Friends of McNeil River (FOMR) is a 501c(3) #92-0149711 tax-deductible nonprofit corporation, dedicated to ensuring the protection of the McNeil River Bears and their associated habitat.

If you are receiving this newsletter by the postal service, please be aware that it is foreshortened to cut printing and mailing costs. We really need to get everyone’s email addresses to help us keep getting McNeil River information out. The full version is available on our website or upon request.

**Or Current Occupant**

**2013 FOMR Newsletter**

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**7:00 to 9:00 p.m. — Please join us for an evening of McNeil River Presentations & Discussions:**

This will be a wonderful photo presentation of the world famous McNeil River Bears fishing & living in their natural habitat. The current and former staffers of the Sanctuary have a tremendous background in viewing these brown bears and want to share some of their experiences with you. We’ll have highlighted for us many of the traits that illustrate different mannerisms to watch for when viewing bears. We’ll discuss and hopefully get a glimpse of a new program being developed (which FOMR is one of the sponsors) for an “in-the-round” show of the McNeil River bears for the UAA Planetarium. The program will conclude with a question and answer period which gets pretty lively as these bear specialists discuss their favorite subjects—The McNeil River Bears.

FOMR will have their fieldbooks and “got bears?” baseball caps and knit caps for sale in the outer lobby. Donations are appreciated and new or renewal memberships welcomed!
2013 Permit Holders: All persons that have been selected for the 2013 permits to McNeil River should be aware that FOMR has two items for sale that can enhance your trip and memories of the Sanctuary. The Photo ID books are highly recommended for use in the park and as mementos later on and we sell a great hat for the local refuge you’re traveling to. Due to recent interpretation of an old F&G regulation, only the Photo I.D. books are available in camp, whereas the books and hats are both available on our website or by contacting us at 907-244-4041.

Friends of McNeil River
POB 231091, Anchorage, AK 99523-1091
KEEP ME ON YOUR MAILING LIST!

Name ________________________________
Address ________________________________
City ________________________________
State __________ Zip ______ - _______
Phone ________________________________
email (important to reduce printing costs):

Membership  ( ) $20 Cub  ( ) $35 Family
( ) $50 Donor  ( ) $100 Paw Patron
( ) $250 Generous Griz  ( ) Other
Photo ID Donation  ( ) $29 2010 ID book
$ _______ ( ) $5 mail ( ) $20 air
( ) $20 FOMR Hat-Color___$__ ( ) $2.50 mail

Name on Card ________________________________
Credit Card # ________________________________
Exp. Date _____ Security Code _____
____________________________________________
( ) Yes, I want to be a Volunteer!
( ) Sanctuary opening next year: We will be taking names for next spring’s opening (2014). Your email address is required for rapid processing. See below for more information. No camp volunteers were requested by ADF&G for the 2013 camp opening.
( ) Administrative help
( ) Board Member Applicant
(Cover Photo by Tom Griffin, ADF&G)

You can also visit our website at www.mcneilbears.org and use our PayPal credit card option for memberships or purchases!

Checks and money orders are certainly appreciated, but must be issued by a U.S. bank. If this isn’t possible, please use a credit card. The postal service frowns on mailing cash, but we’ve been known to take that too.

With today’s economy and to cut down on printing costs, we really need everyone’s email address.

For Alaskans eligible for receiving the Permanent Fund Dividend, please consider giving a portion, up to all of it, to FOMR, through the Pick.Click.Give Project when you file on-line next year in 2014. This can be done anonymously, or let us know who you are & we’ll send a tax deductible receipt around the end of the year! Unfortunately, due to a clerical error the Pick.Click.Give opportunities to give are not available in 2013. If you were planning on giving this way to us this way this year, please let us know when you’re donating in another manner and we’ll send a McNeil print your way if you request it.
2012 Spring Volunteer Project

Our 2012 volunteers gathered together last spring in Homer and had a great time helping open the base camp. Only four volunteers were sent out in 2012, and we were requested not to provide any volunteers in 2013 due to a lack of tasks for them to perform. If you wish to be considered as a volunteer for the next 2014 trip, please email your interest to us (we hope it does happen again!). Our volunteers have typically flown with one of

Two flight services:
- Beluga Air, 2886 Bay Vista Place, Homer @ (907) 235-8256
- Northwind Aviation, 1170 Lake Shore Dr., Homer @ (907) 235-7482

