

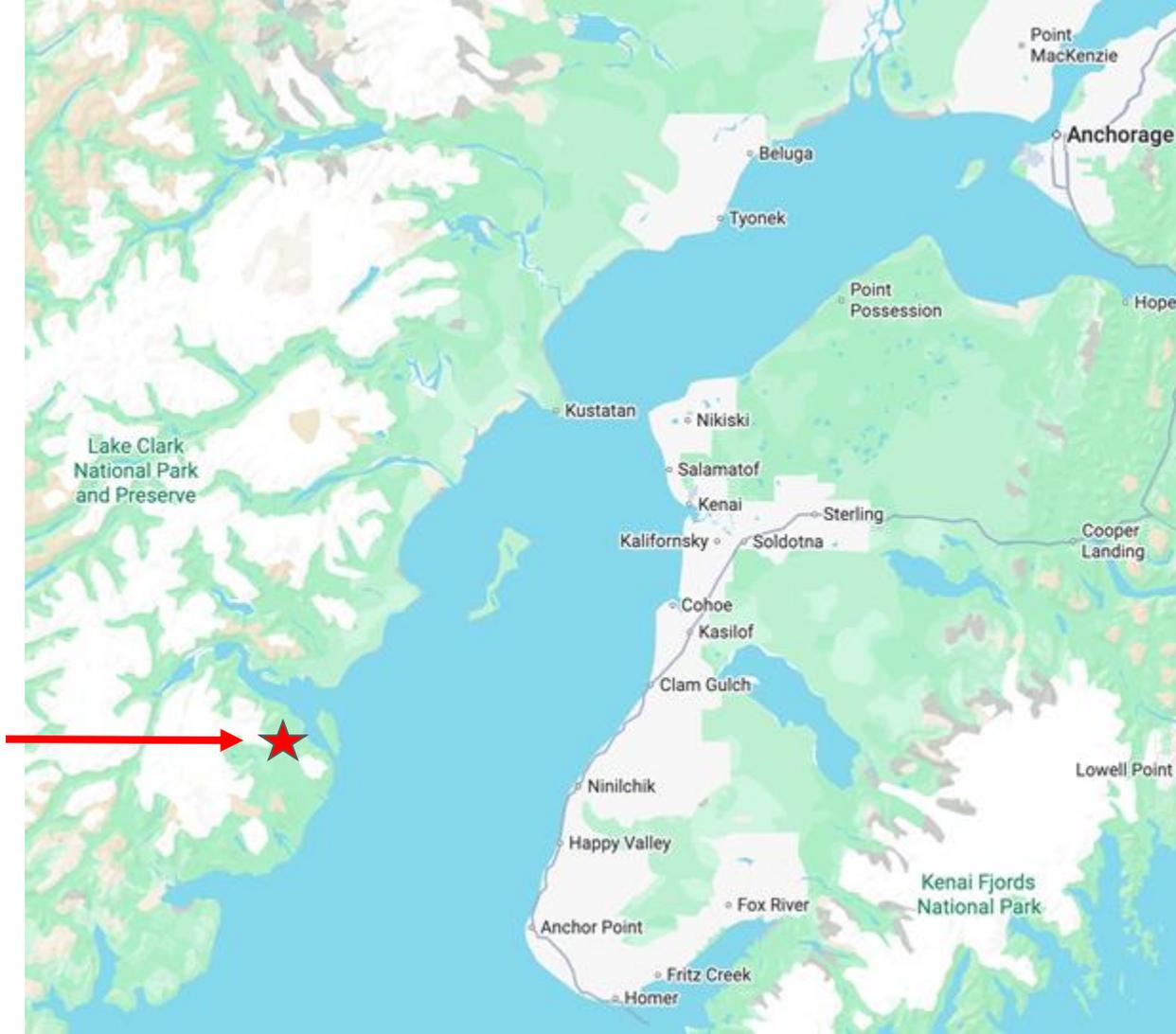
Undermining the Inlet: How the Johnson Tract Mine Threatens Cook Inlet's Connected Ecosystems



Cooper Freeman
Alaska Director
Center for Biological Diversity
Mat-Su Salmon Science & Conservation Symposium
Nov. 20, 2025

