

# CONNECTING ACROSS TIKAHTNU: A JOINT FISH HABITAT PARTNERSHIP MEETING PROCEEDINGS



**MONDAY & TUESDAY  
APRIL 21 & 22, 2025**

BP Energy Center  
1014 Energy Court, Anchorage, AK 99508

**PRESENTED BY UAA ALASKA CENTER FOR CONSERVATION SCIENCE &  
KACHEMAK BAY NATIONAL ESTUARINE RESEARCH RESERVE**

# CONNECTING ACROSS TIKAHTNU



## OVERVIEW

## *Proceedings Introduction*



## **BRINGING TWO REGIONS TOGETHER**

*Building relationships to improve fish habitat resiliency across South Central Alaska*

The two-day meeting was hosted in Anchorage, AK by the University of Alaska Anchorage's Alaska Center for Conservation Science and Kachemak Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve. Funding for the event came from a congressional earmark that the Reserve was awarded to work on Salmon Watershed Stewardship. The intent of the meeting was to support healthy fisheries, people, and economies on the Kenai Peninsula and in the Mat-Su by better connecting organizations working on salmon watershed stewardship in the region.

The event occurred during a time period of significant uncertainty due to large federal employee layoffs and funding freezes. Even with these challenges, Fish Habitat Partnership members and those working on fisheries habitat in South Central Alaska, made the effort to share their work, discuss challenges and priorities, and to connect with one another. Day one was focused on presentations and there were 70 people for the full 8 hours. The second day was filled with collaborative discussions and a presentation from the Kenai Peninsula Mayor, with 42 people participating.

# CONNECTING ACROSS TIKAHTNU



## DAY 1

*Monday, April 21, 9:00 - 5:00pm*

TIME	DESCRIPTION
9:00	Welcome: Introductions & Intentions
9:30	Keynote Speaker Presentation
10:45	Break
11:00 - 12:10	Session 1: Fish Habitat & Restoration
12:10 - 1:10	Lunch, Resource Sharing Activity, & Project Tidbit Updates
1:10 - 2:35	Session 2: Supporting Salmon Fisheries
2:35 - 3:35	Session 3: Invasive Species
3:35	Break
3:50 - 4:55	Session 4: Outreach & Education
4:55	Wrap Up & Day 2 Overview

# CONNECTING ACROSS TIKAHTNU



**DAY 2**

*Tuesday, April 22, 9:00 - 5:00pm*

TIME	DESCRIPTION
9:00	Pre-session Check-In & Coffee
9:15	Welcome
9:30	Meet the Fish Habitat Partnerships
10:30	Making Connections Across Tikahtnu: Get to Know Your Fish Habitat Partnership Neighbors
10:45	Break
11:00	Kenai Peninsula Borough Mayor Micciche Presentation & Q&A
11:30	Priority Pods & Challenge Wall
12:30	Catered Lunch & Project Tidbit Updates
1:30	Reciprocity and Resources
2:00	Supporting the Region: Overlap in Priorities and Challenges between Fish Habitat Partnerships
3:15	Break
3:30	Leveraging the Fish Habitat Partnerships Conservation Action Plan Process
4:30	Wrap Up & Thank You

# CONNECTING ACROSS TIKAHTNU



DAY 1

*Keynote Presentation*



## **WILSON JUSTIN**

*Alaska Native Elders Council / Alaska Pacific University*

Wilson Justin was born in Midcentury at Nabesna Alaska. A village later abandoned to comply with the educational requests of the Bureau of Indian Affairs. Wilson has advised federal agencies such as US EPA, on issues around environmental program capacity building.

In the early 1990's, US EPA began writing the Indian Environmental General Assistance Program statute (IGAP Act of 1992). Wilson played a critical role in the initial structuring of this program, and in its evolution over the years, as it grew from just a handful of grants to Tribal Governments, to what it is today, with over \$27 million dollars in Region 10, Alaska and over 125 Tribes statewide choosing to partner on this program. He has Directed GAP programs, including Mount Sanford's environmental program, overseeing the development of a successful regional recycling program.

