



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE (4/28/10):

KOKTULI RIVER, ALASKA NAMED “WATER TO WATCH” FOR 2010

(WASHINGTON, D.C.) – The National Fish Habitat Action Plan (www.fishhabitat.org) has unveiled the **2010 10 “Waters to Watch”** list, a collection of rivers, streams, lakes, watershed systems and shores that will benefit from strategic conservation efforts to protect, restore or enhance their current condition.

These waters represent a snapshot of this year’s voluntary habitat conservation efforts in progress. These and other locally driven conservation projects are prioritized and implemented by regional Fish Habitat Partnerships that have formed throughout the country to implement the National Fish Habitat Action Plan. The objective of the Action Plan is to conserve freshwater, estuarine and marine habitats essential to the many fish and wildlife species that call these areas home. In Alaska, the **Koktuli River** has been selected as one of the 10 “Waters to Watch” for 2010.

The 10 “Waters to Watch” are representative of freshwater to marine habitats across the country including rivers, lakes, reservoirs and estuaries that benefit through the conservation efforts of these Fish Habitat Partnerships formed under the Action Plan—a bold initiative implemented in 2006 to avoid and reverse persistent declines in our nation’s aquatic habitats.

The Action Plan’s 10 “Waters to Watch” Initiative was first unveiled in 2007 through its Fish Habitat Partnerships. Since 2006, the Fish and Wildlife Service has provided \$8.5 million to support 188 on-the-ground projects in 36 states, leveraging \$20 million in partner match, to address the priorities of the Fish Habitat Partnerships, along with funding from several other State and Federal Agencies and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs).

“Our approach—teaming local, state, tribal, and federal agencies with private partners and stakeholders—is helping to bring these waters back to life in most cases...in a faster more strategic way,” said Kelly Hepler, Chairman of the National Fish Habitat Board. “By watching these 10 models of our nation’s aquatic conservation efforts underway, we can see real progress, in both avoidance and treatment of causes of fish habitat decline. Too often we have focused on treatment of symptoms with limited success. Through sound science and on-the-ground locally driven partnerships, these select Action Plan projects can be held high as a vision of what quality habitat should and can be, and how it benefits all people throughout the United States.”

KOKTULI RIVER, ALASKA – (Southwest Alaska Salmon Habitat Partnership)

Partners: The Nature Conservancy, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Alaska Department of Fish and Game, Bristol Bay Native Association, Funding support was also provided by an association of Bristol Bay commercial fishermen.

The Kaktuli River in Southwest Alaska is a major tributary of the Mulchatna River in the Nushagak River watershed. This remote region of the state has a sparse human population, limited developments and is world renowned for its relatively pristine conditions and associated fish and wildlife productivity.

The Kaktuli River and other waters in the Nushagak watershed sustain highly valued recreational, commercial and subsistence fisheries. The Kaktuli River is a major spawning stream for king (chinook) salmon and has healthy runs of silver (coho) and red (sockeye) salmon. Popular resident recreational fish include rainbow trout, northern pike, arctic grayling and Dolly Varden.

The drainage area is also known to contain other valued natural resources such as mineral deposits. Currently, studies are in progress in this watershed and its vicinity for assessing the feasibility of developing one of the world's largest gold and copper mines.

This fish habitat partnership conservation project was initiated through voluntary actions to ensure public protection of these important and intact fisheries. The work on the Kaktuli project will be adequately balanced with considerations of other natural resource uses including uses of land and water resources associated with improved access and human population growth and other future actions that might be considered, for enhancing socioeconomic conditions for local residents and others.

The voluntary protective actions of this fish habitat conservation project were achieved by on-site observations of anadromous fish distribution in the project area to document fish distribution and comply with state law that allows for formal nomination and recognition of water bodies that sustain anadromous fish. The data collected will be added in the State of Alaska's Anadromous Fish Catalog (Alaska Statute, AS, 46.15.871). Documented nominations of fish distribution observations that comply with state law (and ultimately approved by the state) provide an increased level of regulatory protection for all physically documented stretches of anadromous water bodies that produce salmon within Alaska.

This project was initially conceived to help fill information gaps in the anadromous waters catalog maps for this highly productive salmon region. Under this ongoing project all headwater streams in which salmon are found are being surveyed to document the presence or absence of salmon. Formal nominations for reaches documented to produce salmon in

compliance with state laws and regulations are being submitted to the state for review, approval, and ultimately formal inclusion in the state's Alaska's Anadromous Waters Catalog.