FOMR President 2011 Report by Mike Adams:

FOMR has had a busy year in 2012 and getting a good start here in 2013. We had a good turn-out for our April, 2012 annual meeting at the Auditorium of the Anchorage Rasmusen Museum, which Tom Griffin, Tony Carnaham and Drew Hamilton made their presentation on the 2011 season and historically significant steps in the development of McNeil River State Game Sanctuary and Refuge. Many of our joint FOMR/F&G 2010 Photo ID Fieldbooks, along with the new FOMR’s “Got Bears?” hats were sold and ordered at that time and throughout the year.

We had four of our volunteers assist the Sanctuary staff in opening base camp and maintaining trails in 2012. Our volunteers for 2012 were Dyan Ecklund, Kat Versteeg, Linda Green and Valerie Turner. As with all our volunteers through the years, we thank them very much for their contribution of time, money and efforts!

Late in the 2012 season, we got word from returning permit holders and staff that large numbers of bears had again been seen at the falls on several different occasions. It was a good summer all around! See Tom’s article below.

The heavy duty stainless steel cookware and high temperature cooking utensils that FOMR donated in 2012 for use in the cook-shack by visitors were extremely well received.

The Board of Game (BOG) has once again been active this past year in promoting their “Predator Control” plans, but to the best of our knowledge it should not affect the McNeil River bear population in their overall range, both in and out of the Sanctuary in the near future. There are lots of folks concerned on the directions the BOG directed predator control program is headed. We here at FOMR will continue to help track the proximity factors to and potential effects on the McNeil River greater bear population. Please see the follow-up article below.

The first year of the Refuges Friends groups “Art for Alaska Parks - Refuge Choice Award”, put on by the Alaska Artist Guild, which was well received. See http://artforalaskaparks.com/page4/refuges.html for more information. This is a two-year seed project to see if there’s interest within the non-photographic artist’s community with a monetary award for art created within and about the state’s refuges, with McNeil River Sanctuary and Refuge being included therein. The original competition is for Art in Alaska Parks with a separate monetary award.

We had a very short window of time this past spring to review and comment this year on a Public Review of the National Park Service, Katmai National Park and Preserve Hunting Guide Concessions Environmental Assessment. Everyone’s comments were reviewed. A decision was reached that not only was no environmental assessment needed, but that they were going to do minor revisions in the areas affected and issue limited 10-year guided hunting permits, as has been done since the opening of the Preserve. We had hoped for more improvements.

We are now one of the sponsors of a very promising McNeil River video presentation being prepared for in-the-round viewing, initially in the Anchorage UAA Planetarium. The program is being developed by UAA Travis A, Rector, PhD, with many famous videographers and artists. Tom Griffin, ADF&G, and other Sanctuary staffers are assisting with the technical aspects regarding bear activities. We look forward to viewing it here, and eventually around the world.
Unfortunately, in early winter FOMR lost our Vice President, Tony Dawson, when he lost his battle with cancer. We will miss him greatly. Please see the article below by Mary Banasak regarding his life with those he loved in a state that was his playground and backdrop for his artistry. Tony was FOMR’s V.P. for the past ten years, where he strove to help us continue the legacy he helped start years earlier in the founding of the Friends of McNeil River. We are currently looking for new Board Members and eventually someone to try to fill Tony’s shoes.

In Memory of Friend and Founding FOMR Board Member, Tony Dawson, by Mary Banasak

"I first met Tony along the park road in Denali National Park. It was in the late ’80s. You couldn’t miss him. Tony with camera and tripod perched on top of his Volkswagen Vanagon in Igloo Canyon snapping photos of a mother grizzly with triplet, two-year-old cubs. I don’t remember whether he got down from the top, or just held on as his [then] wife, Kathy, drove a little bit farther down the canyon. Over the days and with many conversations in the park, our friendship grew. I was a video guy, not a still photographer. I think that piqued Tony’s curiosity because he’d often call me, out of the blue, to ask about the best video camera to film his bow hunting, or his fishing trips, or hunts in Montana. For 20 years, Tony became my go-to guy for images. Many thousands of visitors to Alaska went home with a video or DVD with a ©Tony Dawson photo on the cover. Tony enjoyed a good cup of coffee and a conversation. When we were together, I’d mostly just listen. His life was filled with adventures and Tony knew how to tell a story." - Todd Hardesty, Anchorage, AK.

