

INLETKEEPER

PROTECTING THE COOK INLET WATERSHED & THE LIFE IT SUSTAINS



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Thank you to everyone who has pledged to contribute a portion of their PFD to Inletkeeper this year through Pick.Click.Give. We know there are many worthy nonprofits in Alaska to support with your PFD, and we truly appreciate your commitment to science and advocacy for a healthy Cook Inlet watershed.

You have until March 31st to add or change your donation at pfd.alaska.gov



How to Be an Advocate!

Are you ever on social media and you see articles titled something like "All the Things You've Been Doing Wrong Your Entire Life." or "Apparently eating chips isn't as simple as popping them inside your mouth. No, there is a proper way to truly enjoy these crispy snacks."

Now if there can be a right and wrong way to eat a Pringle, it's not surprising we get a lot of questions on the right way to advocate. And we've all heard someone tell us that the best tactic is to call your representative or to write detailed comments or some other magic bullet that will be most successful.

We have good news and bad news here. First, the bad news: there's no magic answer—we can't tell you the absolute best way to effect change. But, good news, in so many ways you just need to do something!

HOW TO BE AN *Advocate*



Every time people don't act because they didn't know how best to advocate, we lose some of our collective power to effect change for the Cook Inlet watershed and our communities.

So if you want help, we are here! Let us know what issue you care about, talents you want to put to use, time constraints and we can help brainstorm! But in the meantime, sign that petition you agree with!

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Here are some of the things we'll have brewing over the next few months—stay tuned for updates, public hearings and opportunities to engage!

Coalbed Methane and the West Susitna Access Road

Inletkeeper will be weighing in on proposed coalbed methane leases of state land in the Mat-Su and on the proposed West Susitna Access Road. Exploration licenses (and then development) of almost a million acres west of the Parks Highway (including part of Nancy Lake State Recreational Area) for coalbed methane and the West Susitna Access Road, crossing the lower Susitna River and more than 150 salmon streams, would profoundly change the Susitna River valley and fish and wildlife habitat. Comment periods for the road are tentatively scheduled for this summer!



Anchorage Sewage Treatment Plant

The Asplund Wastewater Treatment Facility is allowed to dump up to 58 million gallons of barely treated sewage a day directly into Cook Inlet. Although the Clean Water Act generally requires more treatment before discharge, Anchorage receives a special waiver (one of only 23 in the country) which, despite having expired in 2005, will be reviewed for renewal in 2022 or 2023. The facility is already claiming that EPA has said they will renew the permit prior to any public input or research. Yet Alaskans know our Cook Inlet beluga whales are dying. Alaskans know our fish populations are struggling. Alaskans know the toxic mixing zones are too big. Alaskans need our government to actually take a hard look at this waiver. If you want to engage now on this issue, reach out to your state, federal, and municipal representatives and ask them to use some of the infrastructure bill money to update the Anchorage Sewage Treatment Plant and protect Cook Inlet, our fish, wildlife and people!



Lease Sale 258

We are waiting for the final Environmental Impact Statement regarding the lease sale in Lower Cook Inlet and think we could see it as soon as Mid-April!

Donlin Mine, Pebble Mine, and So Many Other Issues

We are, of course, watching for new developments and advocacy opportunities on many long standing issues including the Donlin Mine gas pipeline and the status of Pebble Mine (expect to see a comment period after May!). And we are keeping a watchful eye on legislative action down in Juneau.

If you hear of issues you are concerned about, please let Liz (liz@inletkeeper.org) know and we can help you raise your voice and advocate!



WATERKEEPER® ALLIANCE

Cold-water Treasure Maps

The blue lines on topographic maps necessarily under-represent the complex movement of freshwater across floodplains, through wetlands and gravel bars. For a juvenile fish, the blue lines are experienced as a maze of currents, temperature, food and hiding places, while a migrating adult salmon wends its way along the blue lines of riffles and pools on its upstream push to find the perfect spawning area and its final resting spot. Instincts guide salmon to critical stream reaches where eggs will be laid and become the next generation.

If only our instincts could guide protection of the diversity of habitat, flows and temperature inherent in our healthy stream systems that support our wild salmon. Instead we must rely on science and navigate the complex human systems we've created to manage and protect our salmon habitat.

Cook Inletkeeper has been contributing to salmon science for years by exploring small-scale temperature variation in Cook Inlet streams using thermal imagery. With this technology, we can identify where groundwater is bringing cold water into stream channels during the summer. These cold-water inflows will be critical for salmon to persist as streams continue to warm due to our changing climate. To ensure these groundwater connections are not inadvertently harmed because they have not been identified, Cook Inletkeeper is now in conversation with land managers to put thermal X's on decisionmakers' maps.