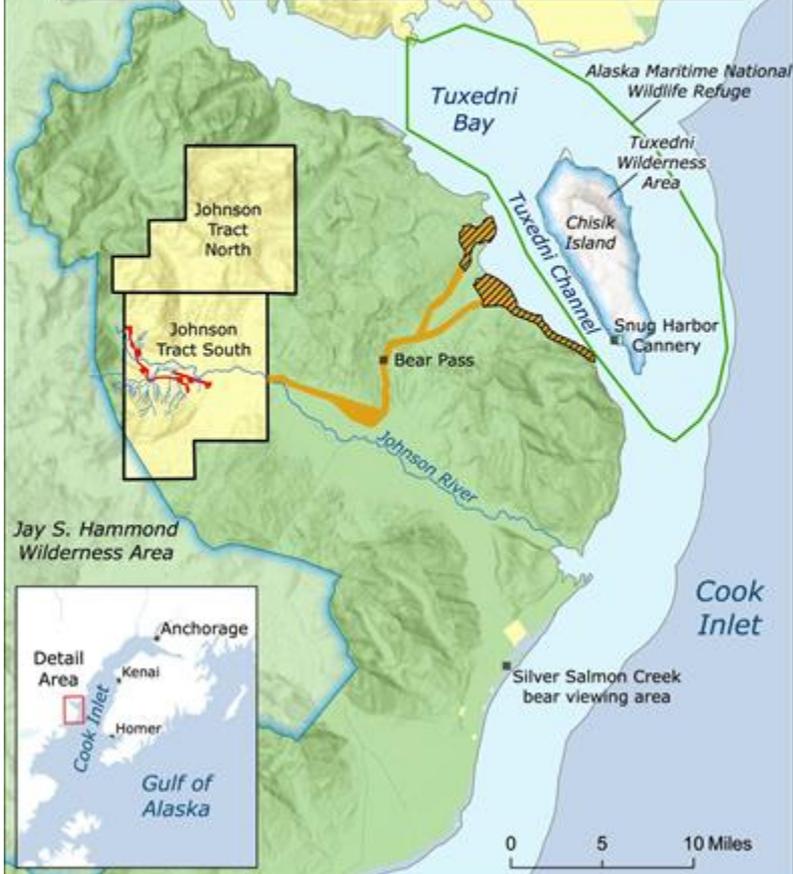


***Proposed
Johnson
Tract Mine
Location***



Johnson Tract Mine Exploration Project

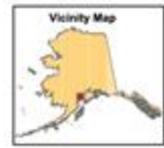
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|--|--|
|  Proposed mine exploration project |  Lake Clark National Park |
|  Johnson Tract |  Alaska Maritime National Wildlife Refuge |
|  Transportation easement |  Wilderness areas |
|  Port easement |  Cook Inlet beluga whale critical habitat |
|  Native Corporation and private lands | |



Use the **[+]** button  on the toolbar to  zoom in.

Lake Clark Coastline Special Use Area

Authorized: January 11, 2000



Legend
 Lake Clark Coastline SUA
 Map Created On October 16, 2002



Alaska Department of Natural Resources
 Division of Mining, Land & Water

Johnson Tract Mine Leadership

- **CIRI**
 - Landowner (fee simple) - South Johnson Tract
 - Subsurface rights owner - North Johnson Tract
- **Contango Ore / JT Mining Inc**
 - Mine Developer
 - Lease w/ CIRI to explore & develop mine
(ends 2029)

NYSE-A
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GOLD SILVER COPPER

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BUILDING ALASKA'S NEXT GOLD MINES

CONTANGO ORE IS AN AMERICAN, NEW YORK STOCK EXCHANGE LISTED COMPANY
WITH A 5 YEAR PLAN TO PRODUCE 200,000 GEO ANNUALLY.

MANH CHOH
MINE

IN PRODUCTION

PRODUCING ~60,000 OZ ANNUALLY

LUCKY SHOT
MINE

FULLY PERMITTED

TARGETING 30,000 - 40,000 OZ
ANNUAL PRODUCTION

JOHNSON TRACT
PROJECT

1M OZ GRADING 9.4G/T AU EQ

OREBODY AVERAGES 40 METERS WIDE
PEA EXPECTED IN MARCH 2025



Contango Direct Ship Ore (DSO) Model



Four Main Components of the JT Mine Project

1. Mine

- a. Johnson Tract Deposit - underground
- b. 7-year mine life
- c. Potential for expansion?

2. On-site processing

- a. "Ore Sorting" -> crushing and sorting for shipping = waste rock
- b. Ore storage prior to shipping
- c. Wastewater treatment

3. Haul Road

4. Ore Shipping Port

- a. Year-round shipping of barges - pier into deep water channel
- b. Camp, laydown area, storage facility - dredging?

What Is The Mine's Current Status?