Wilson has professionally attended conferences for decades. He has led numerous discussions on climate change as an acclaimed speaker during interdisciplinary conferences such as the Alaska Forum on the Environment. The publication titled: Alaska Forum on the Environment: Climate Change: Our Voices, Sharing our Ways Forward, became a component to the US Department of the Interior, US Geological Survey, United States National Climate Assessment, Alaska Technical Regional Report (Circular 1379).

# CONNECTING ACROSS TIKAHTNU



DAY 1

*Welcomes & Introductions*



## **ERIN LARSON**

*UAA Alaska Center for Conservation Science / Assistant Director & Lead Aquatic Ecologist*

Erin earned her B.A. in Biology with a focus in Ecology at Dartmouth College and her Ph.D. in Ecology and Evolutionary Biology at Cornell University. She served as an Assistant Professor of Environmental Science at Alaska Pacific University before joining the Aquatic Ecology team at ACCS as Research Faculty.



## **JESSICA SPEED**

*Mat-Su Basin Salmon Habitat Partnership / Coordinator*

Jessica Speed is the Mat-Su Basin Project Manager with Trout Unlimited Alaska and has served as the Coordinator of the Mat-Su Basin Salmon Habitat Partnership since 2012. She holds a Bachelor of Science in Geography, with a focus on Natural Resource Management, from the University of Victoria, with additional coursework from the University of Alaska Fairbanks. Jessica has worked as an environmental educator and science technician, and previously served as Executive Director of the Wrangell Mountains Center—an institute dedicated to promoting land stewardship through the arts, scientific research, and environmental education. In 2012, she completed a Nonprofit Management course with The Foraker Group.



## **TRENT DODSON**

*Kenai Peninsula Fish Habitat Partnership / Coordinator*

Dodson has been an engaged community member and professional in the field since 2001, making significant contributions to various organizations in Alaska like Cook Inlet Aquaculture Association, Cook Inlet Regional Citizen Advisory Council, and the Kodiak Regional Aquaculture Association.

# CONNECTING ACROSS TIKAHTNU



DAY 1

Session 1: Fish Habitat & Restoration



## **FROM BARRIERS TO SOLUTIONS: TRIBAL CAPACITY BUILDING FOR FISH PASSAGE RESTORATION**

*Andrea James / Chickaloon Village Traditional Council*

Chickaloon Native Village is restoring salmon habitats in Southcentral Alaska through a Tribal Fish Passage Program funded by the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law. The program offers training, hosts virtual meetings, and implements culvert replacements and stream restorations to support salmon resilience, while fostering collaboration with other agencies and NGOs.



## **VARYING ROLES OF GROUNDWATER SUPPORT TO STREAMFLOW AND TEMPERATURE MODULATION IN NON-GLACIAL SALMON STREAMS IN SOUTH CENTRAL ALASKA**

*Tyelyn Brigino / University of South Florida & Kachemak Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve*

Groundwater discharge plays a critical role in the proper functioning of salmon-bearing streams in the Kenai Peninsula Lowlands, Alaska



## **A LOW-COST SONAR INDEX OF SUSITNA RIVER EULACHON RUN TIMING AND STRENGTH TO BETTER UNDERSTAND THE COOK INLET ECOSYSTEM**

*Nicole Schmitt / Alaska Wildlife Alliance*

Our proposed 3-year project seeks to produce a relatively low-cost, sonar-based index of eulachon abundance and run timing for more informed fishery management decisions and ecosystem considerations.

# CONNECTING ACROSS TIKAHTNU



DAY 1

Session 1: Fish Habitat & Restoration



## MONITORING THE EFFECTS OF BEAVER-INSPIRED ACTIVITY IN THREE HEADWATER WETLANDS

*Spencer Johnson / UAA Kachemak Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve*

Peatlands on the Kenai Peninsula are drying. This trend threatens the many ecosystem services these wetlands provide, such as delivering temperature-modulated groundwater to salmon streams, storing carbon, and mitigating fire risk. Beavers are a potential solution: beaver dams retain more water on the landscape, recharge groundwater, and often create excellent rearing habitat for juvenile Coho salmon.