This type of proactive science to conservation requires a long view to prioritize strategic work and a bit of optimism that, with more knowledge about the complexity of our salmon habitat, Alaskans can avoid the mistakes made everywhere else where salmon once thrived.

Meanwhile, draft Environmental Impact Statement comment periods and public testimony on bad legislation fill up the calendar. Although there's satisfaction in helping to stop or limit impacts from poor decision making, we know the finger-in-the-dike analogy too well. And with infrastructure money likely to pour into the state, poor decisions will now come with extra funding.

The balance between fighting for stronger regulations and oversight versus investing in community solutions and long-term research can be a daily challenge. At Cook Inletkeeper, we are committed to finding the right balance for the watershed and for supporters like you who share our vision. In the year ahead, we'll continue to improve the maps that guide habitat protection, fight for public input on the use of our public resources and chart the future we want for Alaska.

Photo by Ben Rich, USFWS

SALMON Science

Juvenile salmon congregating at a cold-water inflow where groundwater enters the Deshka River.



KEEPERNEWS

We're gearing up for a busy summer! To stay in touch, receive information about upcoming events, action alerts and more, be sure to sign up for our monthly electronic newsletter at inletkeeper.org/newsletter

If you enjoyed this newsletter, consider sharing it with a friend so they're up to date on what's happening across the watershed.



We're excited to announce the opening of our 7th season of the Alaska Food Hub!

Essentially an online farmers market, the Alaska Food Hub is a convenient alternative to our mainstream food systems, offering communities a lower-carbon, local alternative to purchase directly from farmers, fishers and makers!

We currently serve the communities of Homer, Soldotna, Seldovia and Ninilchik. Learn more at alaskafoodhub.org



Jeff Lockwood shares a salmon dish during 2019 Salmonfest Chef at the Fest cooking demonstrations organized by Cook Inletkeeper

Elevating Local Knowledge to Protect Our Salmon

Salmon and agriculture are two of Alaska's most important renewable resources. Alaska's agricultural sectors are growing faster than any other state in the nation. With the formation of both the Alaska Grown Caucus in the Alaska Legislature, and the announcement by the Governor of the Food Security Task Force, farming is poised to take a central role in strengthening our food system. As agricultural development increases though, it is vital that this emerging farming economy does not lead to negative impacts on our healthy salmon habitat and water quality.

To help get ahead of potential issues, Cook Inletkeeper is building an Alaska focused Salmon Safe Agriculture project. Early this winter, we launched a Cook Inlet Watershed Farmers Working Group to examine and discuss Salmon-Safe agricultural practices. Salmon-Safe Inc., based in the Pacific northwest, works with farmers, developers, and other environmentally-innovative landowners to reduce watershed impacts through a third-party verified certification program. While certification is not currently our goal, developing an Alaskan land and water ethic that protects our salmon while feeding our communities is. This group of farmers throughout the watershed is providing valuable, first hand knowledge and experience of farming on a salmon landscape.

This project is a proactive effort to develop and promote agricultural principles which will ensure locally grown food and wild salmon are abundant for all Alaskans. Stay tuned as this group of place-based farmers and agricultural professionals help guide the next steps crafting Alaskan Salmon-Safe initiatives.



A local family picks up a bucket from Cook Inletkeeper volunteers to participate in the Community Compost Project

Meaningful Community Action: Let's get to work!

We've all seen what happens when outsiders come in and do things without meaningful input from locals: We get cookie cutter houses built for Florida winters where all the roofs shed snow right onto the doorstep.

Our Alaskan communities feel the sharp impacts of rising temperatures, increasing wildfires and polluting emissions. Because we intimately experience the accelerated warming happening in the arctic and sub-arctic, we also know what will work best to solve the problems here. **Our Central Peninsula Local Solution Series and Homer Drawdown Series are concrete examples of how the world can be a better place with meaningful community action.** The local solutions in our series are being chosen and implemented BY the community, FOR the community.

While it's important to assess and discuss climate change, we also need to get to work implementing solutions right here, right now. Over the past two years, we've rolled up our sleeves alongside hundreds of volunteers and participants and tackled real projects that not only make our communities healthier but also meaningfully reduce the rampant emissions that are warming our salmon streams, depleting our snowpack and threatening our Alaskan way of life. **Many of you participated in these projects and you are the heroes** behind the success of Solarize the Kenai, Community Compost and Peatland Preservation. THANK YOU!