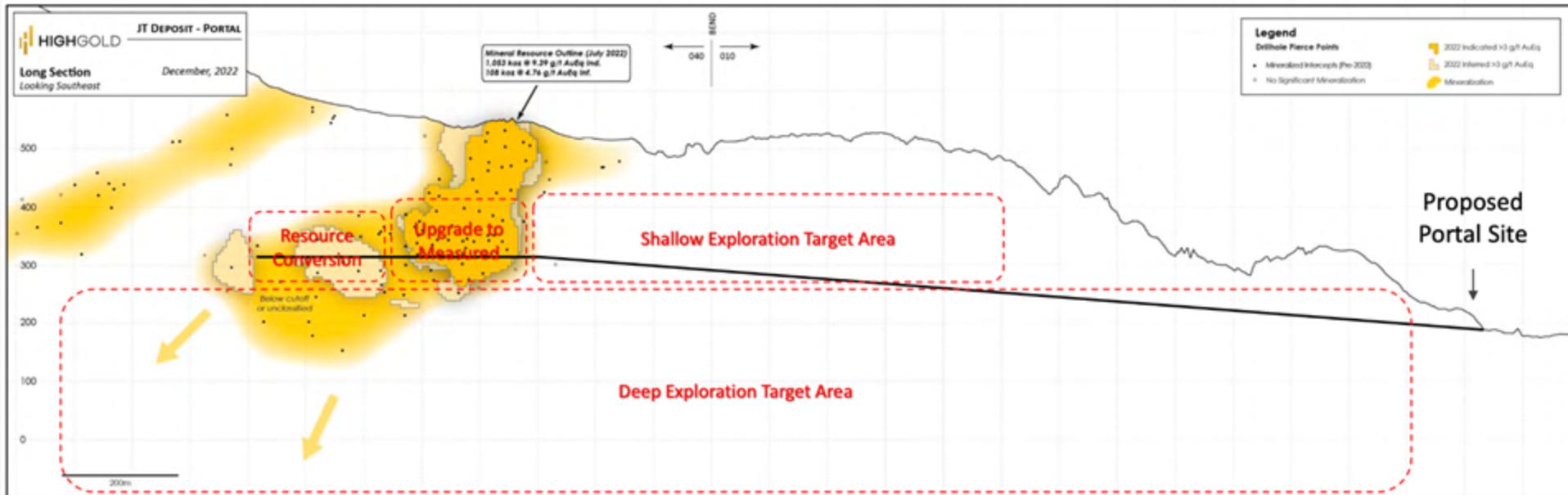
- **Advanced Exploration Activities**
 - Building Road, Airstrip, Mining Tunnel
- **Easements through Lake Clark NP Conveyed**
- **Working Towards Major Permits**
 - Army Corps Clean Water Act Permits
 - Marine Mammal Protection Act Permits
 - Endangered Species Act Consultation
 - National Historic Preservation Act Consultation
 - ANILCA 810 Subsistence Impacts Analysis?
- **Final Investment Decision by 2029-2030?**