Tony Dawson grew up in eastern Washington state. As a young boy, he explored the creeks, woods and fields near his home in Walla Walla. A boyhood interest in fly-fishing and the wonders of the natural world sparked an interest in all creatures great and small, eventually leading to the study of biological sciences with summers spent doing commercial agricultural work (driving a tractor!). After college, Tony earned a Doctor of Veterinary Medicine Degree from Washington State University and moved to Alaska in 1975. As he wrote in his own bio, he was "searching for true wilderness." By trade he was a veterinarian; his other passions included fishing, flying and photography. Tony was able to combine interests and, after purchasing a Super Cub shortly after moving to Alaska, he established a business wherein he flew to rural villages to provide veterinary services. He was an Iditarod veterinarian and, over the course of his career, worked at several Anchorage veterinary clinics including those providing emergency services. Tony could think on his feet and was a versatile, skilled and caring veterinarian. At times, this was more Tony’s identity than photography—he even had an abbreviation for ‘Animal Doctor’ on his license plate. In a way, though, caring for pets was tied to his lifelong interest in fauna and flora, and Tony negotiated a schedule wherein he could spend free moments fishing, flying and telling stories of his adventures.

Tony was passionate about whatever he did and equally passionate about the many places these interests took him. His love of the bears and the specialness of McNeil River State Game Refuge moved Tony to help found the Friends of McNeil River. Over the years, he visited McNeil River at least ten times. As a Board Member and FOMR spokesman, he wrote articles defending the sanctuary against harmful development on a nearby stream. Thanks to the efforts of board members like Tony, Friends of McNeil River was able to effect project changes, add 7,000 acres to the existing sanctuary, and spur the creation of an adjacent 130,000-acre wildlife refuge—a buffer zone for the McNeil bears. The bears were good for Tony, too. His limited edition photos of bears at McNeil and in Denali are classics. He was published in numerous magazines including Audubon, Alaska Magazine, National Wildlife, Ranger Rick, Sunset, Outdoor Life, Sierra, Field and Stream and Outside, to name a few. He covered the Exxon Valdez oil spill for Audubon magazine and was a photography instructor on a jaunt to Antarctica. Tony’s skill as a photographer was at balance with a lifelong interest in the natural world, especially the wildlife of Alaska.
On Tony's last visit to the McNeil River area in 2002, at Mikfik Creek, during a moment when bear activity had slowed down, Tony lounged on the bank above the creek with his ballcap pulled over his face. He didn't often like to be photographed, but since he was sleeping friends took advantage of the moment and snapped a few pictures, including placing an empty juice box on him as a prop and snapping away. Tony woke up, looked around, assessed the situation, and said, 'Maybe this is as good as it gets.' With bears in the background, gulls and eagles overhead, salmon in the stream, chocolate lilies and other spring flowers in bloom, camera batteries charged, plenty of film (or digital cards), fellow nature enthusiasts and photographers as companions, a blue sky, wet waders drying in the sun, not too many mosquitoes, camp in the background, a dry tent waiting (the sound of snipes whistling at night as a backdrop), a grassy spot in the sun wherein to rest, juice boxes available for sipping, and Larry Aumiller overlooking the peaceful scene, perhaps he was right.

It's certain that Tony's love affair with Alaska was not over when he was diagnosed with cancer. He left the state for treatment with a round-trip ticket, planning on a short stay and quick return. For his family and many friends—photographers, veterinarians, pilots, writers, fishermen, bow-hunters, baristas, friends at Piper's, and many others--Tony was a fighter, someone who could probably outsmart his illness if anyone could do so. True to his character, he researched possibilities and sought aggressive treatment. He planned a recreational trip and talked about the future. But just short of his 65th birthday, on November 16, 2012, Tony passed away. There may still be a faded photo in the McNeil cookshack that Tony tacked up on his last visit: a large brown bear lifting it's head from a mouthful of sedges, bits of green protruding from it's mouth, eyes looking off into the distance, head filling the frame. If you are fortunate enough to visit McNeil River this summer--or have been there, plan on going, or are a supporter--take a moment to remember Tony and thank him for the early days of FOMR when HE looked into the future and helped found an organization with the mission of protecting the McNeil River Sanctuary, and the bears.

