

Kodiak Island Refuge...

an exciting opportunity for expansion.

BY GEORGE A. BETTAS

PHOTO COURTESY OF W. PERRY CONWAY FOR NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC SPECIAL, ISLAND OF THE GIANT BEARS, AIRING ON PBS.

Two hundred miles southwest of Prince William Sound, 25 miles east of the Alaska Peninsula, a tangle of mountains, fiords and river valleys protrudes from the storm-tossed surface of the Gulf of Alaska. The Kodiak Archipelago is the name of this remote, beautiful land comprised of one large island, Kodiak, and 17 smaller islands and islets. Together, they cover 5,000 square miles, equal in size to the state of Connecticut.

The archipelago's landscape offers a mosaic of terrain found elsewhere in Alaska, but nowhere else in quite the same juxtaposition. The serpentine shoreline and extensive bay systems mean that no spot on Kodiak is more than 15 miles from salt water. The archipelago offers everything from boulder-strewn shorelines to white sand beaches; from vertical rock wall cliffs to sylvan valleys rolling back from the salt water edge for miles inland along glacier-fed rivers.

The island's top-soil is a dark, nutrient-rich carpet, some of which was blown downwind from the smoky calderas of the world's most active volcanic zone, including nearby giants Aniakchak and Katmai. Thick vegetation winds along coasts and rivers, while tundra-matted lowlands and scrub-shrub give way to lush grasses and radiant flowers. Alpine stubble and lichen predominate as the

landscape ascends to the rock and ice crown of the wilderness tableau at over 4,000 feet above sea level.

Temperate by Alaskan standards, Kodiak and its sister islands resist tides and constant wind, rain and snow squalls while providing remarkable habitat and shelter for a wide variety of birds and fish, marine and land mammals. All five species of Pacific salmon spawn in Kodiak's rivers, along with resident steelhead and Dolly Varden. Wintering seaducks total 150,000, including harlequin, king eider and old squaw. Kodiak is also home to Alaska's largest year-round bald eagle population.

Of course, the most charismatic creature in this wilderness setting is the majestic Kodiak brown bear, which is classified by Boone and Crockett as Alaska brown bear. Kodiak brownies (*Ursus arctos middendorffi*) are cousins to the mainland grizzly (*Ursus arctos horribilis*), and probably reached the island 10,000 years ago at the end of the last ice age as the land bridge between Alaska and Asia was vanishing.

Since the Pleistocene, countless generations of these monarchs gorged themselves on salmon, berries, roots, flowers and grasses. A full-grown Kodiak can stand over 10-feet tall, weigh 1,500 pounds, and run 35 miles per hour! The largest Alaska brown bear ever taken by a hunter was a Kodiak (1952) and had a skull measurement of 30-12/16 points. The top three brown bears, and seven of the top ten on the Boone & Crockett record list are Kodiaks.

Something about Kodiak and its bears engenders poetic wonder in all who visit. Naturalists, John Muir and John Burroughs, considered Kodiak the peak of their coastal voyage to Alaska on the 1899 Harriman Expedition. In 1941, Kodiak became the last wildlife refuge created by executive order, as friendly pressure from sportsmen and conservationists led President Franklin D. Roosevelt to protect these unique bears by creating the Kodiak National Wildlife Refuge from two-thirds of the main island "...for the purpose of preserving the breeding and feeding habi-

tat of the Kodiak brown bear and other wildlife."

The 1.8 million acre refuge also had a friend in President Eisenhower's Interior Secretary, Fred A. Seaton, who outlawed cattle ranches within the refuge to halt bounty hunters from killing bears to defend herds and private property.

Following the end of the bear/cattle conflict, pioneering bear research in the 1960's and wise hunting regulations allowed Kodiak refuge to become a wildlife management success story. Today the bear population is thriving, boasting some of the highest densities on record. With a population of possibly 3,000, Kodiak's bears equal roughly ten percent of Alaska's brown bears.

National Geographic magazine recently called Kodiak "one of Nature's great treasure houses." Alaska Governor, Walter J. Hickel, labeled the Kodiak bear a "symbol for this great state, ... [for its] strength of character and determination to endure." When visiting the refuge last summer, Secretary of Interior, Bruce Babbitt, called Kodiak "perhaps the most important totally intact ecosystem in the United States."