Some Potential Concerns for Cook Inlet

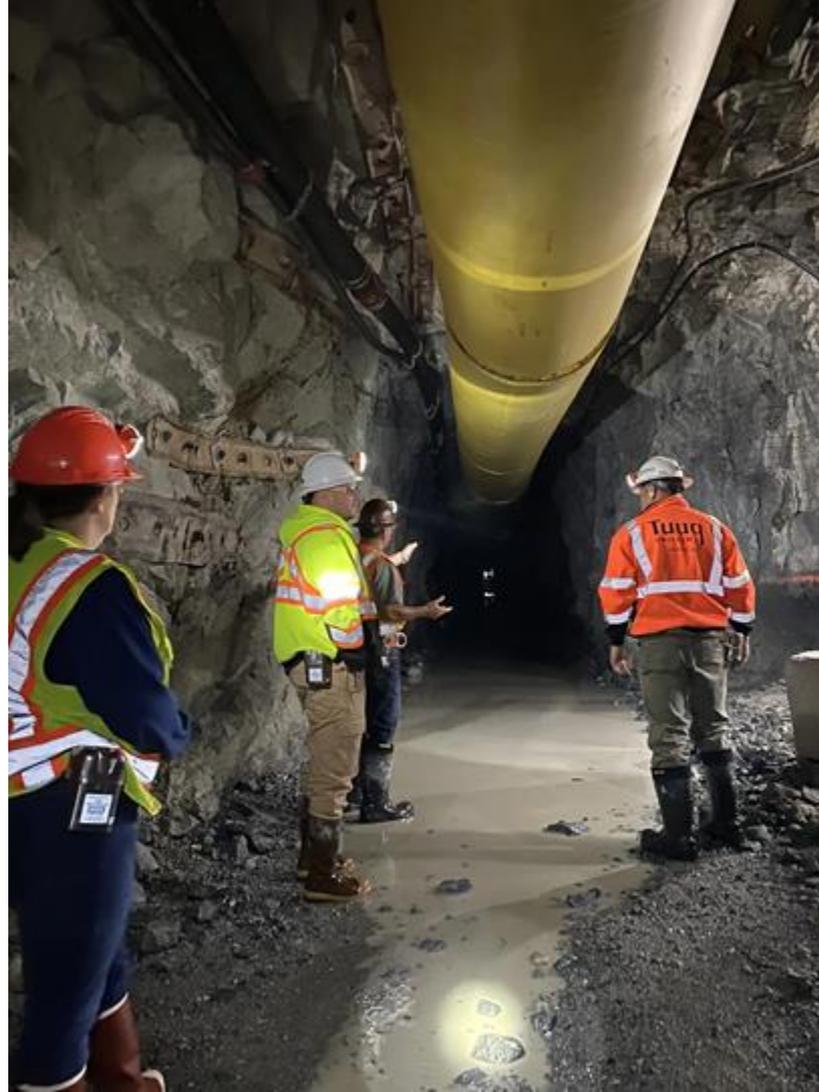
- **Water Pollution - Acid Mine Drainage + Toxic Metals Contaminants**
 - Sulfides, Copper, Lead -> into Johnson River, Tuxedni Bay, Cook Inlet
- **Loss of Fish & Wildlife**
 - Belugas, razor clams, salmon, eulachon, smelt, shrimp, bears, birds
- **Industrialization of Last Major Undeveloped Area of Cook Inlet**
- **Lack of Transparency, Honesty, Speed, Public & Tribal Engagement**
- **Loss of Sustainable Economies, Subsistence Resources & Historic Properties**
 - Clam gathering, local setnet & driftnet fisheries, beluga hunting, bear viewing industry, Native sites & stories

