



Of Special Interest:

- Refuge Clean Up May 10 at Cottonwood Creek and Reflections Lake
- ANNUAL MEETING May 17—Come join us for business and BBQ!
- Last Wildlife Wednesday free science lecture May 28th Mat-Su College 7-8PM
- Alaskans Afield starts
- Add APH until August 31st!



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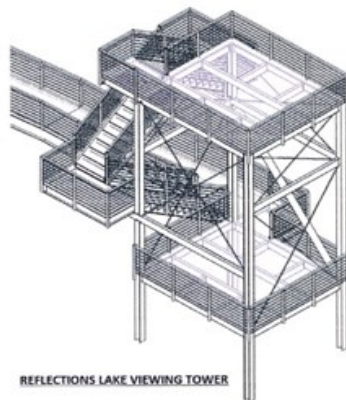
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Volume 10, Issue 1

Spring 2014

Reflections Lake—Knik River Wildlife Viewing Tower by Bill Wood



REFLECTIONS LAKE VIEWING TOWER

At long last, frozen ground was broken and the first stage of the Reflections Lake - Knik River Interpretive Wildlife Viewing Tower has been completed. The Tower feature was conceived and designed by ADF&G and APH as part of the last phase of Reflections Lake (RL) area 2010-2011 planned enhancements. Planning for Tower construction shuddered to a halt in late 2012/early 2013 when important funding portions of the projected \$244,000 construction costs could not be acquired. An important partner, Kiewit Construction, was largely relocated out of Alaska. In mid-summer 2013, the effort was reengaged as contacts with new funders and partners were developed and longtime partnerships reaffirmed by committed APH staff and Board members.

An Elevated Perspective

APH Founders and a visionary Manager at ADF&G had long understood the importance of wildlife, ecological and educational treasures the Palmer Hay Flats State Game Refuge contained. The great intersection of the massive natural forces of land and sea at the Reflections Lake area could be even more appreciated by enhancing educational opportunities from an elevated perspective. A thoughtful review of elevated viewing tower designs led the group to the selected concept. The Anchorage firm of BBFM Engineering, Inc. was retained by APH to provide design drawings for the Tower. BBFM has been an integral paid contractor, and continues to donate in-kind services and reduced fees as an important partner in the Tower's journey to completion.



On this proximity map, Red marks the spot of the of the Tower's north-western Reflections Lake area trail location.

When completed the galvanized, all-steel rectangular 12'10" x 15' structure will stand 30'10" at the upper landing viewing platform. Hand rails attend all stairs and landing viewing levels. Intermediate viewing landings, connected by the stairwell, are found at 17' and 25'. A wheelchair accessible platform at 8.5' is connected by a 42' long Americans with Disabilities Act standard-compatible steel ramp to the berm at the most northwestern corner of the encircling RL trail.

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I recently heard someone say that they knew “it was spring when the robins showed up”. I guess she was unaware that some robins now winter in Anchorage because of the abundance of berry producing ornamental trees and bushes. I have heard others say that “when the snow buntings show up spring is right around the corner.” Having worked and lived adjacent to Palmer Hay Flats State Game Refuge (PHSGR) since 1990 I can say that I have seen at least a few snow buntings somewhere on the Flats in just about every month of the winter.

My field notes suggest spring migration begins when I hear the first calls of herring and glaucous-winged gulls flying over the refuge. Their arrival, beginning as early as 25 March, is closely followed by observations of trumpeter swans, goldeneyes, and common mergansers on the open water of Spring Creek at the intersection of Parks and Glenn Highways.

Those waterfowl species usually arrive during the first 10 days of April. Canada geese arrive on the Flats shortly after the swans and gulls, and they usually start pouring into the refuge by the 15th of April. Around the same time northern pintails usually show in good numbers as soon as open water appears in Matanuska Valley fields and along the Glenn Hwy in the Ducks Unlimited project area. Snow geese and white-fronted geese begin arriving by 15 April. From my home’s window I have counted several thousand Canada, snow and white-fronted geese which seem to peak between 18 and 25 April most years. From that point on the spigot is opened wide and great numbers of other early arrivals show up.

Among the early raptors are rough-legged and red-tailed hawks and northern harriers which begin showing during 4-12 April. First arriving shorebirds are the lesser and greater yellowlegs. I have recorded their first arrival from 10-28 April. The large flocks of whimbrels, pectoral sandpipers and golden plovers seem to wait until mid-May to pass through the flats, though seldom stopping long.