## PREY OF ENDANGERED COOK INLET BELUGA WHALES

*William Bechtol / Bechtol Research*

During 2008–2018, the population of endangered Cook Inlet beluga whales declined at 2.3%/yr, with a 0.9%/yr increase to 2022. Concerns remain over what is inhibiting recovery. The CIBW Recovery Plan identified a reduction in prey as a threat. This presentation discusses data on CIBW prey and possible research options.

# CONNECTING ACROSS TIKAHTNU



DAY 1

Session 2: Supporting Salmon Fisheries



## STATUS OF COOK INLET SALMON STOCKS

*Nick DeCovich / Alaska Department of Fish and Game*

The Cook Inlet region of Alaska is home to all five species of Pacific salmon and supports both commercial and recreational fisheries targeting local wild stocks. The Alaska Department of Fish and Game manages these fisheries by monitoring escapements (spawning abundance) for targeted populations and reducing or increasing harvest opportunities to keep escapements within established goal ranges.



## IT TAKES FISH TO MAKE FISH / MAT-SU BASIN SALMON HABITAT AND POPULATION MAINTENANCE

*Andy Couch / Mat-Su Borough Fish and Wildlife Commission*

It Takes Fish to Make Fish -- has been the name of the Mat-Su Borough Fish and Wildlife Commission's (FWC) informational booklet for several years, and one of the key reasons the FWC was formed. This presentation will provide some history of the Commission and Mat-Su salmon runs, as well as current habitat issues within the Borough, including invasive species, and the challenges presented by increased development near Mat-Su water bodies. There is more information than can be thoroughly covered, so public questions after the presentation will provide an opportunity to go into more depth on specific issues. Sustainable salmon populations are one measurement of healthy salmon habitat.



## DESHKA RIVER TEMPERATURE MONITORING AND SALMON STUDIES

*Daniel Rinella / U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service*

We will present some results from our ongoing Deshka River temperature monitoring and from a related set of studies into changing habitat suitability for Chinook and Coho salmon.

# CONNECTING ACROSS TIKAHTNU



DAY 1

Session 1: Fish Habitat & Restoration



## SCIENCE TO CONSERVATION OUTCOMES: USING DATA PORTALS TO IMPLEMENT CONSERVATION ACTIONS

*Anjanette Steer / UAA Alaska Center for Conservation Science*

As a member of the Science and Data Committee of the Mat-Su Salmon Habitat Partnership, Anjanette will discuss the challenges of transferring salmon science, like thermal imagery to local decision makers as a follow up to work started by Sue Mauger (Cook Inletkeeper). Anjanette will highlight how key statewide databases can be and have been used to support Mat-Su Salmon Habitat Partnership Priorities e.g. Anadromous Waters Catalog , Fish Passage, Exotic Plants (AKEPIC 2.0) including Elodea specific database, and off-highway vehicle mapper for trails in the Mat-Su.



## SALMON FROM SOIL: CHICKALOON NATIVE VILLAGE SALMON RESEARCH

*Benjamin Americus / Chickaloon Village Traditional Council*

This will be a 5 minute tidbit presentation by Chickaloon Village Traditional Council describing a project using DNA and marine nitrogen to detect historic salmon populations.

# CONNECTING ACROSS TIKAHTNU



DAY 1

Session 3: Invasive Species



## THE RACE IS ON: COMMUNITY MONITORING FOR INVASIVE EUROPEAN GREEN CRAB IN ALASKA

*Jasmine Maurer / Kachemak Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve*

The Kachemak Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve has been monitoring for the early detection of invasive European green crabs in the greater Kachemak Bay for over 20 years. A recent project worked with partners in Washington State and those monitoring in Alaska to help transfer knowledge on how to deal with this expanding invader.



