**Threats to McNeil River:** are reduced. See article inside for more information.

**2015 Permit Holders:** Third edition Photo ID books are highly recommended for use in the park and as mementos later on. We also sell a great hat for McNeil and a “River of Bears” DVD.

**2014 Spring Volunteer Project**
Volunteers and staff were successful in installing a new walkway in the Mikfik Sedge Flats area. See their report inside.

**2015 Spring Volunteer Project**
No volunteers were requested for the spring opening in 2015 – Sorry..

**Friends of McNeil River**
POB 231091, Anchorage, AK 99523-1091

---

**KEEP ME ON YOUR MAILING LIST!**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name:</th>
<th>Address:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>City:</td>
<td>State: Zip:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phone:</td>
<td>Email:</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*(emails are important to reduce our printing costs)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Membership</th>
<th>$35 Family</th>
<th>$50 Donor</th>
<th>$250 Generous Griz</th>
<th>$29 3rd Ed, ID book</th>
<th>$5 mail</th>
<th>$20 air</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>$100 Paw Patron</td>
<td>Photo ID Donation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**McNeil River “got bears?” hats:** ($20 FOMR)
- Hat-Color: ($3.00 mail) ($25 FOMR)
- Weatherguard Hat-Color

**“River of Bears” DVDs:** ($20 DVD + $3 shipping or Free DVD with $35+ Donation)

**Name on card**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Card No.</th>
<th>Exp. Date:</th>
<th>Code</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

| ( ) Yes, I want to be a Volunteer! | ( ) We are taking names for next spring’s volunteer opening (2016) |
| ( ) Administrative help | ( ) Board Member Applicant |

You can also visit our website at [www.mcneilbears.org](http://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. We do not share nor sell our membership list to any other parties.

If you move or change your email address, please drop us a note of the change so we can keep you informed on McNeil issues!

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

For Alaskans eligible for receiving the Permanent Fund Dividend, please consider giving a portion, up to all of it, to FOMR, through the Lovalaska: Pick.Click.Give Project when you file on-line this year and next. This can be
done anonymously, or let us know who you are & we’ll send you a tax deductible receipt around the end of the year!

**Major Air Carriers** servicing McNeil River from Homer are (others fly there too):
*Beluga Air, LLC*, 3409 Lambert Loop, Homer @ (907) 235-8256  
*Northwind Aviation*, 1170 Lake Shore Dr., Homer @ (907) 235-7482

**FOMR President 2015 Report by Mike Adams:**

- FOMR has had a busy year in 2014 and getting a good start here in 2015. We had a good turn-out for our April, 2014 annual meeting at Wilda Marston Theatre in the Loussac Library in Anchorage, Alaska. Tom Griffin, and Drew Hamilton made great presentations on the 2013 season and differing dominance styles of many of the more prevalent bears in the McNeil River State Game Sanctuary.

- We’ve heard that 2014 was a pretty good viewing season, with the fish arriving early in both watersheds and the bears catching on quite quickly that their dinner plans were changed. It was a good summer all around! See Tom’s article below.

- Late in 2013, we became informed that the governor of Alaska, Sean Parnell, had requested that the state staff rewrite all management plans of the 32 state sanctuaries, refuges, critical habitat areas and ranges under Administrative Order 266. Thankfully this effort was curtailed through an extensive write-in campaign to the media by many individuals and the involvement of publicly oriented, educationally supportive and active groups like FOMR. New administration was voted in last fall to the state government, and proponents of the rewrite program have been asked to move on to other positions. See the articles later in this newsletter for more information.

- We are now one of the proud sponsors of a very promising McNeil River video presentation which is being shown in the Anchorage UAA Planetarium’s “in-the-round theater”. The program has been developed by UAA Travis A, Rector, PhD, and videographer Jonathan VanBallenberger (Open Lens Productions). This is the first film ever made for this type of theater of this type of portrayal of wildlife. Tom Griffin, ADF&G, and other Sanctuary staffers assisted with the technical aspects of the film regarding bear activities. It has been well received and frequently the ADF&G McNeil staffers were available to do short presentations after the film was shown. Larry Aumiller was kind enough to allow the title of his book to be used for the film title. Each showing has been sold out shortly after dates and times are announced. We hope that you get a chance to view it when you are in town, and that eventually it will be able to be seen in similar theaters around the world. It is now also being shown on occasion in the Anchorage Museum Planetarium. The film is gaining world-wide acceptance. Talk it up and maybe it can be licensed to be shown in a Planetarium near you! A flat screen version is now available for purchase from us at our website, or by becoming a member with a membership donation greater than $35.