The vocal sandhill cranes can always be heard long distances when they first arrive on the flats. Their first calls signifying their arrival start between 16 and 22 April. They begin establishing nesting territories as the ice and snow melts.

Passerines, including robins and slate-colored juncos

can be heard singing as early as 10-12 April but the majority of sparrows and warblers begin arriving no sooner than 20-25 April.

Spring 2013 was an unusual year for spring arrivals. On 8 April I observed 2 pairs of Rusty blackbird at open water at the base of the bluff just west of the Cotton-



TRUS J Millen

wood Creek Access to the refuge. The subsequent hard freeze, snowfall and late spring no doubt did not help these early arrivals of this declining species. The large flocks of geese also struggled to find food and stayed on the flats through 12 May. Almost two weeks longer than normal. It was a tough spring for water dependent birds.

At this writing, 31 March, the flats have been quiet and though it has been beautifully sunny, no sign of the gulls yet.

Best bird watching locations for early arrivals in PHSGR is the Cottonwood Creek public access site at Mile 1.1 of Hayfield Road off Mile 9 of Fairview Loop. Spring Creek which starts just off PHFSGR is best observed at the interchange of the Parks and Glenn Highways but accessing the Rabbit Slough access at the Trunk Road exit is safer. Spring Creek can also be accessed at the Old Matanuska Townsite across the Glenn from the Kepler-Bradly Lake Rec Area Access road. A list of birds that can be seen on the refuge a can be found at: http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/static/lands/protectedareas/palmerhayflats/pdfs/phf_bird_list.pdf

Herman Griese is currently on the APH Board of Directors and lives overlooking the western end of PHSGR. He served as the ADF&G area wildlife biologist for the Mat-Su area from 1990-2002 and then the wildlife biologist for Elmendorf AFB and JBER from 2002-2012.

The orientation of the Tower will grandly display the open expanses of the Refuge towards the north and west, ensuring stunning sunset views of the mountains, tide flats and the sea. With or without binoculars, all manner of visitors and citizens, students and scholars, groups and solitude seekers will be treated to the seasonal parade of avian and terrestrial wildlife transients and residents of the Refuge's unique landscape.

Breaking Ground

Reflections Lake - February 7, 2014. A robust group of intrepid diehards hikes across the lake with an assortment of ladders, rebar, sledges and measuring tapes to survey and stake the Tower layout. APH Board Members Bud Bass and Bill Wood accompany four ADF&G representatives, Dennis Berry (BBFM) and Bill and Scott Metlicka (Alaska Foundation Technology/AFT) to the site of the structure. It was determined a few days previously that ice thickness exceeded 33" along the route of likely equipment travel. Circumstances of the site and contractor availability required a redesign of the planned piling concept used to support the Tower. The new design for anchoring the Tower is known as "helical piers". Concluding pile bidding efforts, APH accepted an installation proposal from AFT, who pioneered several specialized-for-Alaska helical pier techniques. Even after the contract rate was agreed upon by APH, AFT extended their interest and support, generously discounting their work and time while providing exacting installation of the helical pier system. APH is particularly pleased with AFT's high caliber work and greatly appreciated generosity. M.N. Anderson, PE, Engineering and Excavation, and Mark Dean, Northern Geotechnical Engineering, also generously donated Special Inspection certification services to complete the helical pier component installation.



The frozen, unconsolidated soil substrate proved to be a challenging test for the AFT staff and the helical pier technique. Icy material crushed under the unique drill bit and collected like solid, glazed mini-bowls which needed to be cleaned off to crank through the frozen surface. There was surprisingly little organic material in the soil profile.



Helical piers are like giant screws, gaining their strength and stability from the "flights" of the spiral steel attached to the central, square, solid-steel beam. Sections of the piers are bolted together and turned into the required depths to achieve the design resistance torque specific to the soil material. Angled piles known as "batters" abutted the four vertical piers. Depths of the verticals varied between 32' and 46'. A bobcat with a special rotating auger connection turns the beamed flights into the ground as torque resistance is monitored from a gauge inside the bobcat. The AFT crew is meticulous in placement, drilling and finish, insuring torque margins above requirements are achieved. The Tower design achieved double the expected load bearing and torque requirements for added safety. The entire Tower structure will weigh about 17 tons.