## OUTMUSCLING INVASIVE DREISSENIDS WITH A PREVENTION PARTNERSHIP

*Marcus Geist / UAA Alaska Center for Conservation Science*

Multiple organizations are partnering to counter the threat of invasive dreissenid (Quagga and Zebra) mussels to Alaska's freshwater systems through a coordinated prioritization of monitoring vulnerable waterbodies.



## NORTHERN PIKE MANAGEMENT

*Parker Bradley / Alaska Department of Fish and Game*

Northern pike, a species not native to southcentral Alaska, was initially introduced to this region in the 1950's. As one of the most popular sport fish in North America, this top-level predator is commonly and illegally moved around by people, often with dire consequences. In Southcentral Alaska, northern pike are now known to occupy over 150 waterbodies, and they are continuing to spread.

# CONNECTING ACROSS TIKAHTNU



DAY 1

Session 4: Outreach & Education



## WHAT'S FOR LUNCH: SALMON EDUCATION OPPORTUNITIES

*Ingrid Harrald / UAA Kachemak Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve*

Kachemak Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve (KBNERR) has developed a successful watershed-focused education and outreach program, including internships, teacher trainings, classroom activities and field trips. They will share their model for communicating local science and developing a sense of place using methods of engagement to reach communities at every learning level.



## KINGMAKERS: RECOGNIZING AND CELEBRATION THE ACTIONS LANDOWNERS TAKE TO SUPPORT SALMON HABITAT

*Libby Kugel / Great Land Trust  
Carson Chambers / Kachemak Heritage Land Trust*

When land comes under the care of a land trust, it is protected in perpetuity. Much of the land that Great Land Trust and Kachemak Heritage Land Trust protect is vital salmon habitat. Since 2016, the King Maker program has celebrated Alaskans working to protect that important salmon habitat.

# CONNECTING ACROSS TIKAHTNU



DAY 1

Session 4: Outreach & Education



## **FISH NEED LAND TOO: A NON-PROFIT, ACADEMIC AND INDUSTRY PARTNERSHIP TO SUPPORT SCIENCE TO CONSERVATION ACTION**

*Carson Chambers / Kachemak Heritage Land Trust*

*Syverine Bentz / UAA Kachemak Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve*

“Fish Need Land Too” field trips on the Kenai Peninsula hosted by KHLT and KBNERR with industry and local partners serve fisherman, local government leaders, policy makers, scientists, citizens, and children’s school groups to bring awareness about salmon lifecycles, local ecosystems, and the role of conservation in protecting salmon and people.



## **COMMUNITY ACTIONKIT: AN INNOVATIVE MODEL FOR CONFRONTING THE THREAT OF CLIMATE CHANGE TO SALMON HABITAT**

*David Knight / Cook Inlet Keeper*

Protecting salmon habitat for current and future generations was the top aspiration determined in a survey and community conversations hosted from 2021-2023 across 27 communities throughout the Tikahtnu|Cook Inlet watershed.

*Session Wrap Up*

## **PROJECT UPDATES**

*Sign Up Available at Registration Table*

Attendees who have tid-bit updates, 5 minutes or less, will be able to sign up and share updates at the end of the day.

# CONNECTING ACROSS TIKAHTNU



DAY 2



## **MAYOR PETER MICCICHE**

*Kenai Peninsula Borough & the National Fish Habitat Partnership Board*

Kenai Peninsula Borough (KPB) Mayor Peter Micciche was elected in February of 2023. Prior to serving the KPB, he served in Juneau representing the Kenai in the Alaska State Senate for three terms, finishing as the Senate President during Alaska's 32<sup>nd</sup> Legislature. He served as Soldotna's Mayor and on City Council beginning in 2007.

