hub in the Homer area. This is a great opportunity to develop our local economy and reduce food miles through better food distribution systems. Buying local is a simple and powerful way to reduce your carbon footprint. We'll update you as the project gets underway.

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WATERKEEPER ALLIANCE

## Inletkeeper Working with Agencies to Improve Tracking of Abandoned and Derelict Vessels

Back in September, the 96-foot tugboat 'Challenger' sank on state tidelands in Gastineau Channel in Juneau. The Challenger is still there, slowly coming apart with pieces breaking up and littering the shoreline. At low-tide the top of the pilot house is visible, at other times the spill containment boom around the site is all you can see. An October 8, 2015 opinion piece in the Juneau Empire nicely articulated the issue, "I had no idea a person could sink (a) vessel in Alaskan waters and walk away leaving the state with the

responsibility and great expense of raising and disposing of a derelict vessel."

Cook Inletkeeper is spearheading a statewide Task Force, started in 2014, addressing this very issue. At the table are all of our relevant state agencies, federal agencies, the Alaska Association of Harbormasters and Port Administrators, and a suite of municipal, private and tribal stakeholders. We recognize that the aging fleets around Alaska pose a huge environmental, navigational, and public safety threat to our coastal and riverine

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## State, Feds Let Exxon Off the Hook for \$100 Million

When the state and federal governments settled their civil claims in 1991 over the *Exxon Valdez* Oil Spill, they included a so-called "re-opener clause," which would require Exxon to pay up to an additional \$100 million for injuries unanticipated at the time of the settlement. In 2006, Governor Frank Murkowski and George Bush's Department of Justice submitted a demand letter to Exxon, calling for \$92 million to fund research and restoration efforts aimed at recovering otter and sea duck populations. Exxon, of course,

dragged its feet. In the ensuing years, the otter and sea duck populations recovered. In October, as the window to pursue the re-opener funds started to close, the state and federal governments threw in the towel, arguing that because the species on which they had based their 2006 claims had recovered, they had no recourse. But when Inletkeeper met with Governor Walker earlier in the month, we provided a simple alternative: ask the federal court to revise the 2006 documents to recognize that the herring population – which was

devastated by spill - has not rebounded. Sadly, the Walker Administration and the Obama Justice Department chose to simply let Exxon go, and left upwards of \$100 million on the table, at a time when Exxon oil continues to seep from the beaches of Prince William Sound.



*Impacts of the Exxon Valdez oil spill continue to this day. A "re-opener" clause could have been a chance to fund research on sealife that has not yet recovered.*



## State Puts Salmon Second

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Creek, which did. DNR failed to adjudicate these applications, despite the fact it took \$4500 in filing fees from the CCC. In the meantime, DNR issued water use permits to PacRim Coal to take water from Middle Creek for coal exploration purposes. After more foot-dragging, CCC sued the state to protect its rights. In 2013, the court ruled the DNR violated the Alaska Constitution as well as Alaska Statutes by failing to adjudicate CCC claims, and ordered DNR to process the applications. In 2014, DNR started reviewing the CCC applications, and Inletkeeper worked closely with CCC, Trustees for Alaska and a team of fish, hydrology and other experts to respond to DNR questions. In 2015, DNR took public comment on the proposed water reservations, where over 8500 Alaskans weighed in supporting CCC's efforts to keep water in the salmon stream (CCC & Inletkeeper later presented Governor Walker and Lt. Governor Mallot with 6000 more comments supporting the reservations from Alaskans).

On October 7, 2015, DNR issued a decision which granted the water reservation for the lower reach of Middle Creek, but which denied the reservations for the middle and upper reaches (i.e. within the proposed mine area). So, what's that mean? First, the decision represents a historic step forward



*This decision didn't go far enough, but it's a historic first step. When you speak out to our calls to action you help protect special places like Middle Creek.*

in Alaska water rights law and salmon habitat protection, because never before had the state granted a water reservation to everyday Alaskans (past water reservations had always been secured by state or federal agencies). That's the good news.

The bad news is that DNR, after conducting what's called a public interest balancing test, decided the water reservations in the mine area would undermine the Chuitna coal project's permitting

process, and that the coal project ranked higher in terms of the public interest for Alaskans than an intact wild salmon system.

The Alaska Constitution makes every Alaskan the collective owner of our state's fish and water resources. We have a right to use them, and an obligation to protect them. And Governor Walker's own Transition Team unanimously recommended a "fish first" policy for Alaska. Yet the CCC, Inletkeeper and others have spent nearly a decade of time, and countless dollars fighting to keep water in a wild Alaska salmon stream. That's crazy. Instead, we need to completely reverse the presumptions around our rivers and streams, so we assume all streams have sufficient water to support fish. And if someone wants to appropriate water out of the stream, fine – they just need to show they won't harm the fish. Now that's a policy that would truly put "fish first."



## Tracking Abandoned and Derelict Vessels

*Continued from page 3*

communities. Through Inletkeeper's efforts, we are working collaboratively to improve our tracking of ADV, improve inter-agency communications, and develop a full re-write of



*Abandoned and Derelict vessels are not just an eyesore on our beaches, they can release toxins and debris for decades.*

our state statutes on Abandoned and Derelict Vessels (AAS 30.30). Chapter 30.30 was written in the 1970's, when the state Department of Transportation owned and operated all of our harbor facilities. There is little in our statutes to help prevent ADV, nor do our agencies have any ability or funding to deal with these vessels once they're sunk.

Through this exciting work, Inletkeeper looks forward to having fully revised statutes to bring forward to the legislature in fall 2016. For more information on the Task Force, and the issue of Abandoned & Derelict Vessels around Alaska, see the Alaska Clean Harbors ADV website: <http://alaskacleanharbors.org/resources/harbor-management/derelict-vessels/> or contact Rachel at: [rachel@inletkeeper.org](mailto:rachel@inletkeeper.org).