Scott Metlicka (AFT) left foreground and Ed Weiss (ADFG), right fore, stake rebar through frozen ground. Left to right rear: Dennis Berry (BBFM), Joe Meehan, Doug Hill and Stormy Haught (ADFG)



You can see the modest finished product while on your next walk around the Reflections Lake trail. Just take the little path off the berm at the north-western corner to check out this inconspicuous beginning element of the Tower structure. Each vertical pier and batter is capable of supporting greater than 70,000 lbs of above-ground structure. As a result of the project's redesign to use helical piers, and the generous donation and support from Alaska Foundation Technologies and M.N. Anderson, PE Excavation and Construction, and Mark Dean, Northern Geotechnical Engineering, a savings of \$22,500 was realized over the original design.

(continued page 6)

From Our Executive Director - Terri Reynolds-Rogers



Winter Family Fun Day Reflections:

February 13 was yet another cold, snow-free day. So I prayed for snow and pressed on with our game plans for tromping around on snow-shoes and swishing through snow on cross-country skis for the following weekend: Winter Family Fun Day at Reflections Lake. Saturday the 15th arrived, blustery

and colder with just enough snowfall to pretend it was still an Alaska winter.

What we lacked in snow, we made up for with an abundance of enthusiasm. Mat-Su Borough Parks and Rec's Warren Templin and longtime supporter Wayne Bowman put together a strategy for moving snow off the icy lake for ice skating. Starting just after 8 AM, Ed Strabel, of the Mat-Su Ski Club, and I laid out dozens of skis and snowshoes on two scant inches of snow, equipment generously donated for the day by our long-time friends and supporters at REI Anchorage, especially Mike Morganson, and retrieved by Directors Michelle Davis and Nathaniel Emery. Directors Herman Griese and Bill Wood were inspecting Wayne's valiant effort to turn the ice rubble of the lake surface to ice skate-worthy smoothness, boiling water for hot drinks at the info kiosk, rolling out burn barrels and stacking firewood. I helped Ed until he took off skijoring, towed around the lake by two lithe huskies, then stood around the burn barrel schmoozing with ADF&G folks, Refuge Manager Doug Hill, Fish & Game Coordinator Joe Meehan, and Education Coordinator Sierra Doherty.

We welcomed newcomers to Reflections Lake and met some long-time supporters out visiting on just the promise of a sunny day.

As kids and dogs started appearing up the path, we directed families to the ski club's Mark Reiger, standing by to teach basic cross-country skiing technique. Within a

few minutes, they were striding out across the frozen lake, faces alight with cold and the joy of trying something new. It was cold, but we snagged them all and fixed them up with skis and snowshoes, along with the folks who'd hoped for a smooth ice-skating surface. We met a slew of pets and people for the first time, handed out lots of APH brochures and welcomed numb hands and lips with hot cocoa, ice-cold whipping cream and cider.

They were a sight: dog-led skijorers, and solo guests so far out on the lake, braving the temps and gliding awkwardly on new skis. All returned safely with bright pink cheeks and big smiles to hot drinks and cookies. As we wrapped for the day after 4 PM, handing out the last cookies, we considered it a success despite the modest snow, cloudy day and chilly temps.



Director Nathaniel Emery's 3-year-old daughter, Ryan, helped with the final break down, pausing only momentarily by the frozen lake before rolling a burn barrel a long way to the parking lot.

Don't forget to sign up for Fred Meyer's Community Rewards program. Link your Rewards card to Community Rewards program and each quarter, Kroger will send us a check. See p. 11 for details.



What's Cooking?

One thing cooking is a big THANK YOU we want to extend to Bob's Burn Barrels of Wasilla (check craigslist). He came to our need and attention as we prepared for Feb's WFFD. APH now has our own—great for future outings. Bob reduced his price by a third !! Thanks, Bob !

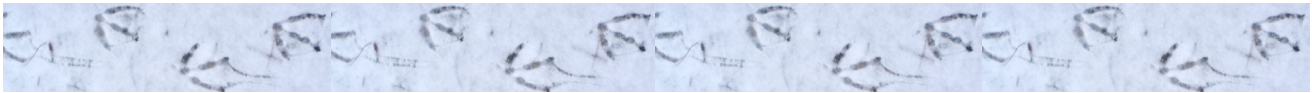
Recently, APH's main computer server was attacked by the Ransomware virus Cryptolocker. This resulted in destruction of almost all Microsoft Office and ADOBE .pdf files as well as obliteration of our main email address. Probably an errant click in a legitimate looking email got past us. Our communication and operational ability has been fully restored. However, issues conspired to produce almost total loss of APH contacts, project, administrative, education and historical data and documents. We are reconstructing to the best of our abilities. As members, partners, supporters and friends, we would ask that if you think it's possible you have valuable correspondence or other documents, we would appreciate hearing from you.