Strategic location has been key to Kodiak's human history, which began more than 7,000 years ago. Abundant fish and wildlife made the islands one of Alaska's pre-historic population centers. In 1784, Russian guns and madness slaughtered sea otters to near extinction as Kodiak became the first capital of Russian-America. Again, in World War II, location made Kodiak ideal for the North Pacific headquarters of the U.S. Armed Forces fighting the Aleutian campaign.

On the downside, the archipelago straddles a tectonic fault that violently snapped in the 1964 'Good Friday' earthquake. The sudden powerful jolt immediately set off landslides throughout the archipelago and within half an hour, the first of three deadly tsunamis deluged the city of Kodiak and the coastal Native villages along the eastern coastline.

Tragedy struck again on March 24, 1989, a week before the 25th anniversary





of the earthquake, when geography fated Kodiak to lie in the path of 11 million gallons of North Slope crude oil belching from the crippled Exxon Valdez tanker. The Exxon Valdez oil spill, and the wave of death, chaos and human trauma that followed will never be forgotten by those who lived it and who continue to feel its effects throughout the oil spill region.

EXXON VALDEZ FIVE YEARS LATER

Five years after the Exxon Valdez's killing tide flowed into one of the world's richest marine ecosystems the recovery process continues to be assessed by federal and state biologists and others. In order to assess the recovery of the ecosystem a number of "indicator species" have been identified. These include birds, sea mammals, fish and intertidal organisms such as mussel and eel grass. Following is a sampling of these assessments to date.

BIRDS: Experts believe bird mortalities due to the Exxon Valdez oil spill may have totaled half a million, affecting 90 species of birds and ducks. Insulating feathers soaked up the oil, compromising the animals' ability to survive. As even small amounts of oil accumulated, matted feathers allowed cold water to soak through to the skin, heat was lost, and the birds succumbed to hypothermia. Normal preening and grooming behavior often resulted in the ingestion of toxic doses of oil, sometimes resulting in death or lowered metabolisms, and negatively affecting breeding behavior, reproductive success and egg shell thickness. Marbled Murrelet and Harlequin ducks are still species of serious concern five years later, while bald eagles are recovering.

MARINE MAMMALS: Sea otters were at risk from exposure to oil for some of the same reasons as birds: oil on sea otter fur disrupts its ability to insulate and aid in buoyancy, and normal fur grooming behavior resulted in the ingestion of oil. The immediate sea otter death toll was probably about 4,500. Within Prince William Sound, up to 30 percent of the

NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC IN COUNTRY



KODIAK'S BROWN BEAR/NATIVE DILEMMA HAS REACHED AUDIENCES IN THE MULTI-MILLIONS IN RECENT YEARS. BOTH U. S. AND OVERSEAS PRINT AND BROADCAST MEDIA FOCUSED ATTENTION ON THE "WIN-WIN" OPPORTUNITY AVAILABLE TO POLICY MAKERS IN JUNEAU AND WASHINGTON, DC. ABOVE, EMIL CHRISTIANSEN, PRESIDENT OF OLD HARBOR NATIVE CORPORATION IS INTERVIEWED BY NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC TELEVISION FOR THEIR 1994 SPECIAL "ISLAND OF THE GIANT BEARS" FILM PRODUCED BY WOLFGANG BAYER.

otter population was killed. Pup survival of the first winter after the spill was poor. Sea otter populations are recovering their full range. Seals fared better than sea otters because of their reliance on blubber, instead of fur, for insulation. One killer whale pod experienced unprecedented 20% mortality in the year of the spill and the following year, losing seven whales and six whales, respectively. This killer whale group is recovering and is expected to reach pre-spill population levels by the year 2000. Humpback whales showed no impact from the spill.

FISH: Pink and sockeye salmon, herring, and Dolly Varden and cutthroat trout were all adversely affected by the oil spill and have received attention from the Exxon Valdez Trustee Council restoration. In the autumn of 1989, pink salmon egg mortality in oiled streams averaged about 15 percent compared to about nine percent in unoiled streams. Since 1989, egg mortality has generally increased. In 1991 and 1992, approximately 40-50 percent of the salmon eggs in oiled streams did not survive, as compared to an 18-30 percent mortality in unoiled streams. In 1993, though the rates of egg mortality had dropped to an average of less than 25 percent in oiled streams, the differences still persisted. Herring fishermen were

shocked to find last year's fish covered with viral infections in Prince William Sound.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL & SUBSISTENCE RESOURCES: In addition to damaging fish and wildlife populations and the commercial fishing industry, the Exxon Valdez oil spill severely impacted many forms of subsistence harvesting by Alaska Native villages from Chenega and the Kenai Peninsula villages such as Port Graham and Seldovia, all the way to the fishing village of Chignik, 800 miles from Valdez on the Alaska Peninsula. This region of Alaska, including the Kodiak Archipelago, was among the most heavily populated areas in prehistoric times. Dozens of ancient village and ceremonial sites were damaged by oil, erosion from spill cleanup efforts, and vandalism. Subsistence is a crucial factor in making rural Alaskan life possible. Many Alaska Native villagers rely upon wild sources for at least a pound of food per day.