In the Central Peninsula, we are exploring the next top three solutions that came from our initial community brainstorm in 2019: Energize the Kenai—a community energy audit and retrofit program, Re-Treeing Our Neighborhoods, and Landfill Methane Capture (reach out to david@inletkeeper.org for more info). In Homer, we are exploring a host of top solutions that arose during the 2020 planning process including a Local Food Preservation Co-op, a Home Energy Efficiency initiative, Non-Motorized Paths and Affordable Heat Pumps (reach out to satchel@inletkeeper.org for more info). Join us each month as we explore solutions. Then help tackle one!

If you live outside of the central or lower Kenai Peninsula and want to start a solution in your area, we would love to support you! Check out the guide we developed to **help implement local climate actions at inletkeeper.org/actionkit** and get in touch with kaitlin@inletkeeper.org!

MOUTH TO MOUTH WILD RUN & RIDE

By David Knight

I stood at the finish line of the Mouth to Mouth Wild Run & Ride at the end of Cannery Road in Kenai, on an extremely cold February afternoon (the race is still over three months away). There was a mean wind that bit at any exposed skin, making my eyes water. I quickly wiped the tears away for fear that they would freeze my eyelids shut. The beach looked so foreign, just a frozen landscape interrupted only by straw colored dune grass, bending but not breaking in the gale.

A person cannot help but be awe-inspired by the sights, smells and overall feels that overwhelm the senses when they experience this extraordinary place. A connection may be formed that may never be undone. It's something that could impact and shape a life forever.

When we connect to something significant it changes us and we want to celebrate and protect it. We grow to love the places we connect to, creating a special relationship and a strong bond. **It is our hope that our community will experience this relationship building through the Mouth to Mouth Wild Run & Ride. It's what it's all been about for the past 8 years and this year we will be doing it in person on May 30th, 2022!**

We also want to recognize that the lands the race takes place on have been culturally shaped by the Dena'ina people, their stewardship, knowledge and traditional practices before time immemorial. Since the impact of colonial settlement, they have faced many challenges, including loss of traditional Dena'ina ways of living, hunting, fishing, land, language and culture. However, the Dena'ina are extraordinarily resilient and have combated the challenges valiantly. The work of reclaiming Dena'ina culture continues to this day in so many admirable ways, including Kenaitze Indian Tribe's educational fishery located on Tribal land right next to the finish line of the Mouth to Mouth Wild Run & Ride.

I look forward to a little bit warmer weather at the end of May. Until then stay warm and mark your calendar for May 30th! Reflect on all that is good in this place we love and remember that there is so much that is significant and meaningful where we live. So, let's be curious and continue to learn about the Cook Inlet watershed AND each other.



Solutions Inspired by Nature and the Life it Sustains



SALMONFEST RADIO

SALMONFEST RADIO SEASON 2 IS ROLLING!

Salmonfest Radio is about celebrating our connection to salmon and keeping that connection in the hearts and minds of Alaskans during the off season. Tune into Salmonfest Radio Season 2 this March through June wherever you get your podcasts to hear music recorded on stage at Salmonfest 2021, exclusive backstage interviews with bands, and salmon issues and stories told by people whose lives are inextricably tied to salmon—people we call Salmon Champions.

Salmonfest Radio also airs on public radio across the state; go to salmonfestradio.org to find stations and air times.

We often look to natural systems for inspiration to design better processes and products. We see this captured within the principles of biomimicry: **life creates conditions to life by evolving to survive; adapting to changing conditions; being locally attuned and responsive; using life-friendly chemistry; being resource efficient; and by integrating development with growth.** Although the idea that “nature knows best” is not new to Indigenous communities across the world, the dominant culture is so accustomed to conquering or improving nature that a return to these principles and the inherent wisdom of the natural world may seem revolutionary.