JT Deposit Conceptual UG Exploration Ramp

Preliminary Planning Stage

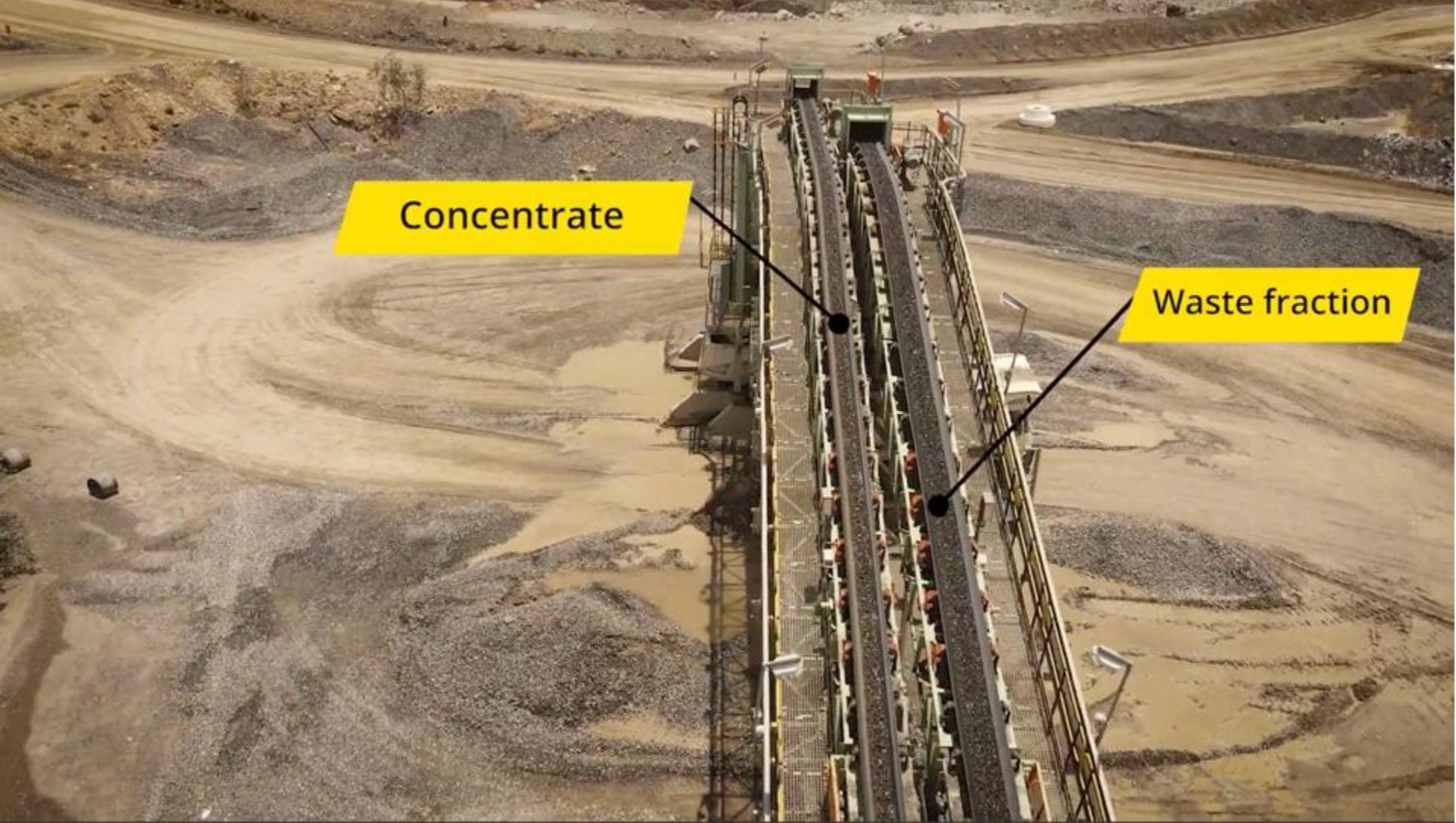


Exploration ramp to parallel mineralized zone, providing drill access to 1.5 km of high potential mineral trend







An aerial photograph of a large-scale mining operation. A long, elevated conveyor belt system runs through the center of the image, flanked by metal walkways and railings. The conveyor belt is divided into two main sections. The left section is labeled 'Concentrate' and is filled with dark, heavy material. The right section is labeled 'Waste fraction' and is filled with lighter, more granular material. The surrounding area is a vast, flat, sandy landscape with various piles of material and tracks from heavy machinery. The sky is clear and bright.