Tony is survived by two sons, grandchildren, and many friends far and wide. There will be a celebration of Tony's life at a date TBA. If you would like to be kept informed of the particulars, please email TDmemorial@akvideo.com. We also welcome pictures of Tony. He was a big personality and will be missed.

Larry Aumiller sent these additional comments to Mike Adams, President of FOMR, regarding Tony’s passing:

I had heard about Tony (from Tom). Strange there was no acknowledgment anywhere of his death but, knowing Tony, I’m guessing that’s how he wanted it.

I first met Tony when he was married to Cathy Bushue and they came to McNeil in the mid 70’s. He was Tony Funk then and later changed his name. Both he and Cathy became friends and remained so even after their divorce. Cathy eventually became Cathy Lacey (married to Mike, with two kids).

When Paint River got going in the early 1990’s Tony and a few other former visitors started “Friends” to help lobby for a better deal for the bears. They were VERY successful, getting the Refuge established and many commercial fishery guidelines that remain even to this day. They were the only proponents of the bears and the sanctuary. Fish and Game was not able to speak up or lobby and, of course, neither was I.

As you know, being FOMR president is lots of work and back then even more so because of the controversy. Tony was a major force in those early dealings. As he burned out and moved to other interests the Keelers took over and then of course when they moved on you were (are) the man. The four of you have accounted for 20 years of leading “friends”. My hat is off to all of you, starting with Tony.

I had remained friends with Tony and last saw him a year ago last spring. (at Cathy’s house actually). I will miss him.

Tom Griffin, Sanctuary Manager’s Report to FOMR:
The 2012 viewing season at McNeil River was yet another fantastic summer season! We were lucky to have Samantha McNearney step in as the third on-site staff member with Drew Hamilton and I after Tony Carnahan was promoted to a research biologist position with ADF&G. We wish Tony well and were grateful to have him for two seasons. It was a treat to have Samantha back on staff since she had worked previously as part of the McNeil team from 2000 to 2002 and had filled in as recently as the 2009 season. Thank you Samantha! The Drew and Samantha team worked very well during the
2012 season. Their consistent hard work in camp and with visitors was much appreciated, not only in safely leading the group day in and day out, but also in doing such an excellent job of interpreting the natural history of McNeil River. We are currently in the process of hiring a third staff member for this upcoming season’s McNeil Team since Samantha will be back in Fairbanks with her family for the summer. As always, we had the invaluable support of Ed Weiss, the statewide Lands and Refuge Manager, and Joe Meehan, Statewide Program Coordinator of the Lands and Refuge Program. McNeil was very fortunate to have this extended crew. Also notable in 2012 were some “usual suspects” back to sub for staff. Retired (and legendary) bear biologist John Hechtel provided much needed humor and relief in July and Tony reprised his time at McNeil by filling in as a staff sub in August. Thanks to John and Tony for covering.

Drew and I arrived at the sanctuary in late May to beautiful weather and started opening up camp. We were expecting to find snow after the heavy snow year last winter, and boy did we. There was still snow on Mikfik flats at the base of the bluffs for several weeks (which made for some interesting bear viewing opportunities later). Samantha arrived one day after we did in stormy high winds with the rest of the gear. We got a blustery workout hauling gear from the end of the spit to camp in the headwind. For several days afterwards, Drew, Samantha and I worked with four super volunteers – Dyan, Katy, Linda and Valerie - who helped with basic tasks, such as prepping camp, clearing trail and hauling, stacking and splitting firewood. Thanks to the volunteers for all the good work.

For the month of June, we viewed bears at Mikfik Creek which is a favorite for many people, including me. We enjoyed many wonderful days along the Mikfik Riffles watching bears chase salmon and graze on sedge grasses through the summer solstice. Observing bears interact and play on the snow deposited along the base of the Mikfik bluffs was a highlight and not something we get to see every year. Those first few groups of visitors to the sanctuary had some unique photo opportunities with the bears in the snow. We had good days walking to the Upper Falls and spending time watching one or two bears wander, follow each other, and fish in the creek as we sat up on the grass. Watching the bears arrive back on the flats, the grasses really starting to pop out of the mud, and seeing the first few fish head upstream, reminds me of what is dynamic and remarkable about observing the cycles roll through the sanctuary. All this activity only becomes more intense as we near solstice and the fish-bear-sun-rain-sedge recipe that is Mikfik in June comes to a head.