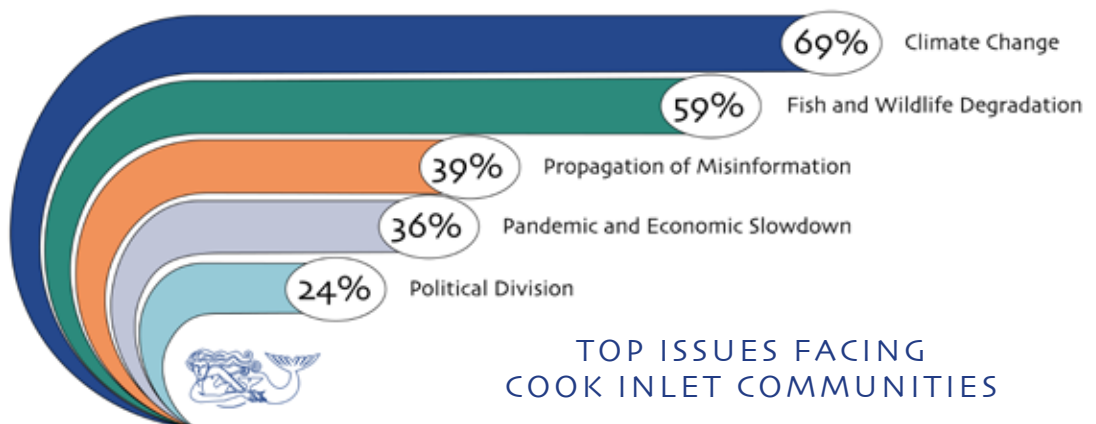
The Cook Inlet (Tikahtnu) watershed is vast and nearly two-thirds of Alaska’s population call the watershed home. Families and communities depend on the health of the waters and wild habitats for their wellbeing and livelihoods. We look to this place and are proud to call it home for the nourishment, inspiration, and innovation it provides. We know that healthy lands and waters are a critical component and vital resource at the heart of the bounty and richness of this place.

We applied for a WaterSmart grant through the Bureau of Reclamation to better understand current community-specific concerns about threats to water resources and identify community-based solutions. The diversity of the population and communities within the watershed is as vast as its geographic breadth; yielding challenges that are variable from one place to the next. Because the Cook Inlet watershed is so large, we narrowed our focus to the watersheds of the Kenai Peninsula for this effort.

We are looking to you—the experts in your experience—to better understand the concerns you have for your communities. During the summer of 2021, we distributed an online survey to begin to understand threats and concerns to water resources as well as how valuable Inletkeeper programs feel towards addressing those concerns to protect our water and all that relies upon it.

Your response to the survey (see graphic below) told us that the top issues facing Cook Inlet communities are climate change, fish and wildlife degradation, propagation of misinformation, the pandemic and economic slowdown, and political division. These concerns are as relevant as ever. We’ll be taking our next step this summer by holding community conversations where we can dive deeper into these top issues and community-specific concerns to work together to develop local solutions.

As we continue to navigate unprecedented times in a world that often moves at a pace not seen in natural systems, we must all continue to adapt to changing conditions. We’ll be monitoring the health crisis closely over the coming months and planning a time to connect with communities when we can do so safely. Stay tuned for a save the date. In the meantime, we’ll be looking forward to longer, warmer days and turning to the natural world for inspiration and innovative solutions.



Energy Democracy in Alaska

When America began to electrify, lights came on first in cities. It made commercial sense: the city's affluent could easily foot the cost of power, and urban density meant less line to lay and easier maintenance. Electricity beyond the city made no sense. Powering far-flung farms and villages meant stretching miles of pole and wire into places where fewer people had the funds to cover expenses, much less make it profitable. It seemed the commercial logic of electricity would keep cities aglow and the countryside dark forever.

Rural Americans who wanted electricity had to organize to get it for themselves. In 1940, the farmers of the Mat-Su Valley created Alaska's first electric co-op, the Matanuska Electric Association. By the end of that decade, Alaskans had joined with their neighbors to create the Kodiak, Golden Valley, Chugach and Homer Electric Associations.

Alaskans created these democratic electric co-ops to secure a better quality of life. Co-ops give us the same opportunity today—a chance to fight for a liveable climate, affordable and abundant energy, and an equitable distribution of benefits. Very few Americans can so directly steer their energy future.



**Today's electric co-ops
serve 56% of the U.S
land area but only 42
million people—about
13% of Americans.**

Image Source: National Rural Electric Cooperative Association

Following the historic electrification divide, most people in and around cities get power from for-profit utilities owned by investors. As customers rather than member-owners, they cannot elect their utility's leaders or sit in on their deliberations. They can only influence energy decisions through petitions, phone calls to legislators, advocacy and legal battles. Every spring, Alaskan co-op members can more decisively influence their local energy system with far less effort by voting for a director on their nine- or seven-person co-op boards.

Among the empowered minority of American co-op members, Alaskans are a minority within the minority — members of co-ops that control both distribution and "G&T," or generation and transmission. The distinction is technical, but being "vertically integrated" has big implications for the reach of your vote. Distribution co-ops deliver electricity to members, but they buy power from larger G&T co-ops rather than generating it themselves. G&T boards aren't elected by end consumers, but appointed by distribution co-op boards. G&T meetings are usually closed to distribution co-op members, and the needs of these two classes of co-op aren't always aligned.

