

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 "Compensation Planning Framework" report ([Click here](#)) 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 ([Click here](#)).

The Corps is conducting a public review and accepting written comments on these SEAL Trust draft reports. For the comment deadline, check the Corps website www.poa.usace.army.mil/reg (under special public notices) or contact the Corps Juneau Regulatory Office by phone (907) 790-4490 or by email (randal.p.vigil@usace.army.mil).