The Southwest Alaska Salmon Habitat Partnership received the NFHAP money used for this project to organize field seasons and send fish biologists to the headwaters of the Kuktuli and other affected systems in the drainage to document anadromous fish distribution so those water bodies would become eligible for and subject to Alaska's fish habitat protection laws.

This ongoing project to fill these gaps is succeeding. Altogether, the Southwest Alaska Fish Habitat Partnership (FHP) has added more than 100 miles to the Anadromous Waters Catalog over the last two seasons.

The field observations and resulting documentation and nominations for the upper reaches of the Nushagak and Kvichak watersheds have demonstrated that it is likely all water bodies in the area provide important habitat for salmon. This assumption is based on field surveys to date documenting salmon presence in approximately 75 percent of the stream reaches observed, many of them small streams less than 10 feet wide. Collectively, these highly productive watersheds are essential for migration, rearing, spawning and incubation life phases of salmon produced in the Bristol Bay region.

In addition to this catalog effort, our partner Bristol Bay Native Association has contributed hundreds of thousands of dollars over the last five years to cover costs of gathering flow data on the Kuktuli River. That and other information is voluntarily collected and analyzed to file and request instream flow reservations under state law (AS 46.15.145) to protect sufficient amounts of unappropriated water required to sustain salmon and other fish production.

These two voluntary conservation related actions performed by the Southwest Alaska FHP demonstrate some of the many opportunities afforded under the National Fish Habitat Action Plan for volunteer based fish habitat partnerships to achieve positive results and measurable science based outcomes for protecting intact habitat.

These actions help Alaskan agencies and the public make the best uses of available legal tools to balance stewardship of these and other natural resource uses in this salmon rich region.

The rest of the 10 "Waters to Watch" for 2010 include:

- **Bobs Creek, Pennsylvania**
- **Diamond Lake, Iowa**
- **Fairbanks and Soda Springs, Nevada**
- **Georgetown Creek, Idaho**
- **Green River Basin, Wyoming/Colorado/Utah**
- **Lake Vermilion, Minnesota**
- **Mackeys Creek, Mississippi**
- **Wasilla Creek, Alaska**

- **West Branch, Machias River, Maine**

The National Fish Habitat Action Plan is built on a framework of National Fish Habitat Partnerships. These regional-scale efforts include, **the Southeast Aquatic Resources Partnership, Eastern Brook Trout Joint Venture, the Western Native Trout Initiative, the Driftless Area Restoration Effort, the Matanuska-Susitna Basin Salmon Habitat Partnership, the Southwest Alaska Salmon Habitat Partnership, the Midwest Glacial Lakes Partnership, the Desert Fish Habitat Partnership, the Hawaii Fish Habitat Partnership, the Kenai Peninsula Fish Habitat Partnership, the Fishers and Farmers Partnership, the Ohio River Basin Fish Habitat Partnership, the Great Plains Fish Habitat Partnership, the Great Lakes Basin Fish Habitat Partnership, the California Fish Passage Forum, the Reservoir Fisheries Habitat Partnership and the Atlantic Coastal Fish Habitat Partnership.** There are also four “Candidate” Fish Habitat Partnerships that have stated their intent to apply for full NFHAP Board recognition.

The Action Plan has met its objective of establishing at least 12 Fish Habitat Partnerships by 2010 to help identify the causes of habitat declines and implement corrective initiatives for aquatic conservation and restoration, with 17 Fish Habitat Partnership currently working on the ground in aquatic conservation.

Since its launch five years ago, the Action Plan has received wide public support. To date nearly 1,200 partners have pledged their support including a range of organizations interested in the health of the nation’s fisheries such as fishing clubs, international conservation organizations, federal agencies, angling industries and academia.

These ten habitat conservation efforts highlighted in 2010 are a small sample of the many habitat conservation projects implemented under the Action Plan. The 2010, as well as past 10 “Waters to Watch” lists can be viewed at www.fishhabitat.org along with complete information on the scope of the Action Plan.

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About the National Fish Habitat Action Plan

The National Fish Habitat Action Plan is the most comprehensive effort ever attempted to voluntarily conserve freshwater, estuarine and marine waterways and habitat across the country. The Action Plan is a science-based investment strategy to conserve waterways and make conservation dollars stretch farther by combining federal and privately raised funds to build regional partnerships. For more information, visit www.fishhabitat.org.

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