- Paul Joslin has stepped down as our Treasurer after many years of helping out on McNeil issues. Our VP, Didier Lindsey, accepted his new position of Treasurer. Lennie Gorsuch continues as our Secretary and advisor. We have contracted with Lila Vogt to help us with our accounting. We are having quarterly Board meetings to address issues.
Hello to everyone! This past summer was another great season at McNeil River State Game Sanctuary. We got some exciting new projects started and had, as always, an amazing summer with the visitors and bears. The season got off to an early start in mid-May when we headed out to begin work on a geoblock trail in the Mikfik sedge flats. This is something we had been working to achieve for the past couple of years, so it was great to see the project come about. For those of you who are used to the muddy trail through Mikfik, you will find the situation improved! After some trails research, it was determined that the geoblock would provide a stable walking surface while also allowing for the regrowth of sedge grasses. The grasses grow up through holes in the material and after several years the root system locks the geoblock in place. At least this is the theory and we are hoping to see improvement for visitors walking through Mikfik in the future. We were grateful to be able to get the project going with the help of some amazing volunteers. Thanks to Bob Halpin, Randy Armstrong and Brendan Barry. Both Bob & Randy were there as FOMR’s last minute volunteers, as funding for the project was late in being approved for this summer’s installation.

We were also extremely fortunate this summer to have Larry Aumiller and Polly Hessing filling in as temporary staff. It is always inspiring to learn from them and to have their level experience available to visitors (and staff!). Larry did an array of projects singlehandedly and worked on the geoblock trail, as well. Polly arrived later in the season and brought her wealth of knowledge. It was special to have them at McNeil this summer since both Polly and Larry each are exceptional on the ground with people and bears and have such a keen eye for detail with wildlife observations. Everyone has a lot to learn from them both.

And we were fortunate to have Drew Hamilton back this summer for a fifth season at the Sanctuary. Drew brings his sense of humor and a real talent for connecting with visitors, not to mention his guiding skills around bears.

The summer of 2014 was an unusual one in terms of timing. The sockeye salmon run in Mikfik Creek, which we commonly expect to see starting in mid-June, started early with fish appearing at the end of May. Imagine our surprise to see salmon jumping in the lagoon in late May! Visitors in the first time block were fortunate to see bears fishing Mikfik Creek. There was good bear activity for those first few weeks of June and then the run ended early, since it had begun early. The unusual timing of the season continued with an (also) early chum run in McNeil River. The fish came in sooner than usual and visitors were viewing bears at McNeil Falls during late June. By the second week of July, we were seeing our peak congregation of bears. August was a bit slower this year, due to the early chum run, and visitors experienced some rainy days mid-month. All in all though, it was another excellent summer of bear viewing at MRSGS.

As always, we had wonderful visitors during the 2014 season. Alaskans and people from all over the world continue to appreciate the uniqueness of McNeil River. And it is always nice to host visitors from other bear viewing locations in Alaska. This summer we were fortunate to have staff out from Brooks Falls in Katmai, from
Pack Creek on Admiralty Island in the Kootznoowoo Wilderness (Fortress of the Bear!), and from Anan Creek Wildlife Observatory. Staff and visitors had the opportunity to share stories and experiences unique to these bear viewing areas. It is great to learn from other people who also spend their summers viewing bears. It affords the public a chance to hear about other special places for wildlife viewing.

And on that note, we had another special summer with our wildlife observations. In addition to the bears, we had an amazing day watching a gray wolf chase fish in Mikfik creek. We did not observe any fish caught, but the wolf was active off and on for several hours. It was an exciting viewing opportunity! We also were interested to observe Caspian terns flying and vocalizing in the lagoon for several days in July. And perhaps the most interesting sighting was actually caught on film by the research camera at Mikfik Lake – the first documented black bear in the Sanctuary.

All in all, it was a wonderful season. Thanks to everyone behind the scenes for their hard work and dedication to MRSGS, especially Ed Weiss and Joe Meehan! We are looking forward to the Summer of 2015.