May 10 - 9AM-noon Refuge Clean Up Day at Reflections Lake and Cottonwood Creek — Bring your boots and gloves, trash bags provided!

May 17 - noon-3PM — Annual Meeting & Potluck, this time at Reflections Lake. Come meet all the other folks who love to eat and support our Refuge, review the Silent Auction items, meet a wildlife rehab education bird, hang out for door prizes and meet your Board of Directors.

May 28 - 7-8PM — The final Wildlife Wednesdays free science lecture, a collaboration between APH and Department of Fish and Game, will be held in Room 103, Frank & Sara Machetanz Bldg. at the Mat-Su College campus on Trunk Road. The final lecture is by Dr. Todd Rinaldi, discussing urban conflicts with wild moose.

Alaskans Afield, a monthly event comparable to Anchorage's Wildlife Wednesdays, is starting the last Saturday of May and runs through September. Check our website for details.



ONLY FOUR MONTHS LEFT..... *by Bud Bass*

summer. Looking forward to and anticipating a glorious summer. But, you look at the calendar and Sept 1 is only 4 fast months away. This is significant to me because Sept 1 is the opening day for duck hunting and other waterfowl in the South Central area. It marks the beginning of cooler days, termination dust on our surrounding mountains, and the chance of occasional frost or even a snow flurry. The hunting seasons for caribou will open weeks earlier. In many areas moose will open the last week or so of August. Fireweed will be in full bloom, the August rains will be tapering off (hopefully), and the rivers will still have silver salmon traveling towards the spawning beds.

Summers are so short in Alaska. Thankfully we have those long days, we need them to cram all of our summer activities into our summer. Hiking trails are abundant, lots of wildlife to view, pictures to save the memories and look back on while sitting in front of the winter fireplace.

Don't put off these activities. Think back on other summers and things you wish you had done, you may never have the opportunity again. Take that hike, set up that tent. Drive to Hatcher's Pass or Homer. Dig for clams. Get ready for hunting. Wet your line in hopes of catching that lunker. I hope to see you all out in the countryside, enjoying what most people in the lower 48 can only wish for. And, be sure and take the kids and grand kids on these outings with you. As adults, we are responsible to teach today's youth to love and become caretakers of the wilderness that we hold so dear.

4/13/14 Here we are, in the middle of breakup, fast approaching



We want to thank these generous partners and providers for their care and service to the Refuge and the future public users of this great interpretive education feature.

Into The Stretch

The Knik River and Reflections Lake Public Access Area recovery and enhancements have been part of years-long envisioned needs, hopes and opportunities associated with the Palmer Hay Flats State Game Refuge's co-location with the Glenn Highway National Scenic Byway. The Alaska Department of Fish and Game and Alaskans for Palmer Hay Flats have worked closely with a diverse group of important supporters who could truly imagine the melding of travelers of the Byway, with the local knowledge and presence of the natural treasures and features of the Refuge. An excerpt from the project's proposal to the Federal Highway Administration, Scenic Byways Program, the projects main funding source, reads:

"In spite of this wealth of scenic beauty and natural resources, no suitable viewing and interpreting venue had been developed for the byway traveler. Visitors were often seen pulled over on the shoulder of the highway with the traffic whizzing by at 65 mph as they set up tripods for cameras. Without any information available to travelers explaining the landscape along this stretch of the byway, a huge gap existed in telling the byway story."



Alaska Foundation Technology staff torque in the 45° "batter" pile to link with the vertical pier. Special Inspector Mark Dean stands in the background.

This core concept was enhanced by ADF&G and APH strategic cooperation to bring local community interests and values, private and public organizations, existing and would-be users of the Refuge, into a combined participative effort. Generous support and enthusiasm has been sought and found at critical junctures. We are extremely grateful for the care and support of our funders, partners, members and the entities listed below. We are at another crucial juncture as the project adjusts to current cost and support conditions. We still have gaps to fill financially, and ask for your help to defray final costs for Tower materials and services. Please become part of the force that brings the Wildlife Viewing Tower to the community and Alaska's visitors and travelers.