THE EXXON VALDEZ FINANCIAL SETTLEMENT

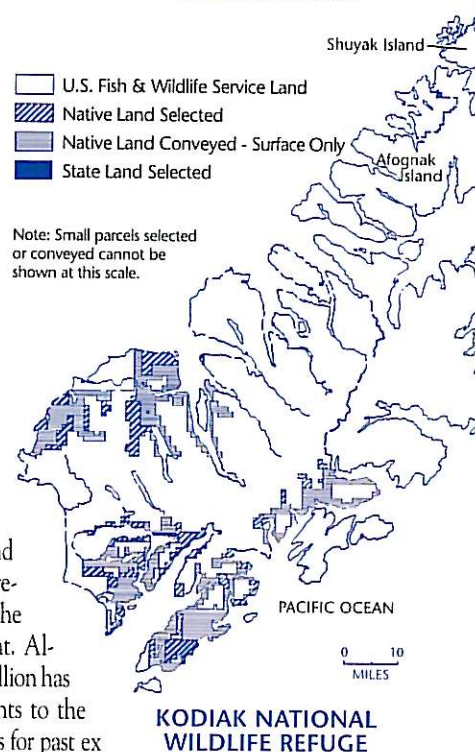
In the civil court settlement negotiated in 1991 by Alaska Governor Walter Hickel, Exxon Corporation agreed to pay the United States and the State of Alaska 900 million over a 10-year period to restore resources injured and services reduced or lost as a result of the Exxon Valdez oil spill. As of September 1993, \$340 million of the \$900 million promised has been paid.

The Exxon Valdez Oil spill Trustee Council — a panel of three federal and three state officials — are responsible for deciding how the settlement money will be spent. Already, a total of about \$282 million has been spent for reimbursements to the state and federal governments for past ex-

"The importance of maintaining large, undeveloped expanses of wilderness habitat for protecting the Kodiak brown bear population cannot be overstated. Brown/grizzly bear populations in Europe and much of North America have either been extirpated or are seriously threatened by a long history of incompatible human developments."

Sterling Miller, Ph.D.
Alaska Dept of Fish & Game
International Association of
Bear Research & Management

LAND STATUS WITHIN KODIAK REFUGE

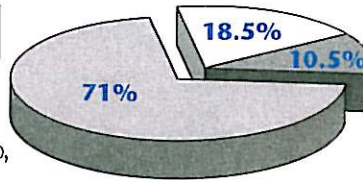
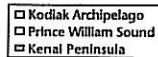


"I think the Kodiak Islands may be perhaps the most important totally intact ecosystem in the United States."

*The Honorable
Bruce Babbitt
Secretary of the Interior*



FIGURE A
OVER 550,000 TOTAL ACRES OF LAND IN ALASKA WERE RANKED HIGH TO MODERATE. KODIAK ARCHIPELAGO, WHICH INCLUDES THE KODIAK REFUGE, AFOGNAK ISLAND AND SHUYAK ISLAND,



IS THE LARGEST AREA AFFECTED. THIS PIE CHART SHOWS THE PERCENTAGE OF OIL SPILL THAT AFFECTED EACH REGION. SOURCE - EXXON VALDEZ COMPREHENSIVE RESTORATION PLAN, 12/1993

penditures related to the oil spill incurred from 1989 through 1991; about \$40 million was credited to Exxon for cleanup expenses during 1991 and 1992; and approximately \$100 million has been spent or committed through annual restoration work. That leaves more than \$600 million for trustees to spend restoring damage from the 11 million gallons of oil which were spilled in 1989.

Public input to the Trustee Council has been overwhelmingly in favor of habitat protection and habitat acquisition

as key parts of the restoration plan. In order to determine what land should be considered for immediate protection a team of wildlife and marine biologists known as the Habitat Protection Working Group of the Exxon Valdez Trustee council devised an elaborate mathematical equation and evaluated coastal habitat within the oil spill region during 1993. They determined where wildlife species and natural resources with a high "link to injury" from the oil spill could be benefited by ecosystem protection through preservation of land. The restoration benefit of protecting high quality fish and wildlife habitat is that anchor points of biodiversity will continue to thrive within the oil spill region to repopulate spill damaged species and provide sanctuaries for fish and wildlife in case of future oil spills.