By early July there were a handful of bears fishing McNeil Falls for chum salmon. Bear numbers climbed quickly and a high count of 66 bears was observed in mid-July. This is a truly amazing occurrence and a memorable sight for the visitors, as well as for the staff. We saw a lone gray wolf on two dates in June and one in August, plus a varied list of bird sightings over the course of the season. With all the bears, we too often take for granted the many common bird species that are observed at the sanctuary over the summer – Glauccous-winged gulls, Mew gulls, Ravens, Green-winged teal, Bald eagles, Brants, Tree swallows, Wilson’s and Yellow Warblers, Golden-crowned sparrows, Savannah sparrows, Red-necked and Common Mergansers, just to name a few. It is also always a treat to see Pacific Harbor Seals bobbing their heads around at high tide in the lagoon. Then there’s the few brave Arctic ground squirrels who stick close to camp and provide a shrill alarm to alert us when a bear is possibly nearby. All in all, it was another spectacular season for wildlife at the sanctuary.

As summer waned on the 2012 season, we enjoyed the usual nice days late in the season down by Ender’s Island in the lower river watching bears catch post-spawners. This is always a bittersweet time of the year since we know that the summer is drawing to a close. Hues shift from a lyngbye green to a fall yellow and we know that soon the bears (and we) will be heading out.

I hope to see you this summer for a great 2013 season at McNeil River State Game Sanctuary. And thanks to everyone behind the scenes (and to those with us in spirit, we’ll miss you Tony D.) for their hard work and dedication to MRSGS!

Best, Tom Griffin
We also heard from Tom’s supervisor, Ed Weiss, that a project started while our volunteers were in camp, has been
completed: “I don’t recall seeing this go around on any notification earlier in the year so; FYI, here is the link to the NRCS Snotel McNeil River site where you can view and download weather data from the Snotel Site located at Mikfik Lake.”
http://www.wcc.nrcs.usda.gov/nwcc/site?sitenum=1191&state=ak

We always ask **visitors and volunteers** that are going to McNeil to send us comments, photos and articles for the newsletter & website regarding their trip and experiences. Here are some:

**Katie Versteeg** wrote: Just wanted to say thanks again for the opportunity to volunteer at McNeil River. It was absolutely wonderful! We had good weather, scenery was fabulous, the bears were amazing and Tom and rest of staff were fantastic. We helped with some basic chores around camp (stacking firewood/organizing/trash pick up, etc) and some trail maintenance around McNeil Falls. I feel like we got the better end of the deal - but Tom seemed to appreciate our efforts.

**Valerie Turner**: Volunteer trip report at McNeil River – Summer 2012 There were four of us – all women. Katy Versteeg and Dyan Ecklund were both from Anchorage and veterinarians, Linda Green was an anthropology professor from Tucson, AZ and Val Turner was a retiree from Boulder, CO. Mike Adams from FOMR gave us each other’s contact information so we were able to communicate ahead of time about menus. We each planned a meal, making a main course the day before that was frozen. Katy brought two coolers where the frozen items were packed with other food that needed to be kept cold, each containing a bag of ice. Linda stayed with a friend near Homer and Val stayed at the Pioneer Inn that had one unit with a full kitchen. Dyan shopped in Anchorage with Tom Griffen, manager at McNeil, the week before to buy non-perishable items that we jointly requested. With FOMR’s assistance, Val shopped in Homer at the Safeway for our perishable foods the day before departure. Ask for items to be packed in several small boxes rather than one big one (it is easier to pack on the plane and easier and lighter to unload at McNeil, and carry on the spit to camp).