Concentrate

Waste fraction





Photo: Cooper Freeman,
Center for Biological Diversity

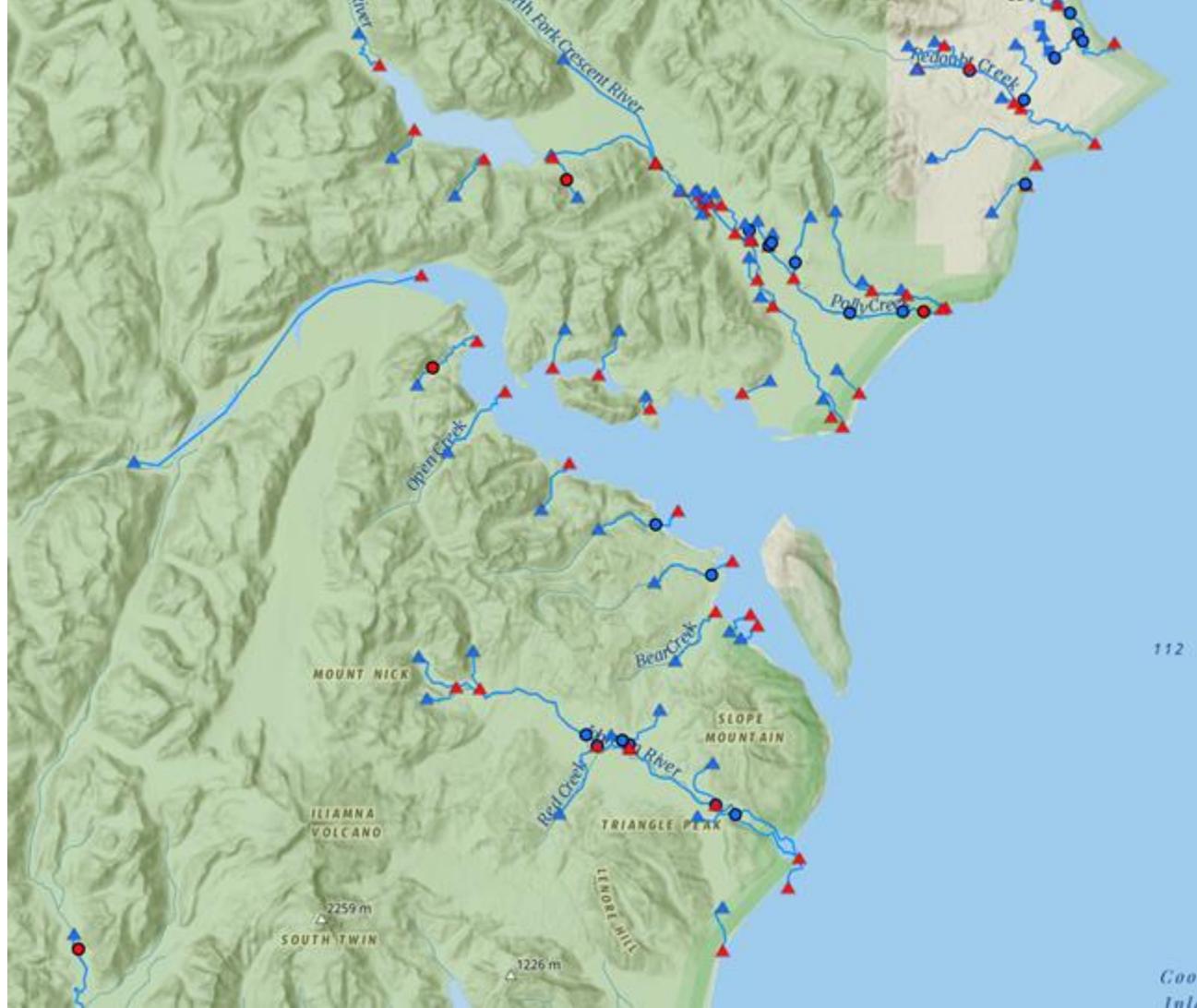
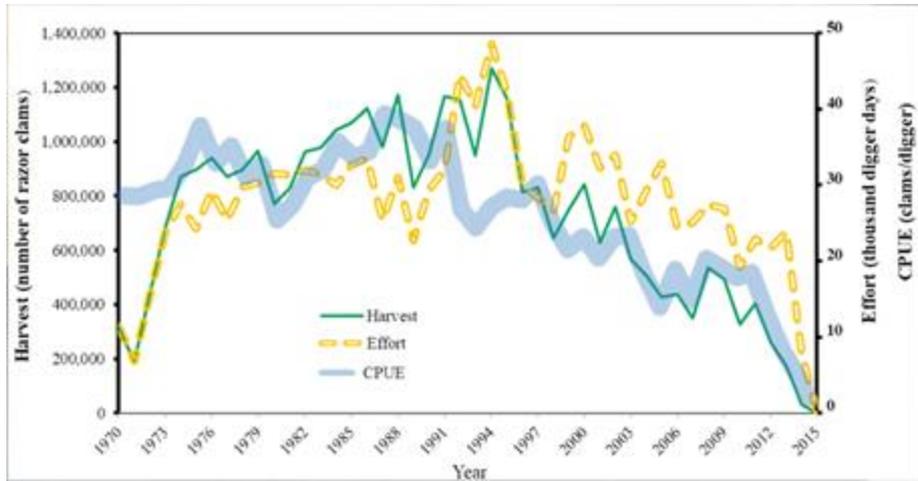