Most of the private land in the oil spill region from Prince William

Sound to the Kodiak Archipelago is owned by Alaska Native corporations pursuant to the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act of 1971. Native land selections throughout the oil spill region — and Alaska — are strategically located within high productivity fish and wildlife areas.

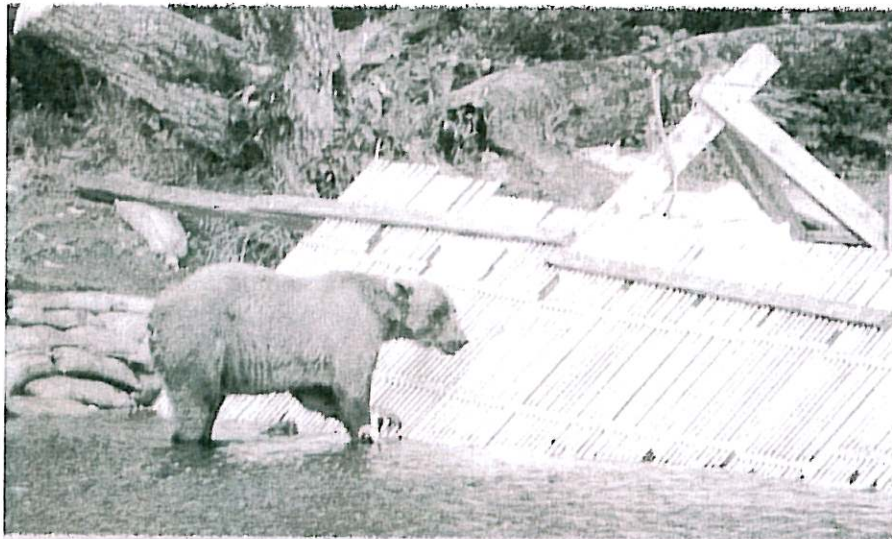
Native land holdings are predominantly coastal and riverine and therefore had high oil spill impact. Over 500,000 acres of Native land received HIGH to MODERATE habitat rankings from the Habitat Protection Working Group, qualifying them for consideration in the habitat restoration process. (See Figure A)

THE LIMITATIONS OF THE ALASKA NATIVE CLAIMS SETTLEMENT ACT (ANCSA)

The Kodiak national Wildlife Refuge was created in 1941 by President Franklin D. Roosevelt to protect the Kodiak brown bear. The refuge comprised a majority of the island, although privately owned lands have always existed within the boundaries of the refuge.

The 1971 Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA) allowed Alaska Native Corporations to reclaim 44 million acres of their ancestral lands which were adjacent to their villages. On Kodiak Island the law promised to deed the Aleuts of Kodiak 330,000 acres within the Kodiak National Wildlife Refuge. Although they were able to claim this land they were not allowed to use it for anything incompatible with the land uses established for the refuge. An obscure and untested provision of the federal law allows Alaska Natives to develop their lands within a wildlife refuge only to an extent compatible with the goals of the wildlife refuge. Depending on the interpretation of the clause, it could mean little or no development at all. With this restriction in place, development of these lands that might interfere with brown bear and other animal habitat is prohibited within the Kodiak National Wildlife Refuge. This restriction makes these lands of little economic benefit to the Native Corporations who own them.

A primary purpose of ANCSA is to provide Natives with the opportunity



WHAT'S WRONG WITH THIS PICTURE?



AN ELDERLY KODIAK SOW TAKES ADVANTAGE OF EASY PICKINGS OF SPAWNED OUT SALMON AT AN ALASKA DEPARTMENT OF FISH & GAME WEIR AT DOG SALMON CREEK. THE WEIR SITES AT THE MOUTHS OF KODIAK'S RIVERS PROVIDE SOME OF THE CLOSEST AND MOST REGULAR BEAR/HUMAN ENCOUNTERS. OLDER BEARS AND JUVENILES THRIVE AT THE WEIRS RATHER THAN RISKING LIFE AND LIMB IN WILD COUNTRY. BUT THE BEARS BECOME USED TO HUMANS AS THEY DODGE STATE FISHERIES' BIOLOGISTS AND GROWING NUMBERS OF PHOTOGRAPHERS AND BEAR WATCHERS. ADF&G'S WEIRS ALLOW FOR MANAGED SALMON ESCAPEMENT AND ARE THE KEY FOR CONDUCTING ONE OF ALASKA'S HIGHEST SUSTAINABLE COMMERCIAL WILD SALMON FISHERIES. THE STATE LEASES MOST WEIR SITES FROM NATIVE CORPORATIONS, WHO OWN OUTSTANDING COASTAL AND RIVERINE HABITAT IN