Peter is a 30-year commercial salmon fisherman in Cook Inlet and retired after 35 years as the Superintendent of the ConocoPhillips LNG Facility. He's been a small business owner on the Kenai since 1983, operating a restaurant, a commercial painting business, rental property, and a snow removal service. Peter received his Associate's degree from Kenai Peninsula College and graduated summa cum laude from Alaska Pacific University with a Bachelor's degree in business.

Peter serves on various boards, including the Boys and Girls Club of the Kenai Peninsula, the Triumvirate Theatre, the Kenai Peninsula Fish Habitat Partnership, the National Fish Habitat Partnership, and the Alaska SeaLife Center. He and his family have been active in supporting disadvantaged youth and the senior and veteran communities for many years.

Peter is married to Erin and they have four daughters—Madi, Sophia, Luci and Stella—whose ages range from 30 to 11. The Micciche family resides in Soldotna enjoying all that is wonderful about Alaska.

# CONNECTING ACROSS TIKAHTNU



**DAY 2**

*Collaborative Discussion*



## **BRINGING TWO REGIONS TOGETHER**

*Conversations Between Fish Habitat Partnerships*

Intentions for Day 2 of the Joint Fish Habitat Partnership meeting was to provide space for developing relationships across the region. In the room were participants that serve as steering committee members of each Fish Habitat Partnership, those that participate in Fish Habitat Partnership events, and individuals that were new to the partnerships but work on related topics. The structure of the day was to first center everyone on the two different partnerships, introduce folks to each other, discuss what priorities and challenges they are in each location, align what areas that are overlap, and highlight areas for future collaborations.

There were 42 participants on the second day representing federal, state, tribal, and non-profit organizations. During discussions on priorities and challenges participants were pre-assigned groups with the intention of allowing for new connections to be made across the region. This document overviews some of the discussions had on day two, highlighting areas of overlap and desired future cross-partnership working opportunities.

# CONNECTING ACROSS TIKAHTNU



**DAY 2**

*Presentations & Member's Input*

## **KENAI PENINSULA FISH HABITAT PARTNERSHIPS**

*Input from Steering Committee Members on the value of the partnership*

Members from the Fish Habitat Partnership's each introduced themselves and shared what they find valuable with the partnerships.

- Value to my work – personally & professionally
- Bringing people together
- Education
- Continuity
- Connecting partners & organizations – bridging gaps
- Maintain institutional knowledge & relationships across landscapes
- Convener, collaborating, and network

## **MAT-SU BASIN SALMON HABITAT PARTNERSHIP**

*Input from Steering Committee Members on the value of the partnership*

- Opportunity for overlap and to share ideas among Fish Habitat Partnerships around the state
- Collaboration on communication of habitat topics
- Working together on stewardship initiatives
- Building new relationships
- Sharing expertise, relationships, and networks to conserve salmon

# CONNECTING ACROSS TIKAHTNU



## DAY 2

## *Collaborative Discussion*

### **MAYOR MICCICHE'S PRESENTATION**

*Notes from the presentation and questions asked*

#### **Presentation:**

- Increased need to communicate with those in power.
- Find ways to share your message with those you do not normally interact with
- Children are the gateway to the larger community when it comes to education efforts
- Focus on science for those harvesting and regularly interacting with fish habitats
- Need to explain to people why the science is important to intergenerational experiences

#### **Questions:**

- What tools are needed for policy makers?
  - *Bullet points that are easy to understand*
  - *Imagery showing the science*
- Are there things about the fish habitat partnership structure of functions that are hindering our ability to maximize participation in fish habitat work?
  - *Strategic plan priorities or language*
  - *Representation in the memberships*

# CONNECTING ACROSS TIKAHTNU



**DAY 2**

*Collaborative Discussion*

## **AFTERNOON SESSION**

*Connecting the two Fish Habitat Partnerships*

Participants were broken into pre-determined groups designed to mix members from the two Fish Habitat Partnerships. Each group had a facilitator that also acted as a note taker. The session focused on identifying priorities and challenges that are felt across the region. Groups reported out on what they identified and then Fish Habitat Partnership coordinator's facilitated a discussion to talk about areas of alignment across the region.