We all met for the first time the morning of June 1 at Beluga Air. Our bags, boxes, and each of us were weighed in and it was hard to imagine how it was all going to fit in that little airplane. Apparently it was a normal load and we were soon taking off for McNeil. The flight takes a little over an hour and there is a beautiful view of Mt. Augustine. We were met by Tom Griffen and two other staff members, Drew Hamilton and Samantha McNearney who brought two wheel barrels. We helped unload the plane, filled up the two wheel barrels, and carried and pulled everything to the campground. It was a beautiful day and we were all anxious to set up our tents, but first we were shown a viewing spot where we could visit at any time. Tom gave us an introductory talk, then Samantha reinforced all the rules and regulations. This was all done in a friendly way with lots of opportunities for questions and stories. Samantha was relieved to learn that none of us had any health issues or were carrying firearms. Then we set up our tents and stowed our food and some personal items in the cook shack. Nothing goes into a tent that has any kind of scent. Samantha took us for a walk on the spit where we picked up small pieces of drift wood that make good fire starters in the wood burning stove, and also collected any trash that came in with the tide. We had our first dinner and went for a hike. Remember, it hardly gets dark there so the days are very long. It is hard to realize at 11:30 at night that one should be going to bed. It does get cold at night in early June, and the best purchase I made before leaving Homer were heater packs that are activated when opened. There are ones available that are good for 12 hours of heat, can be moved around in a sleeping bag to warm up cold spots or put on a sore back muscle. During the week, we stacked wood that Drew and Tom cut and split. This all comes from large driftwood that regularly washes up on the beach. We helped organize the tool shed, took inventories of everything in the cook shack, repaired folding chairs, weeded the garden, scraped, sanded and shacked the deck, and did trail maintenance. Every time we left the camp with one of the staff, we took trash bags and collected items on the way back. Trash and recycling is sent out on the seaplanes in burlap bags to Homer. The hike to McNeil Falls was on a beautiful sunny day. We packed lunches, wore our waders, hiked through streams, mud, sedge, and snow. We carried shovels, clippers and pulaskis to work on the trail. Several years ago the volunteer
project was to build an extensive boardwalk. We dug, cut, and chopped. This was tough but our praise goes to those who built the boardwalk. It is important to take layers of warm clothing. I wore the same clothing many days and even slept in my clothes when it seemed just too cold to make a change. A set of long underwear, polar fleece jacket, a light down jacket, a good waterproof shell, warm hat, gloves, socks and, of course, waders that were worn at least once a day. Everyone had hip waders except me, who had chest waders. That was probably a good choice for me since I was the only one who fell in the river but didn't get wet because I had the extra coverage.

AK Fish and Game publishes a good checklist of things to bring. I liked having a pillow but wish I had packed my insulated coffee mug. I also think several old kitchen towels would have been nice to have for drying dishes and there are several clothes lines where damp items can be hung.

Steve & Susan Skrocki sent us several of their photos from their July trip. They had a wonderful trip.

Rick Boots not only enjoyed his trip to the Sanctuary, but held a local gallery opening this fall with both Tom Griffin, ADF&G & Mike Adams, FOMR discussing our roles in protecting the bears. Rick wrote later: I cannot tell you how much I appreciate the support you provided tonight and in the previous weeks for the Gallery Opening to benefit FOMR. There was a great mix of people on hand for the presentation. The attendance numbers ebbed and flowed well throughout the night. While canvas sales were moderate at best, that was just fine with me. The spirit I had going into this was to evangelize the Refuge and the Refuge system. I felt it was a tremendous success on those terms. Again, thanks to all and kudos for exemplifying above and beyond, once again, Rick rickbootsphoto.com

Steve Gustus wrote: Greetings from Australia. I was wondering if I could pick up some FOMR hats, Photo ID Fieldbook and join FOMR during my stopover through Anchorage to Homer? (When Mike agreed, he responded: ) Thanks very much for the offer to drop by the airport. It would be great to meet you and hopefully you will have time for coffee. I have been to McNeil before and feel very privileged to win another permit. My wife is busy with work and I will be travelling alone. I don’t need to do anything else in Anchorage as I have my waders and I will be doing food shopping in Homer. I will be flying in with Air Canada from Vancouver, due to arrive at 1411 and departing with Era at 1830. I will have my Australian mobile with me and as Ted Stevens Airport has wifi, I can call you using Skype when I arrive. I will also have email on my phone if you have any last minute issues. Thanks again for offering to meet up and for all you are doing with FOMR. Kind regards, Steve Gustus

Bruce Faanes wrote: McNeil is the most special place I've been at to date. I thank you, Tom Griffin & Larry, for giving me the opportunity to visit a very, very special place on the planet. Never been to a place on my 59 years on the planet where I think of it every day. Not just like you went on vacation and had a good time. McNeil is very unique. I filled-out the form for the McNeil lottery for next year. Hope it happens! (Bruce later wrote that he was interviewed by Madison, WI channel 15 news about his McNeil trip).