Without Whom This Wouldn't Be Possible

Federal Highway Administration, National Scenic Byway Program

Alaska Dept. of Transportation

Alaska Div. of Parks and Outdoor Recreation, Recreational Trails Program

Alaska Dept. of Fish and Game, Lands and Refuges Program

ConocoPhillips—Spirit of Conservation Award

Kiewit Construction

BBFM Engineering, Inc.

Alaska Foundation Technology

AK Steel Erectors/ Contractors

Alaska Ironworkers Local 751

The Mat-Su Valley Garden Club

M.N. Anderson, PE *Engineering and Excavation*

The Knik River Fairview Community Council

Mark Dean, Northern Geotechnical Engineering, Inc.

Members and Volunteers of APH

The Board of Directors and Executive Director would like to express our profound gratitude for the unflagging support by the estate of conservationist Harriet Richards toward our long-term goal of providing a site-based education facility serving the people of Alaska. She was deeply moved by the beauty of the hay flats and has played an important role in the work of APH to protect and enhance this physical and cultural icon.

Thanks to outgoing Mat-Su Assemblywoman Cindy Bettine and subsequent shepherding by Assemblyman Warren Keogh, Alaskans for Palmer Hay Flats received a \$38,000 Mat-Su Borough Community Development Grant to conduct access improvements at Rabbit Slough and Cottonwood Creek. These primary access points to the Palmer Hay Flats State Game Refuge have historically received high levels of use, especially during salmon fishing and waterfowl hunting seasons. The attraction to the refuge for these popular activities created crowded conditions, and human nature led to users driving onto sensitive wetland areas. These funds enabled APH and Department of Fish and Game refuge managers to collaborate in designing improvements to expand parking options while discouraging vehicle damage to adjacent wetlands. With the exception of new signage, all improvements were to be completed before the 2013 waterfowl hunting season with minimal impact to the weekend salmon fishing season.



Cottonwood Creek Access Area west-end pre-grade

With an additional \$68,900 funding from ADF&G and project oversight by refuge staff, Cottonwood Creek Access to the western end of the refuge, off Hayfield Road, was completed on 15 July 2013. Improvements included grading and resurfacing the access road and expanded parking areas with recycled asphalt pavement, improving the host site parking and access, and protecting adjacent wetlands with boulders. These improvements added to the previous ADF&G funded Cottonwood Creek bridge replacement and trail hardening improvements, reported in the APH 2013 Autumn/Winter Newsletter (http://www.palmerhayflats.org/newsletters/newsletter_fall_winter_2013.pdf). Combined, these improvements will make a lasting impression on visitors that the site is managed for responsible use and refuge appreciation.

Rabbit Slough Access to the east side of the refuge, located off E. Fireweed Road (off Trunk Road interchange), received road and parking area resurfacing, an expanded parking area at the boat launch site and placement of boulders to protect adjacent wetlands. Those improvements were completed on 15 August. ADF&G contributed an additional \$46,000 to complement that project. (continued page 8)



Rabbit Slough, before and as the tide came in. Refuge Manager Doug Hill's pup, Chai, observes the changing of the tide.



Alaskans for Palmer Hay Flats

Dedicated to responsible use and enjoyment of
Palmer Hay Flats State Game Refuge

Date: January 15, 2014

Honorable Sean Parnell, Governor

Alaskans for Palmer Hay Flats (APH) is a citizen, non-profit group formed in 2005, with members who have diligently worked to maintain and improve the beauty of and accessibility to the Palmer Hay Flats State Game Refuge. APH represents a large segment of the public that greatly care for this special area.

Since its inception, APH has enjoyed an outstanding collaborative relationship with ADF&G through the State Refuge Management Program and with the Palmer area management office. APH has partnered repeatedly with Alaska Department of Fish and Game and numerous local organizations dedicating countless hours and effort to cleanup and enhance access for hunters, anglers, birders, photographers, school classes, and many other Refuge users wanting to enjoy and learn about the rich fish, wildlife and cultural resources in this unique wetland ecosystem.

Through the media, APH recently became aware of the shift in policy by your administration for the development and revision of special area plans. In addition, Randy Bates, ADF&G Director of Habitat Division, also stated his intent is to "update these existing plans efficiently and institute a more functional process to develop new plans for the remaining areas" in his recent response to Kris Abshire (APH founder, past president, and Board member). Though Randy Bates concedes ADF&G has "a legal mission and obligation..." to "protect and preserve habitats for the reasons designated", he recognizes "other uses of these lands exists".

