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Press Release

COMMISSIONER'S OFFICE

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Clean Water Actions Grants Awarded Totaling More Than \$424,000

A wide range of organizations are the recipients of \$424,000 in Alaska Clean Water Actions (ACWA) grants today. The ACWA partnership between the Departments of Environmental Conservation (DEC), Fish & Game, and Natural Resources awarded 13 grants to assist the State in its clean water objectives. The grants focus efforts on waters in greatest need of protection and restoration.

"Improving and protecting Alaska's waters requires teamwork," said Michelle Hale, Director of DEC's Division of Water. "These grants allow us to strengthen our partnerships and help us to conserve, protect, or restore waters that are important to all Alaskans. The ACWA grant process has been effective at identifying priorities and directing our efforts to where they are needed most to improve the quality of Alaska's waters."

Several of the projects help boaters learn how to minimize their environmental impact. DEC has been supporting localized efforts on Big Lake and the Little Susitna River to teach clean boating practices. Grants issued this year will expand the effort to other fishing venues in the Matanuska-Susitna Valley.

A number of other projects support the construction of low impact development. A rain garden will be constructed to reduce the amount of stormwater entering the already impacted waters of Pullen Creek in Skagway. Groups in Fairbanks will work to incorporate green infrastructure as a part of the Cushman and Barnette Complete Streets improvement project to reduce pollutants carried to the Chena River via stormwater.

ACWA grants are balanced between projects that protect water quality and ones that restore waters considered polluted or impaired. The grant funds come from a combination of federal water quality grants with matching funds provided by the grant recipients.

For more information about ACWA and the list of priority waters and actions, see: www.dec.state.ak.us/water/acwa/acwa_index.htm.

Below are summaries of the Alaska Clean Water Actions Grants for projects starting in July 2014 and finishing in June 2015. The summaries are arranged by region of the state and include the contact information for the group conducting the project.

Southeast Region

Pullen Creek Rain Garden and Outreach

Southeast Alaska Watershed Coalition, \$18,400

This project addresses an ACWA Restoration priority. Working with the Taiya Inlet Watershed Council, the coalition will construct a rain garden at the Senior Center in Skagway. The garden will be designed to capture stormwater that normally flows along 11th Avenue, enabling the water to be treated before flowing to Pullen Creek. Diverting untreated stormwater will help to reduce the pollution reaching Pullen Creek. The garden will also serve to educate Skagway residents about the benefits of low impact development. Contact: Rachel Ford, (907) 983-2426.

Snow Removal Plan in the Haines Borough

Southeast Alaska Watershed Coalition, \$17,000

This project addresses an ACWA Stewardship priority. This project will develop a snow removal plan to be presented to the Haines Assembly and the Department of Transportation for adoption. Haines receives an average of 97 inches of snow per year and can receive as much as 120 inches of snow in a single month. Piles of snow, which are often laced with sand, grease, antifreeze, oil and heavy metals have, in the past, been pushed into anadromous stream and tide pools. This project will provide Haines with a snow removal plan identifying alternative locations that will better protect sensitive fish and aquatic habitats. Contact: Brad Ryan, (907) 314-0477.

Wrangell Beach Monitoring

Southeast Alaska Watershed Coalition, \$24,589

This project addresses an ACWA Stewardship priority. This project will initiate recreational beach monitoring at City Park and Petroglyph Beach in Wrangell, Alaska. These beaches were identified by DEC as a high priority, because they are commonly used for swimming and wading recreation activities. DEC will work with local agencies to notify the public if monitoring results confirm bacterial levels that exceed public health criteria. The project will also increase public awareness of potential sources of bacterial contamination and associated health risks. Contact: Brad Ryan, (907) 314-0477.

South-Central

Big Lake Management Plan Revision

Agnew Beck Consulting, LLC, \$28,616

This project addresses an ACWA Restoration priority. In 2006, Big Lake was identified as impaired (polluted) from petroleum hydrocarbons. This project is focused on amending the 1998 Lake Management Plan. With support from the community council, the project will start by educating the public on how revising the 1998 Lake Management Plan could help to reduce the petroleum hydrocarbons in the lake. Once authorization to amend the plan is received from the community, the grant recipients will produce an amended plan, and subsequently work with the community and Matanuska-Susitna Borough officials to seek adoption of the amended plan. Contact: Shelly Wade, (907) 242-5326.

Clean Boating in the Susitna Valley

Cook Inletkeeper, \$55,000

This project addresses both ACWA Restoration and Protection priorities and expands on an ongoing program. Since 2010, DEC, in conjunction with Cook Inletkeeper and local partners has been educating boat owners at Big Lake and the Little Susitna River on the importance of clean boating practices. This project continues the education activities at these sites and adds the Deshka River boat landing. All locations are popular for sport fishing and other recreational opportunities in the Matanuska-Susitna Borough and are important economically and socially. The waters are impaired (Big Lake) or at risk of impacts to water quality from petroleum hydrocarbons. Excess turbidity is also a concern. Older 2-stroke carbureted motors are a significant contributor of petroleum hydrocarbons, and boat wakes can cause re-suspension of fine sediment which increases turbidity. Contact: Rachel Lord, (907) 235-4068 ext. 29.