Cheers, Tom Griffin

**ADF&G has an open position at McNeil:** Job #07758 – Contact Ed Weiss if you’re a highly skilled bear guide seeking a shot at the third staff position this summer at McNeil. Closes 4/24. More at: [Workplace Alaska](#)

**2016 is McNeil River’s 50th anniversary:** keep your eyes open for events and activities!

**McNeil Weather**
If you are interested in weather data available from an on-site weather station erected in 2012 (and still operational), 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 (just above base camp)." [http://www.wcc.nrcs.usda.gov/nwcc/site?sitenum=1191&state=ak](http://www.wcc.nrcs.usda.gov/nwcc/site?sitenum=1191&state=ak)
Visitors and Volunteers
We can’t survive without volunteers and we can always use some help. As mentioned above, we had two volunteers last year for the Spring, 2014, camp opening. We received notification just prior to the trip that F&G had finally secured funding for materials for a small robust crew to install partially submerged geo-grid pathway blocks in the sedge flats. We had to choose in a short period of time from a limited number of folks that had previously submitted their names for consideration, if a project presented itself. A short trial section had been installed previously and has held up well to the winter storms.

Perhaps you’d like to be considered to be a volunteer in opening camp in 2016, or helping us administratively or becoming a new Board member. If so, please contact us on our website comments page or on page two of this newsletter. There has to be projects needed in camp, in order for volunteers to be needed, so no guarantees until we hear in the spring from F&G if a need is there or not.

All of our Board of Directors and Officers are volunteers and many of us have been holding down positions for many years. We would like to encourage others to step forward to help us run this wonderful organization.

Volunteer Trip Reports from 2014:
Email from Bob Halpin on 5/27/2014

Mike-
I am short for time with an overloaded work calendar but did want to let you know the project went very well. The geo-block is installed and only a minor amount of tweaking will be performed by the resident McNeil staff. I personally believe this will be immensely beneficial regarding preservation of the terrain through the Mifik estuary.
Thanks for the wonderful opportunity. OH- and the bears are ubiquitous and the red salmon run is on as of the rising tide yesterday afternoon....very early

Bob

From: Randy Armstrong
Sent: Friday, May 30, 2014 12:23 PM

Hey Mike,
Just thought I’d give you a quick recap of our successful McNeil trip. We couldn’t have scripted it any better; flights went as planned, the weather couldn’t be topped, and we got a lot of projects accomplished, including the geoblock to completion. Plus had plenty of wildlife action!

Bob and I left Anchorage with ample time to not have to hurry to get to Homer. No matter how often we make the drive, we still comment about the high quality of scenery.

We did start out the week with some slight hiccups though. Tom and Larry were to fly out with us on Beluga Air Monday evening, but just as Bob and I drove into Homer I received a phone call from Tom that their state truck broke down near Ninilchik. We had just enough time to allow Bob and I to unload our gear at Beluga from my Subaru so I could race back to pick up Tom, Larry, and their gear and still make our 6:30pm flight departure. Hiccup number two though was we had too much weight for the Beaver, so Larry offered to stay behind and travel with the barge. Flying conditions were perfect, unlimited visibility and ceiling, with Augustine and Iliamna displaying their mass.
Tom was immediately struck by the lack of snow as we first flew over camp, despite arriving earlier than he usually does. We even happened to spook a bear out of camp! Our first bear sighting already, boy that got Bob and I excited as we didn’t know if we’d arrive too early for any viewing to be had.

We went right to work that evening, unloading our gear and relaying everything to the areas in front of Tom’s cabin and the cook cabin. Ratchets and sockets were distributed immediately so we could remove the boarded window and door coverings from the cabins and get our gear inside. It felt good to return here again, and interesting to see how the camp fares over winter. With gear stowed we continued to remove more of the protective window and door coverings.

I had my first encounter with a bear that evening while removing lag bolts from the window at the back of the cook cabin. He was just curious enough to want to check out the ratcheting noise, came by quietly, and ambled along through camp, giving us our first interruption while raising our awareness.