Ben Chui wrote: We had a great trip. Keep up the good work! We'll remember our bear trip for the rest of our lives.
(Two regional articles follow that do not currently nor directly affect the McNeil River Sanctuary, but expresses reviewers concerns regarding the Alaska Board of Game policies in regards to predator control in Alaska:)

Feb.8-15 Board of Game meeting in Wasilla, notes by Didier Lindsey, FOMR Board Director
At the recent BOG meeting concerning southwestern Alaska, 6 proposals were up for review that affected Unit 9. Of those 4 failed, and two were carried with amendments. Proposal 54 was to liberalize brown bear hunts to every year and to extend the seasons in the spring and fall. Only one part of this proposal was carried, spring bear season was expanded by 6 days to May 10. The current take is 1 bear every 4 years, one every year would have had a big impact. Proposal 59 was to establish limits for the number of applications per guide on Unimak Island. Up to 50 permits were allowed.

Of special note was proposal 58 brought by the National Parks Conservation Association. This proposal would have established a Katmai Preserve specific registration hunt for brown bears in Unit 9. They testified that for the last decade, brown bear harvests in Katmai Preserve have been over 100% over National Park Service management goals. This proposal would have made it easier for the NPS to control the hunt and keep it closer to their goals, which is less bears. The proposal failed. It is important to note how many more bears are being taken in Katmai Preserve. The Katmai Preserve is immediately west of the McNeil Refuge and northwest of the McNeil Sanctuary. Overall not many proposals specifically were aimed at Unit 9 and nothing was looking at McNeil River. For now.

Brown bears come under fire on the Kenai, and maybe moose along with them
At its March 2013 meeting the Alaska Board of Game unanimously approved a proposal to expand hunting of brown bears on the Kenai Peninsula, as well as approved shooting of brown bears at baiting stations. These are sites where bears, black or brown, are intentionally habituated over a period of time to feeding on dog food, doughnuts, old bread, rotten chicken, rotten turkey and other domestic products as well as heads, bones, guts and skin of fish or wildlife for the purposes of being shot. Because it can take a lot of food to consistently attract bears, the common practice is to employ a 55 gallon drum as the food container. Hunters are allowed to operate more than one baiting station.

Shooting brown bears at bear baiting stations has a short history. It was temporarily approved by the Board of Game in 2005 as part of a state predator-control program near Tok in eastern Alaska. The Board expanded approval in March 2012 to include shooting brown bears at baiting stations over vast areas of the interior.

At the March 2013 meeting the Board also extended the hunting season for brown bears on the Kenai. Regular hunting of brown bears will be permitted from September 1st through May 31st, while shooting over bait will be allowed from April 15th through June 30th including on the Kenai National Wildlife Refuge. An earlier requirement to restrict brown bear hunting through a lottery permit system was dropped.

The Board’s primary motivation for initiating such an aggressive increase in brown bear hunting on the peninsula is the result of biologists, using a combination of DNA analysis of hair samples and radio collaring, determining that there were about twice as many brown bears than biologists had earlier determined. While some might argue that the results indicate an increase in bear numbers, the more likely scenario is that the older estimates were inaccurate. Until these new techniques came along, attempts to assess brown bear numbers in a largely forested environment was speculative at best. For more details on the new findings go to www.fws.gov/uploadedFiles/Kenai_brown_bear_population_estimate_2012.pdf

In addition to increases in bear harvesting the Board of Game also approved making major cuts in wolf numbers, which together they see as a way to increase declining moose numbers on the Kenai. Many biologists have pointed out that the primary cause of moose decline is due to the moose not having enough willow, aspen and other forage to eat, not overhunting by predators. Most of the habitat has been taken over by spruce because of fire suppression. Moose don’t eat spruce.
Fire is a natural part of the ecology but, with increasing numbers of people living in scattered homes on the Kenai, as well as concerns over the resulting poor air quality over major areas including Anchorage, fire suppression has become necessary. The last major fire occurred in 1969. It created conditions for willow, aspen and birch to take hold, which led to a peak in moose forage in the late 1980’s. It has been in decline ever since, dragging moose numbers down with it. A disproportionate number of moose are malnourished, carry insufficient fat and exhibit poor musculature. They also produce lower than average numbers of twin calves, and drop higher numbers of calves later in the season, resulting in fewer calves being able to bulk up sufficiently before winter.