## **PRIORITIES**

*Shared During Group Breakouts*

### **Shared:**

- Bringing different perspectives together
- Supporting collaborations
- In-person events connecting people & place: community education
- Collaborations
- Leveraging match
- Knowledge & data sharing
- Holistic view of salmon infrastructure
- Boots on the ground events
- Relationships with sport fishers, residents, property owners, across the political spectrum
- Diverse roles in capacity
- Established network
- Building relationships among communities, scientists, and managers
- Institutional knowledge
- Accessibility of Alaskans to delegation of politicians
- Shared individual personal values
- Anadromous waters catalogue
- Overlap in action plan priorities
- Usable tools
- Intentional networking
- Public private partnerships

# CONNECTING ACROSS TIKAHTNU



**DAY 2**

*Collaborative Discussion*

## **CHALLENGES**

*Shared During Group Breakouts*

### **Shared:**

- Limited representation and participation in the Fish Habitat Partnerships
- Finding the correct messages for outreach
- Staffing turnover leading to loss of relationships and knowledge
- Turning knowledge to action
- Reaching audiences
- Implementing
- Plans
- Funding
- Uncertainty
- Changing agency priorities mid-project
- Lack of local recognition of the partnerships

# CONNECTING ACROSS TIKAHTNU



DAY 2

Reciprocity Activity



## RECIPROCITY ACTIVITY

*Finding ways to support one another while in a time of limited resources*

During a time of limited resources and dramatic funding cuts, it is important for organizations to work together to continue to work to protect fish habitat in the state of Alaska. The Reciprocity Activity was led by the Research Reserve's Coastal Training & Engagement Coordinator to find clear ways that people can support one another. Participants were given sticky notes and were to list things they needed or things they can offer to help like specific equipment, field work help, or outreach development support. After participants added their offers and requests to the board, then the coordinator was able to pair up asks and offers. This activity is designed to help support resiliency in the region and to build relationships.