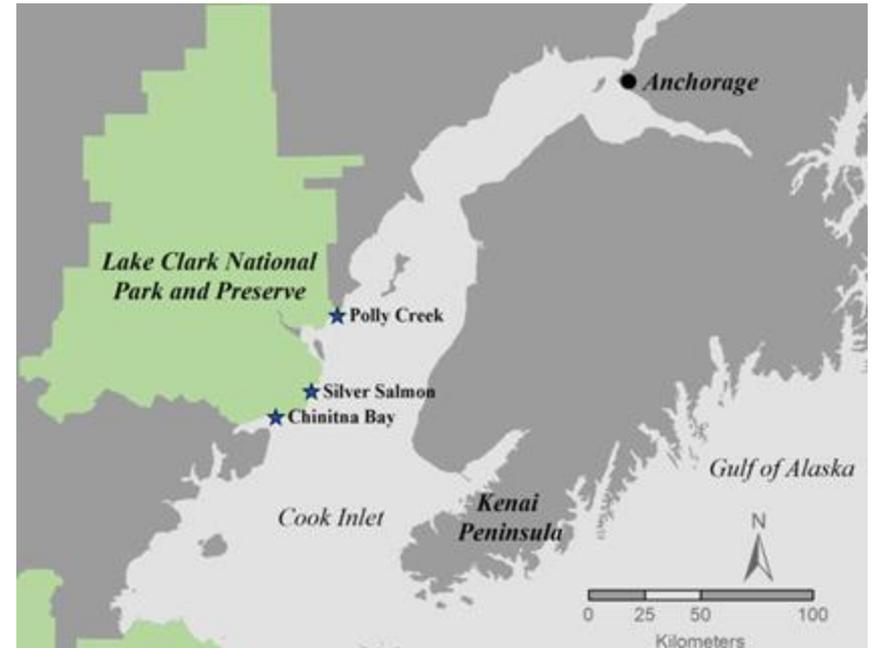
Photo: Dustin Solberg

Tuxedni Bay Area = Most Productive Razor Clam Beds Left in Cook Inlet

East Cook Inlet Clams



West Cook Inlet Clams



A close-up photograph of a puffin's head, showing its characteristic black and white facial markings and a bright orange beak. The background is blurred.

Alaska Maritime National Wildlife Refuge

THOUSANDS OF ISLANDS, MILLIONS OF BIRDS

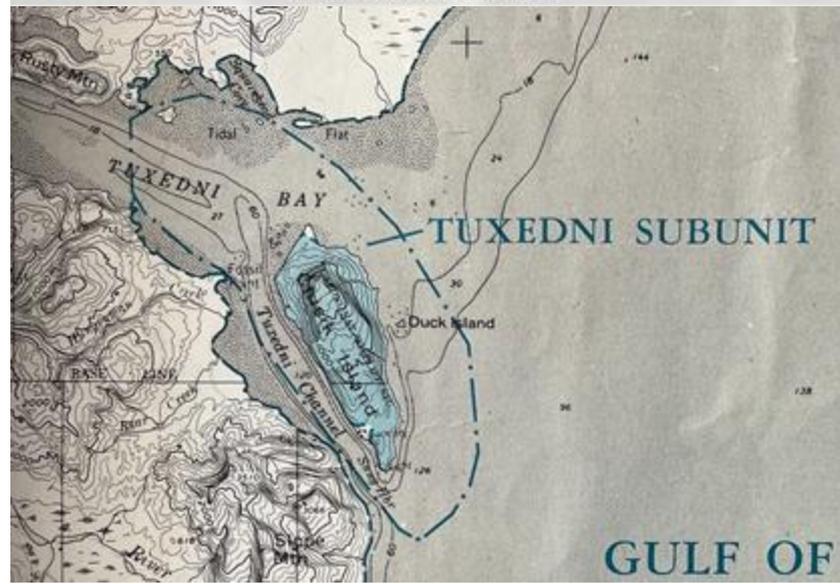




Photo: Rebecca Noblin,
Center for Biological Diversity



Photo: Cooper Freeman,
Center for Biological Diversity



NEWS

First Winter Foraging Ground For Endangered Cook Inlet Beluga Whales Identified

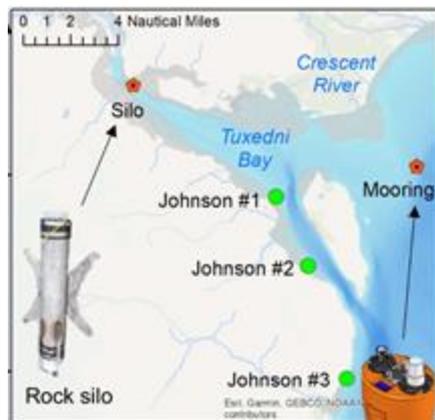
July 15, 2024

Whales were recorded foraging in Tuxedni Bay and River from September to May, some of the most undisturbed sections of their critical habitat.

[Feature Story](#) | [Alaska](#)



Using passive acoustics to identify a quiet winter foraging refuge for an endangered beluga whale population in Alaska



CIB presence in winter in the bay reached 24 hours for two consecutive days. This level of concentrated acoustic presence has only been observed in the Susitna delta (UCI) in June when CIB concentrate in this area preying on salmon

This is the first time a winter foraging area (Tuxedni) has been identified for CIB. The importance of this area is further accentuated by its pristine soundscape and the bay and river should be viewed as a noise refuge for this endangered whale. In view of the converging interests by industry in this area of Cook Inlet, managing anthropogenic activities to minimize habitat degradation and acoustic disturbance will be a key component to support the recovery of this endangered population.

The conservation task may simply involve maintaining the acoustic status quo of this habitat.