Both the Alaska Department of Fish and Game and the US Fish and Wildlife Service have advised the Board of Game that without substantial controlled burning or mechanical removal of the spruce forest to create more moose habitat, conditions for moose will continue to decline. By removing the sick and weak moose, including calves which bears mainly prey upon, the predators are slowing the decline in moose numbers by creating healthier, fewer moose to compete for the remaining albeit declining browse.

If the Board’s goal of sharply reducing the number of predators succeeds it will cause an increase in moose numbers, especially among calves. That is not good, as it may trigger a devastating decline in moose numbers during winter as they all try to survive on what little browse remains. Worse, it may also cause a more rapid decline in moose forage because of over browsing.

Dr. Paul Joslin, retired wildlife biologist

**POTS AND PANS** for McNeil River Base Camp have been Donated by Friends of McNeil River for use starting in summer, 2012. We have tried to help lighten folks load for flying to McNeil by donating 2 sets of “All-Clad” made in the USA, heavy duty, stainless-steel pots, pans, skillets, lids, oven mitts and a water kettle, plus high temperature utensils. This should help folks with their packing for the trip. Two stoves are already provided by F&G in the cookshack, and the older pots & skillets will be boxed & stored for emergency or high occupancy loads. The staff will instruct visitors in proper cleaning techniques to ensure a long life of use!

**McNeil River Hats:** We currently have about 15 colors available. We also have some knit stocking hats in a few colors-embroidered the same way. The cost for the hats are $20 each plus $2.50 each for postage and handling, unless picked up in Anchorage. Either mail a check to the PO Box below, or use the PayPal on our website with a follow-up email to let me know the particulars of your order and where to send it. They can also be picked up in Anchorage with some advance coordination by email or phone.

Hats and Fieldbooks may be available in Homer at the Pratt Museum, Beluga Air and Northwind Aviation.

**McNeil River Photo ID Fieldbook**
A **MUST HAVE** for everyone’s trip to McNeil!!!
(2010 Cover photography by Shawn Eggleston)

With the generous support of a Rasmuson Foundation Grant, FOMR was able to proceed with the publishing of the 2009 and 2010 Photo ID Fieldbooks. The Fieldbooks are a cooperative effort between the Alaska Department of Fish and Game and Friends of McNeil River. The first edition published in June 2009 was well received. The second edition was published in the
spring of 2010 with thirty-eight identified bears, new maps, and a more comprehensive photo guide of the plants of McNeil River. Both editions are available for sale through our website. www.mcneilbears.org. As nearly all the bears shown in the book still are seen in the Sanctuary, we will continue using this printing for visitor use in the park. The fieldbooks are available in basecamp with payments sent to FOMR by mail.

Our plan is that the project will help enable the enhancement of the development of the database that ADF&G has started. This might someday be one that includes census, age and gender mix of these bears. Additionally, information about specific animals and family bloodlines, unique physical characteristics, injuries, fishing styles, and timing of visits will also be tracked. In the future ADF&G may add genetic testing results to the database. Tom Griffin, Sanctuary Technician, has volunteered his time and photographic talent to the project. I believe the photographic talents of the new staffers that started in 2010 may also be enlisted for future editions, but time will tell on that. The photo below is a new one from Tom Griffin, 2012.

We look forward to your thoughts and comments on this exciting project! Thanks go to Tom, Shawn, Larry, Colleen, Mike, Joe, Ed, Doug and Lennie for all their collaborative efforts. We could not do it without your help. Special thanks too, to the staff and Board of the Rasmuson Foundation who put their faith and funding in FOMR and thereby are supporting the bears of McNeil River. This is a “Must Have” for your trip to McNeil River and is excellent as a gift for friends and family.

Don’t forget to visit our website for McNeil Wear clothing and gifts available from Café Press. http://mcneilbears.org/home/?page_id=145
Check out our new Facebook page at https://www.facebook.com/mcneilbears and “Like” us. Thank you.

Please “bear” with us as we are all volunteers and are trying to keep you informed as information becomes available. Thank you.