THE REFUGE, BUT THE STATE CAN'T AFFORD THE BIDDING WAR THAT IS BREAKING OUT FROM TOURIST AND OTHER COMMERCIAL USES FOR THESE FISH AND WILDLIFE HOT SPOTS. THE COMMERCIAL SALMON INDUSTRY IS SUFFERING PLUNGING PRICES FOR THEIR CATCH AND CAN'T AFFORD MORE USER FEES OR TAXES TO FUND HIGHER WEIR LEASES.

YES, A TOURIST BOOM OF BEAR VIEWING WOULD ALLOW THE KODIAK NATIVE CORPORATIONS TO EARN FROM THEIR LAND ASSET AS INTENDED BY THE ALASKA NATIVE CLAIMS SETTLEMENT ACT, YET SUCH A SCENARIO MEANS THE INJURED SPECIES OF THE OIL SPILL, THE BEARS, THE STATE OF ALASKA, AND COMMERCIAL FISHERMEN AND THEIR FAMILIES COULD LOSE OUT. ACQUISITION OF THESE CRITICAL HABITAT AND MANAGEMENT SITES IS ONE PRIORITY OF THE EXXON VALDEZ TRUSTEE COUNCIL, AND A RESTORATION POLICY PROVIDING DIRECT AND INDIRECT BENEFITS TO EVERYONE WHO LIVES AND WORKS IN THE KODIAK AREA OF THE OIL SPILL REGION.



LAST OF THE GREAT BROWN BEAR MEN



WHEN MORRIS TALIFSON AND PARTNER, BILL PINNELL, ARRIVED ON KODIAK ISLAND IN THE 1930S, THEY AIMED TO MAKE IT AS GOLD MINERS. MINING WAS A BUST HOWEVER, AND THEY WORKED THE GREAT DEPRESSION AND WORLD WAR II YEARS AT KODIAK'S REMOTE FISH CAMPS AND SALMON CANNERIES AS CARETAKERS AND RADIO WEATHER REPORTERS FOR THE ISLAND'S NOTORIOUS CLIMATE. FINALLY, PINNELL AND TALIFSON CONCLUDED KODIAK'S BEARS WERE THE REAL GOLD ROAMING THIS WILD ISLAND, AND THEY BEGAN GUIDING BEAR HUNTS IN 1949.

DURING THEIR CAREERS, PINNELL AND TALIFSON GUIDED OVER 1,000 SPORTSMEN, INCLUDING PRINCES AND DIPLOMATS, SOME OF THE WORLD'S MOST FAMOUS OUTDOORS MEN FROM SAM SNEAD TO WALTER PAYTON, AND BIG GAME HUNTERS FROM EVERY WALK OF LIFE. P&T'S CLIENTS ACCOUNTED FOR ONE-THIRD OF ALL KODIAK BROWN BEAR LISTED IN THE RECORDS OF NORTH AMERICAN BIG GAME, PUBLISHED BY BOONE & CROCKETT CLUB. (SOURCE: LAST OF THE GREAT BROWN BEAR MEN, MARVIN H. CLARK, JR.)

THEIR FAMOUS OLGA BAY LODGE (SEE PHOTO ABOVE) REVERTED TO NATIVE CORPORATION OWNERSHIP IN 1993. AKHIOK KAGUYAK, INC. PRESIDENT RALPH ELUSKA (FAR LEFT) POSES WITH MORRIS TALIFSON, PETER STOTHARD, EDITOR OF THE LONDON TIMES, AND NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC MAGAZINE SENIOR WRITER JOHN ELIOT (FAR RIGHT).