Before Lower 48 co-ops can even begin the challenge of building clean local energy, they spend years and millions of dollars on legal struggles with their G&Ts. Alaskans get to skip this step. All three electric association (EA) co-ops in the Cook Inlet watershed: Homer (HEA), Matanuska (MEA) and Chugach (CEA), control their electrical systems from generation to transmission to distribution into your home.

Being their own G&Ts causes Alaskan co-ops plenty of expense and headache, but for members seeking a better energy future, there's a hidden blessing: our co-op boards have almost unique power over their own electrical systems. **Alaskans have a lot to lose from climate change, and a lot to gain from clean, local energy. It just so happens that through our co-ops, we also have an extraordinary opportunity to act.**

POWERFUL ELECTIONS

This spring many of us will receive ballots in the HEA, MEA, or CEA elections. All these co-ops are pushing toward renewable energy or carbon reduction goals. This is possible because of board members who understand what's at stake. With pro-renewable majorities on these boards, we can build the clean energy system we need.

Inletkeeper is working to recruit pro-renewable HEA board candidates. During the race this spring we'll strive to inform voters who these candidates are and what they can bring to the co-op. Historically, only around 15% of members vote in co-op elections. **Your vote** will therefore carry a lot of weight, and in a vertically integrated co-op it can make deep waves, touching the actual sources of energy and carbon. We hope you'll cast it with a feeling of power well used.



Homer Electric Association:

Vote by mail only. Ballots will be sent April 4 and must be returned by May 3, with results announced at the annual meeting May 4.



Matanuska Electric Association:

Election materials will be sent at the end of March. The election will end with the annual meeting on April 26.



Chugach Electric Association:

Voting will begin in mid-April and end with the annual meeting on May 20.



Electronic Recycling: Inletkeeper's Annual Game of Tetris

After a short winter lull, Inletkeeper's programs start revving up come spring. One program that Kenai Peninsula residents have grown to count on are our annual spring electronics recycling events. This year is no different. **Mark your calendars for April 30th** for our annual e-recycling events in Soldotna and Homer. Drop off your old devices and Inletkeeper staff and volunteers will engage in our annual game of tetris as we palletize electronic relics from your junk drawers, closets and garages.

► **FACT: There is more recoverable gold in 1 ton of personal computers than in 17 tons of gold ore.**

From lessening the demand for mineral mining to avoiding pollution, recycling these old devices is a meaningful, conscious consumer action. If the life cycle of old electronic devices end in our landfills, not only do we allow them to leach toxins

such as lead, mercury, cadmium, beryllium, polyvinyl chloride, and chromium into our watershed, we also surrender precious, reusable metals that we've invested significant resources to uncover back to the earth.

While Inletkeeper is committed to diverting electronic waste from our landfills, we also must acknowledge the program's shortcomings. The life phase of electronics recycled in Alaska is an energy intensive journey that takes them thousands of miles from one recycler to the next - and while Inletkeeper can ensure that every recycler is certified by the EPA to have a responsible recycling policy while managing end-of-life electronic equipment, the final destinations and uses of these electronic components are often unclear. Inletkeeper envisions a transition in how we handle electronic waste in our state, leaning into Alaskan's resourceful nature to build up our local economy for refurbishing, recycling and repurposing. Until then, let the games begin.



Planned GIVING

At Cook Inletkeeper, we keep our vision of thriving and equitable communities in a resilient watershed at the heart of all we do. We invite you to join us in planning for the long view and consider becoming a legacy donor, one of a dedicated group who cares about protecting Cook Inlet for future generations.

One of our longtime supporters, Ed Bailey made a lasting contribution through a bequest after his passing. Ed was a devoted conservation activist and worked on many important issues with various conservation groups over the years, including trying to end the practice of bear-baiting and aerial wolf hunting in Alaska, stopping the parking of oil rigs in Kachemak Bay, keeping oil and gas drilling out of Kachemak Bay, making Kachemak Bay a jetski free area, and stopping the coalbed methane oil and gas lease in Homer, to mention just a few.

Ed's contribution allows us to keep up the fight while honoring his legacy of supporting conservation work in Alaska.

Legacy gifts give you the opportunity to make a larger charitable donation while providing a stable funding source for Cook Inletkeeper. If you would like to discuss these options or make a planned gift to Cook Inletkeeper, please contact Bridget via bridget@inletkeeper.org or phone at 907-235-4068 x27.