



Stewarding Lands You Cherish

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To Professionals Working with Land and Resources:

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I am writing today to let you know about the Southeast Alaska Land Trust and our efforts on certain natural areas of Southeast Alaska. I also want to explain an opportunity available to you to learn more about SEAL Trust and to provide input into the work we do. As a professional or organization involved with land and resources in Southeast Alaska, you may be interested in our work.

Since incorporating as a nonprofit organization in 1996, SEAL Trust has teamed up with communities and willing landowners to make sure that vital natural areas remain in place for our well being and for future generations of Southeast residents. We use well-established practices to offer landowners permanent, legal protection for their property's historic, cultural or natural values. Where the owner prefers, they can retain ownership of the land while SEAL Trust purchases an easement to protect key values. Currently, SEAL Trust acts as steward, protecting these significant values, on nearly 3,000 acres in Southeast Alaska.

Many of the areas SEAL Trust seeks out are the wet areas – the freshwater or tidally affected wetlands -- that can be found in and around our communities and throughout the region. These truly productive natural areas benefit us all by protecting and cleansing our drinking water, reducing flooding during Southeast storms, rearing the fish, birds and wildlife we harvest or enjoy viewing, and by offering open space for recreation and protection for cultural values.

An important funding source for this work is fees that SEAL Trust receives to offset impacts to wetlands when permits are issued by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers for human activities such as road or airport construction and residential, commercial or resource development in the region's wetlands. The Corps is conducting a public review and solicits your comments on SEAL Trust's application to update this Corps-Trust relationship, including our draft report that describes wetlands in Southeast

Alaska and the Trust's role within this permit process. The outcome of the public review will be a renewed agreement between SEAL Trust and the Corps that allows us to continue receiving wetland impact fees to support projects with willing landowners to protect important natural and community values in Southeast Alaska.

Enclosed is more information about SEAL Trust and our work with the Corps. We welcome your questions. Please contact us at the address above, by phone at 586-3100, or by email at setrust@ptialaska.net. You can find out more about our organization at our website: www.southeastalaskalandtrust.org

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Diane Mayer". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the printed name and title.

Diane Mayer
Executive Director

Enclosure

Southeast Alaska Land Trust's Efforts in Vital Wet Areas

High rainfall and coastal topography often produce wetlands in the low-lying coastal terrain of Southeast Alaska; however, the non-forested freshwater and tidal wetlands which are the region's most productive are not that abundant. Some of these wet areas inevitably have been impacted by people and their activities. While national policy discourages human activities that damage wetlands, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers can approve permits for necessary projects that cause unavoidable impacts. In these cases, the Corps may require payment of an *in-lieu* fee which is then used for public benefit in other wetlands. In keeping with its overall mission of conserving high-value habitats for future generations' use and enjoyment, Southeast Alaska Land Trust is authorized by the Corps to receive and use *in-lieu* fees to conserve wetlands throughout Southeast Alaska. Also, Seal Trust is incorporated as a non-profit under Alaska law with staff accountable to a Board of Directors, and the Trust operates under nationally recognized land trust standards, practices and federal (IRS) nonprofit regulations.

For more than a decade, SEAL Trust has teamed up with willing landowners, the Corps, communities, and natural resource agencies to identify wetlands important for fish and wildlife rearing, bird feeding and resting, community water quality and flood control, or recreation and harvesting. In-lieu fees have paid for land surveys, field investigations, and real estate appraisals on some properties where SEAL Trust now performs regular field visits to maintain these important natural and community values. A willing landowner can either sell a productive wetland, or if they wish retain ownership of their land but agrees to not develop or alter the valuable natural area through a permanent "conservation easement" agreement with SEAL Trust. For example, an estuarine parcel near Petersburg and a riparian/wetland area on Hilda Creek near Juneau have permanent conservation easements paid for by in-lieu fees. SEAL Trust has also worked with Ketchikan and Sitka organizations to identify properties important to each community that could be funded by in-lieu fees received from local development projects.

New federal regulations changed the in-lieu fee rules, and SEAL Trust is now updating its existing legal agreement with the Corps so the Trust can continue to offer landowners, public works and private developers, communities, and resource agencies a competent and efficient in-lieu fee program. As part of a multi-step review process, SEAL Trust wrote a "Planning Framework" report that describes Southeast Alaska, its wetland resources, past and potential development, and how SEAL Trust will work with interested parties to find other wet places with important natural and community values where in-lieu fees can be used to conserve the areas for public benefit and future generations. SEAL Trust also wrote an "In-lieu Fee Program Account" description of how it will manage and report the in-lieu fees it receives.

The Corps is conducting a public review and comment on these SEAL Trust documents, which are available at the SEAL Trust website (www.southeastalaskalandtrust.org) or at the Corps website www.poa.usace.army.mil/reg (under special public notices). For the comment deadline, check the Corps public notice or contact the Corps by phone (907) 790-4490 or by email (randal.p.vigil@usace.army.mil).