However we ask - what other uses are truly compatible with current users and the mission of protecting and preserving the wildlife and fisheries resources of the Refuge's that are not already accounted for in the existing Refuge Management Plan ?

The collaborative effort encouraged and executed for years by ADFG to bring responsible and compatible uses and access to Refuge's has nurtured public involvement and input, recognizing the will of the citizens and the potential for local impacts. The decisions captured by the current Refuge Management Plan for the Palmer Hayflats are accorded greater community validity and application because of the collaborative public manner in which it was developed. This is a primary reason that APH has supported ADF&G

about re-

For more background information check out:

<http://www.alaskapublic.org/2013/10/25/the-battle-of-dude-creek>

<http://www.alaskadispatch.com/article/20140422//fish-and-game-weakening-land-use-regulations-alaskas-wildlife-refuges-sanctuaries>

<http://www.alaskadispatch.com/article/20140424/will-fish-and-game-have-any-juice-left-protect-fish-and-wildlife-once>



What is Fred Meyer Community Rewards?

It is the latest addition to the Fred Meyer Rewards Program where Customers can earn donations for their favorite nonprofits by shopping with their Rewards Card. Fred Meyer will donate \$2.5 million to nonprofits in Alaska, Idaho, Oregon and Washington in 2014 through this new program. Here's how it works:

Customers can now enroll online at www.fredmeyer.com/communityrewards and link their Rewards Card to the organization of their choice.

- Customers will continue to receive Rewards Points, Rebates and Fuel Points.
- At the end of each quarter, Fred Meyer will make a donation to participating nonprofits based on the accumulated spending of the Rewards customers linked to each nonprofit. Sign up for APH: our ID is **NPO #82240**

Fred Meyer will donate \$625,000 each quarter via Community Rewards!

In less than 60 days, just five Fred Meyers customers participating in the Community Rewards program resulted in a grant of \$134 to "Alaskans for Palmer Hay Flats". Imagine how much more we can do by joining in this program and all working together!

~ Executive Director Terri Reynolds-Rogers

SIGN ME UP FOR MEMBERSHIP TO SUPPORT PALMER HAY FLATS

Fledgling (12 & under)	FREE
Student	\$15
Individual Adult	\$20
Family	\$30
Sustaining Member	\$100
Sponsor	\$250
Patron	\$500
Steward	\$1,000
Benefactor	\$2,000
Other	_____
Science Ed Building fund	_____

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____

State: _____ Zip: _____

Email: _____

Telephone: (_____) _____

Please contact me about becoming a Board member

"Cherish the Land No One Owns"

~ Li Po, 650 B.C.

Make checks payable to:

Alaskans for Palmer Hay Flats
4900 E Palmer-Wasilla Hwy, Ste. 106
Wasilla, AK 99654-7752

Join on-line at: www.palmerhayflats.org

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your membership
and come join us on
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A Message from our President ~ Michelle Davis



So, it's spring on the Hayflats. It's that magic minute when the birds are returning and the mosquitoes are large and slow. It's a beautiful thing to see life returning to the refuge. It was there all through the winter, but it took a careful observer to see the story in the fox's tracks, catch moose browsing the willows and exchange greetings with wandering raven. Now, the refuge is waking up and reminding us how important this place is to life in the valley.

As the valley grows, there are fewer and fewer large open spaces. Protecting the refuge, practicing good stewardship and creating safe opportunities for everyone to enjoy it are central to the values of Alaskans for Palmer Hayflats.

One illustration of APH values is the beautiful Reflections Lake loop trail which is handicapped accessible and took successful partnerships to accomplish. Hard work but worth it. After all, shouldn't everyone have opportunities to enjoy beauty?

If these things are important to you, please consider volunteering with this organization. You will find a friendly, professional Board of Directors and meet Terri Reynolds-Rogers, APH's Executive Director. APH is seeking new Board members and volunteers and would welcome your help with Clean Up Day, Summer Family Fun day or any of a half dozen other projects. Have a great idea? Come work with us and make those dreams come true. Your assistance, skills and support are welcome with APH.



A mini bore tide captured in April 2014 on Rabbit Slough by ADF&G Refuge Manager Doug Hill