## TESTIMONIALS

*Next steps from activity*

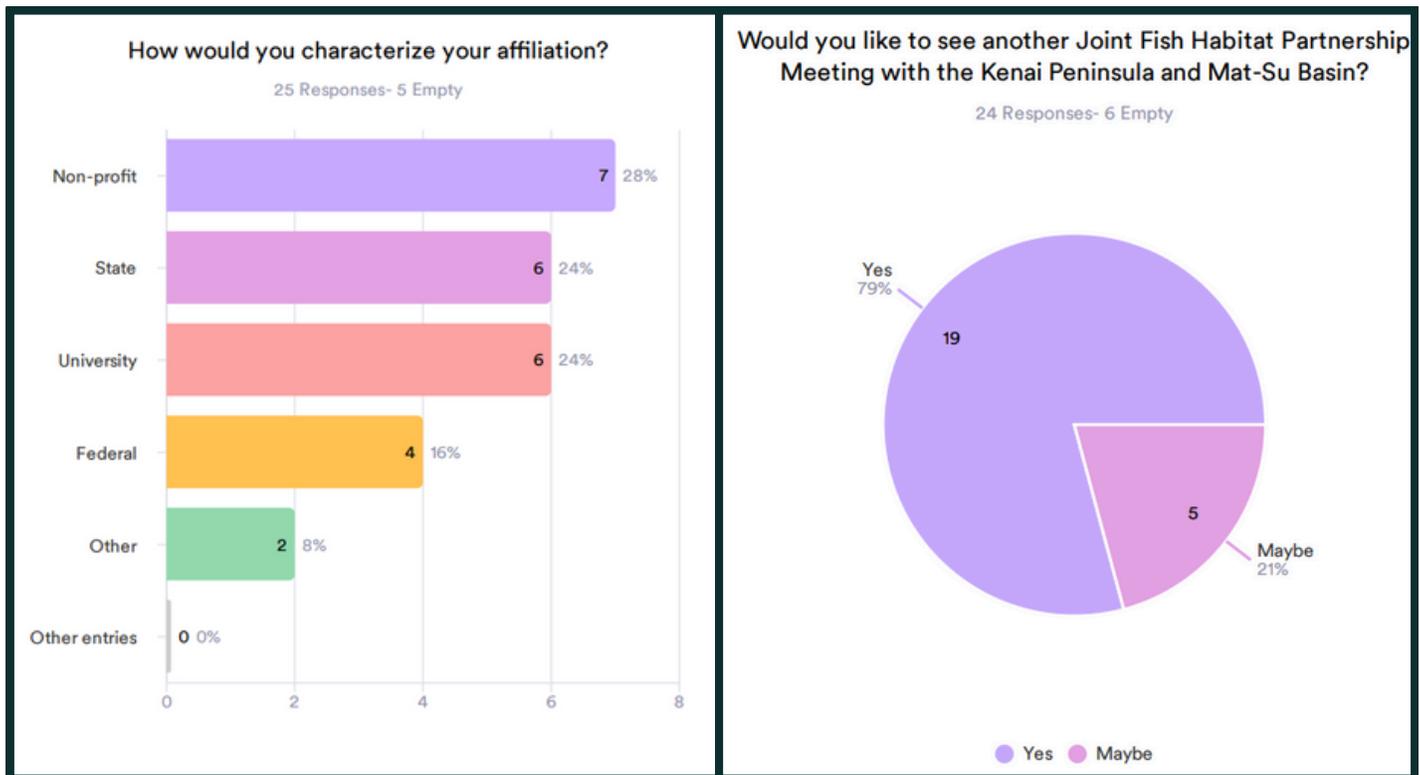
- *"I've already emailed another person for resources I need for a project."*
- *"Made connection about future event / tour coordination and partnership."*
- *"Connected in real life to people I had only previously met virtually. This definitely makes for stronger relationships, connects us to people with technical expertise we perhaps wouldn't have reached out to in the past, increases opportunities for future collaborations when you have actually talked to someone in real life."*
- *"Connecting non-profit partners to local government partners."*
- *"Join ongoing field efforts, work with new partners to apply for funding for joint projects."*

# CONNECTING ACROSS TIKAHTNU



DAY 2

Evaluation



## TESTIMONIALS

Feedback from evaluations

- *"It is all great to have the "science worker bees" in the room. But we need the ear of the folks making policy and management decisions on habitat. "*
- *"This is a great place to collaborate to bring a giant focus on threats to salmon Cook Inlet wide. This group could really be effective at putting a spotlight on issues that require large funding sources."*
- *"After learning more about what the fish habitat partnerships do, I suggest either creating one marine conservation action plan for all the fish habitat partnerships or revising current fish habitat conservation actions plans to incorporate marine-based life stages. Matsu and Kenai in particular will be affected by the same influences from the ocean."*
- *"I think cross-collaboration with other FHPs focused on policy and outreach to policy makers would be highly valuable."*

# CONNECTING ACROSS TIKAHTNU



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

### *Salmon Watershed Stewardship*

The Salmon Watershed Stewardship project originated from earmark funding secured by Coowe Walker at the Kachemak Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve through the late Rep. Don Young's office. In honor of her commitment to juvenile salmon and her service to the Kenai Peninsula Fish Habitat Partnership, we are excited to support this joint meeting between the MatSu and Kenai FHP's. In addition to this meeting, the Salmon Watershed Stewardship project at KBNERR/ACCS is focused on weaving together existing knowledge and outreach and educational efforts on salmon-bearing watersheds across Cook Inlet, leveraging and building on existing research and stewardship partnerships, and providing platforms for information sharing about protocols, activities, and science occurring across the region related to salmon watershed science and stewardship.

The Joint Fish Habitat Partnership meeting was supported by a planning committee made up of representatives from both the Mat-Su Basin and Kenai Peninsula Fish Habitat Partnerships. A big thank you to all who worked to help shape this meeting and to all of our presenters!

