



ALASKA

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Protecting the Best of the Best, Whatever it Takes

In the end, it took a small plane carrying documents for signature to a remote fishing village in the shadow of a volcano on the Alaska Peninsula, but going the extra mile ensured another 4,000 acres of pristine habitat for Kodiak brown bears, Roosevelt elk, and wild salmon are now protected on Afognak Island in Alaska.

Completed in July, the Shuyak-Uganik Coastal Conservation Project was a multi-year effort by ALC and the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation (RMEF). It complements an earlier ALC-RMEF partnership on Afognak that protected 4,441 acres. The land is now open to the public and will be managed by the Alaska Department of Natural Resources.

One of two known resident Harlequin duck populations in the world is found on Afognak.

Immediately north of Kodiak Island in the western Gulf of Alaska, Afognak Island is a remote and pristine landscape of stunning beauty and high conservation value. After the devastating Exxon Valdez oil spill in 1989, a study of 1,500 miles of coastline determined that the north coast of the island included some of the best habitat available for species injured elsewhere by the spill, including harbor seals, sea ducks, pigeon guillemot, herring, and sea otters. Its thick stands of 300-400 year-old Sitka Spruce were also determined to provide superior

nesting habitat for threatened marbled murrelets.

Consequently, protection of habitat on north Afognak has been a high priority for wildlife agencies and other conservation partners. Stream systems there provide spawning habitat for four species of wild salmon, including pink, sockeye, coho, and chum. At least 16 species of wintering waterfowl use the area to feed on mussels in the ice-free shallow water, including one of only two known resident Harlequin duck populations in the world (pictured above).

The eventual conservation goal on north Afognak is to connect currently conserved parcels to create a 150-mile area of contiguous protected habitat. Through a phased collaborative approach ALC is targeting some 53,000 acres of wetland and coastal upland habitat, with a total of 8,441 acres protected to date.

ALC gratefully acknowledges the Shuyak and Uganik Native Corporations, Natives of Kodiak, Inc., Exxon Valdez Oil Spill Trustee Council, Alaska Department of Fish and Game, Alaska Department of Natural Resources, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, U.S. Forest Service, Kodiak Brown Bear Trust, Kodiak Island Borough, Kodiak Chamber of Commerce, RMEF, Afognak Joint Venture, local elected officials, private donors - and some good flying weather at a critical moment - for making this outstanding project possible. ■