Cumulative Threats to Cook Inlet, Alaska beluga whales

 Federally Designated Critical Habitat

 Marine Vessel Activity (2019)

Oil & Gas Activity

 Platforms
 Pipelines

Mixing Zones

 Oil and Gas

 Waste Water Treatment (data from 2021-2022)

NOAA Authorized Level B Incidental Harassment Zones

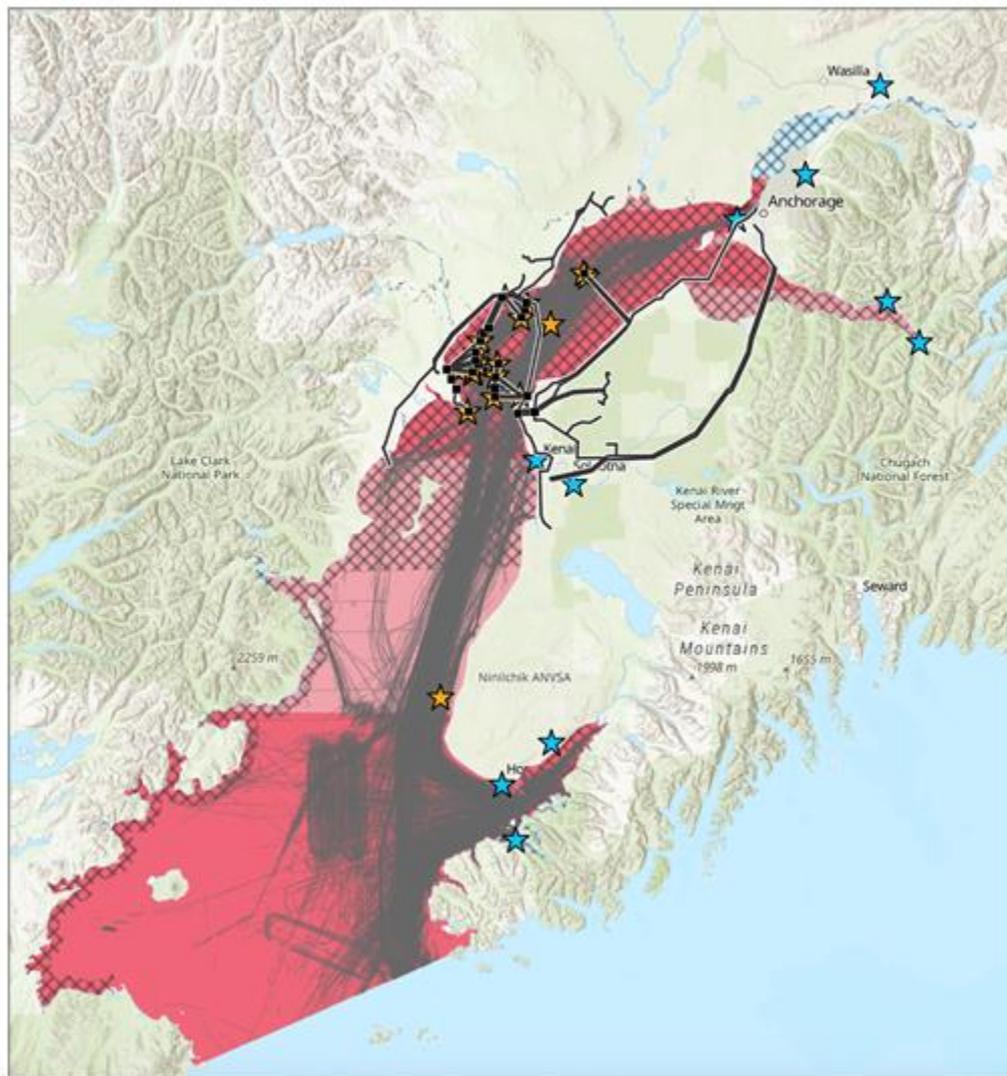
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Map prepared by Defenders of Wildlife in collaboration with Cook Inkeeper, Alaska Wildlife Alliance, and Environmental Investigation Agency
Basemap: State of Alaska, Esri, HERE, Garmin, FAO, NOAA, USGS, EPA, NPS, Esri, USGS



DSO ORE TRANSPORTATION CONTAINERS

ROTAINER SHIPPING CONTAINERS





Opinion: As CIRI shareholders, we value Cook Inlet belugas over a gold mine

By Marina, Claudine and Sonny Haynes

Published: November 1, 2025



COOK INLET WATERSHED





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