Cottonwood Creek Septic Smart: Homeowner Outreach

Mat-Su Resource Conservation Development Council, \$23,450

This project addresses an ACWA Restoration priority and expands on-going efforts. Cottonwood Creek is polluted from fecal coliform bacteria. This project will work with homeowners, local engineers, and septic system pumping services to expand pumping co-operatives that share costs where one street with several home septic systems can be inspected and serviced at the same time at reduced costs. To date, several local septic pumping companies are willing to offer a discounted rate for the co-op. Outreach to the local neighborhoods adjacent to Cottonwood Creek has been conducted and at least one co-op is anticipated to be formed shortly. The project now seeks to expand the number of participants in co-ops. The project will also include an education

component to raise awareness of how septic systems can impact water quality in the creek and ways homeowners can reduce this risk. Contact: Marty Metiva, (907) 373-1016

Kenai and Kasilof River Bacteria Monitoring

Kenai Watershed Forum, \$96,616

This project addresses an ACWA Stewardship priority and continues previous work. Elevated levels of enterococci and fecal coliform bacteria have been measured in samples collected at the mouth of the Kenai River. Using past data to focus the 2014 sampling efforts, this project continues monitoring on the Kenai River (at the mouth of the Kenai River, North Beach and South Beach) and at an upriver location near the Warren Ames Bridge (River Mile 5). The project will also monitor at the mouth of the Kasilof River (both north and south beaches) and at one location near the Sterling Highway Bridge. If bacteria levels of concern are found, microbial source tracking will be used to determine the source. Contact: Rebecca Zulueta, (907) 260-5449 x1210.

Kenai River Watershed Baseline Assessment

Kenai Watershed Forum, \$30,000

This project addresses an ACWA Protection priority. The project will conduct a comprehensive evaluation of the Kenai River baseline data collected from April 2007 to July 2014. Since 2000, the Kenai Watershed Forum has led a broad partnership among 14 organizations to conduct twice-annual watershed-wide monitoring. Monitoring has evaluated 22 sites for over 18 parameters including metals, petroleum hydrocarbons, turbidity, water temperature, and pH. The results are evaluated annually, but a comprehensive evaluation of trends has not been completed since 2007. This project will provide a comprehensive report including trend analysis of all data collected to date. Contact: Rebecca Zulueta, (907) 260-5449 x1210.

Matanuska River Assessment

Palmer Soil and Water Conservation District, \$16,800

This project addresses an ACWA Restoration priority. A portion of the Matanuska River is impaired because of an unpermitted disposal area. Items in the disposal area include automobiles, appliances, abandoned drums, railroad cars, and other recently disposed household items. The grant recipients will work with DEC and the landowner to develop a debris removal and disposal alternative plan including needed permits. The plan will include a cost estimate of options. Contact: Dr. Jeff Smeenck, (907) 745-1441.

Willow Water Quality Habitat Assessment

Aquatic Restoration and Research Institute, \$47,000

This project addresses an ACWA Protection priority to evaluate water quality and aquatic habitat of Willow Creek, an important salmon and rainbow trout stream in the Matanuska Susitna Borough. Riparian development in combination with recent flooding may be increasing bank erosion. Increased development in the watershed may also be impacting water quality. This project will evaluate Willow Creek for physical characteristics, physical habitat, biotic communities, and riparian development. A final report will detail the current ecological condition of Willow Creek. Contact: Jeffrey C. Davis, (907) 315-4631.

Interior

Chena River – Awareness Campaign

Tanana Valley Watershed Association, \$12,000

This project addresses an ACWA Restoration priority. This project supports ongoing efforts to raise local awareness about the Chena River. The Chena River is Alaska's second largest producer of juvenile Chinook salmon that migrate to the Yukon River. This project will organize a Chena River Summit highlighting the benefits of green infrastructure (GI) applications to improve water quality in the Chena River watershed. Contact: Jewelz Barker, (907) 374-8890.

Fairbanks Complete Streets Best Management Practices

Tanana Valley Watershed Association, \$11,392

This project addresses an ACWA Restoration priority for the Chena River. This project seeks to implement green infrastructure projects in conjunction with the Cushman and Barnette Complete Streets improvement projects. Green infrastructure applications are a logical fit to the Complete Streets movement, which has nationally seen high success rates in making streets safer and more user-friendly and at the same time reducing environmental impacts. Through public outreach, the project will work with local partners including the City of Fairbanks and private land owners to see how they can incorporate green infrastructure applications to complement the street redesign. Contact: Jewelz Barker, (907) 374-8890.

Statewide

Decreasing Sewage Discharges from Alaska Boaters

Cook Inlet Keeper, \$43,223

This project addresses an ACWA Protection priority. This project will partner with the Alaska Clean Harbors project to educate boaters and harbormasters on the importance of proper sewage management to protect public health. It will also obtain feedback on the barriers to proper sewage pump-out use, and increase the number of harbor facilities in Alaska with working sewage pump-out units. With over 68,000 recreational motor boat users in Alaska, it is clear

that many Alaskans enjoy boating around the coast, bays and other inlets. Human sewage from boats can contain harmful bacteria contaminating local waters and shellfish beds. A final report describing accomplishments and avenues for increasing pump out use will be provided. Contact: Rachel Lord, (907) 235-4068 ext. 29.

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