KODIAK NATIVE CORPORATIONS LEASE THEIR LANDS FOR GUIDED BEAR HUNTS. OUTSTANDING SITKA BLACKTAIL DEER HUNTING AND WATERFOWL HUNTING ARE AVAILABLE ON NATIVE LANDS IN THE FALL AND WINTER MONTHS, AND LOCAL GUIDES ARE AVAILABLE. KODIAK'S COMPARATIVELY MILD WEATHER MAKES WINTER HUNTING A RARE TREAT IN ALASKA. INFORMATION ABOUT SPORT HUNTING AND FISHING OPPORTUNITIES MAY BE OBTAINED BY WRITING THE THREE NATIVE CORPORATIONS: EMIL CHRISTIANSEN, OLD HARBOR NATIVE CORP., P.O. BOX 71, OLD HARBOR, AK 99643, RALPH ELUSKA, AKHIOK KAGUYAK, INC., 5028 MILLS DRIVE, ANCHORAGE, ALASKA 99508, AND UWE GROSS, KONIAG, INC., 4300 B. STREET, SUITE 407, ANCHORAGE, AK 99503.

Government. Second, we have available for the first time funds from the Exxon Valdez Oil Spill Trustee's Fund which can be used to make these land acquisitions happen.

The acquisition of a substantial amount of land, particularly from Native

to become economically self-sufficient. In the case of the Kodiak Native this is virtually impossible given that they may not develop the lands acquired under ANCSA.

For more than 20 years the Aleut Natives have been in a bind by not being able to derive an economic benefit from the lands they were given through the provisions pursuing the development of parcels of land in the refuge area. If these developments go through to completion they could be the beginning of wholesale commercial development of one of America's most valuable wildlife refuges. On the other hand the Aleut Natives would rather not develop the refuge and instead develop some sort of financial "sell back" to the federal government in order to preserve the refuge as a wilderness home for the great brown bears.

The fact that the Native Corporations of Old Harbor and Akhiok/Kaguyak are interested in the preservation of the brown bears and some sort of financial security vis-a-vis the sale of inholdings in the Kodiak Refuge, the Exxon Valdez settlement has raised some interesting and important new conservation opportunities. Opportunities which stand to benefit both the Kodiak Natives and the giant brown bear.

CONSERVATION OPPORTUNITES ON KODIAK

Currently we have a number of factors coming together that may make it possible to end the 20-year impasse on Kodiak related to ANCSA's goal of providing the Kodiak Natives with the opportunity to become economically self-sufficient and the need to protect the Kodiak refuge and its wildlife from development.

First, Bruce Babbitt has made a public commitment to attempt to work toward a major ecosystem protection project on Kodiak Island via land acquisitions in partnership with the state of Alaska, private parties, and the Federal

Corporations and villages, to be set aside for conservation purposes may have a greater economic value for everyone. If this land is protected we can provide for the needs of the Natives, the brown bears, and enhance what is now a world class ecosystem.

Ironically, from a conservation standpoint, the oil spill has created a new opportunity to conserve the bear refuge through acquisition of extensive Native corporation inholdings among the most critical habitat areas of the Kodiak refuge. This has been a 22 year priority of the Department of Interior under six U.S. Presidents - from Richard Nixon to Bill Clinton - but until now, no buy-back or land swap proposal has succeeded.

Among the public benefits of acquisition will be the ability of the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service and the Alaska Department of Fish & Game to manage the critical habitat areas. This will give the fish and wildlife species injured by the oil spill their best chance to recover. What's more, figures for public use on the refuge show that 87% of the human use is for sport hunting and fishing. This public access will be lost if the Native corporations fragment and privatize their inholdings, reversing over 50 years of wildlife management policy.

Within the next few months the decisions will be made as to how the Exxon Valdez Oil Spill Trustee's Fund will be spent. The conservation opportunity of Exxon Valdez land protection efforts toward critical inholdings in the Kodiak National Wildlife Refuge, the Kenai Fjords National Park and selective stands of coastal rainforest in the region could become the equivalent of adding two-and-a-half Yellowstone National Parks for future generations. That's the oil spill legacy opportunity before Governor Walter Hickel, Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt and the Exxon Valdez Trustee Council. Such a habitat restoration package would still leave substantial sums available for the Seward Sea Life Marine Research Center — a "Woods Hole" of Prince William Sound — fisheries projects, and university research to fill out a comprehensive regionally balanced oil spill restoration plan.

"The Department of Interior has long sought to re-acquire Kodiak Native corporation inholdings along the salt water edge and the salmon rivers within the bear refuge. These are some of the most biologically productive habitats within the oil spill zone, and they are under imminent threat of commercial development even though their highest and best use is clearly intrinsic wilderness."

Stephen S. Adams

*President
Boone and Crockett Club*