The bear seemed like he just needed to satisfy his curiosity about the new noises that came along with these spring intruders. He sniffed a bit, moved along, and we never had another bear in camp for the remainder of our stay. Some did explore the perimeter of camp on the lagoon side a few times, but seemed to respect the camp space.
Tuesday morning had Bob and I jump right into action making general repairs. The next two days we tried to accomplish as much as possible prior to the barge arriving so then we could devote the remainder of our stay to the geoblock trail project. We spent Tuesday and Wednesday making outhouse improvements, removing all the covers from stove stacks and giving all the stovepipes a cleaning with the chimney brushes we reconnected all the systems of hoses and containers to catch rain water, got a generator running, removed a couple of stoves that were to be replaced, and even spruced up Tom’s cabin a bit. And Wednesday evening the barge arrived as scheduled! It was good to see Larry, Drew, and Brendan were in good spirits. The waters were calm for their trip, and mentioned their excitement at seeing killer whales, Dall’s porpoises, and I believe a bowhead whale. Six guys plus a deckhand made quick work of unloading all the gear onto the beach.

That evening was spent shuttling a summer’s worth of supplies, everything but the decking, into the cabins. The toughest challenge was the new 400lb stove for Drew’s cabin, but with enough muscle it went well. With time spent moving in and getting settled, we then prepared for some sampling of just how the decking project might progress. Other than the extended section of trail Tom wanted to cover near Mikfik, there were a couple of muddy sections by the dune he thought to test as well. Could we have had nicer weather? And more bears were gradually appearing.
With the initial attempt a success, we were ready to progress to the larger project. As a team we got the skiff into the lagoon and the motor mounted, Tom and Drew had set up the boat’s anchoring system. Now the boat could be used to transfer decking from the beach in front of camp to the Mikfik trail site. Let the games begin....

With the first skiff-load of decking and 2x4’s in place, we got into assembly mode, making four section segments to place.

We assembled the initial load, and had them all laid in place by the end of the day. Here’s a view of the trail as the segments are placed at the onset. We still needed to assemble the remaining decking, place them, with wood blocks level them, then with duckbills secure them. Knowing the remaining scope we really went into assembly line action the following day to complete it all.

Bob and I left satisfied that the project was accomplished, with just some minor enhancements to do. The path was in place, leveled, secured, and felt good underfoot as you hiked it. I’m sure the crew out there will do a little tweaking. As we flew out Wes was courteous enough to fly over the trail area, so I snapped a few aerial shots of the section to show the continuous path.
Mike, thanks for giving Bob and I the opportunity to contribute. We’ve had so much pleasure from our previous trips to McNeil as viewers that it was gratifying to pay back a little. That’s not to say it was pure work either; both Tom and Drew were really gracious to escort us about for plenty of bear viewing as a daily reward. By the time we left there were usually about six bears visible at a time daily. And we experienced a variety of behavior, not just grazing on the sedge grass, but clamming and some play between bears as well. A bonus was a fox in camp one day, harrier sightings often, and seeing the reds coming in on the day we departed.

If there’s going to be a continuation of projects in the future, please think of us as we’d both like to repeat with additional help. I think Tom was pleased with our efforts and accomplishments, so he’d probably give us the thumbs up. I’m glad to have helped the guys out and hope to have represented FOMR well.

Randy

THREATS TO MCNEIL RIVER AND OTHER ALASKAN SPECIAL USE AREAS:
by Mike Adams, President of FOMR

Whether you’re an Alaskan or not, and if you fish, hunt or otherwise recreate in this incredible state, you need to learn about what was going on previously behind closed doors by reading last years’ newsletter and associated press releases.

Governor Parnell’s plans for Alaska have been changed and our new Governor, Bill Walker, is working on picking up the pieces and putting everything back in order. We are encouraged and hoping that this will be an effective recovery! It was scary for almost two years, but we are hopeful now that the Management Plans previously and meticulously prepared prior to this recent boondoggle, will continue to be a guide for future operations in McNeil River and the other 31 Special Use areas around the state.

ROUND ISLAND CLOSURE - A WAKE UP CALL: The 2014 decision by the Alaska Department of Fish & Game to close Round Island State Game Sanctuary during last year should be a wake-up call for all members of Friends of McNeil River as well as for everyday Alaskans and friends of the out of doors. The new Governor has allowed a partial season for 2015, but we’re not sure what happens after that. Several civilly minded groups recently pulled together some private funding to help keep the Sanctuary open longer. It is unfortunate that the state is willing to turn its back on the oldest and first state game refuge, considered one of the finest places in the world to safely observe pacific walrus. A fledgling group is now on Facebook called Walrus Advocates of Round Island Sanctuary. The state seems to be taking a position that it will not defend wildlife resources that do not turn a profit. We hope that this sister group can indeed continue to make a difference in protecting this asset.

POTS AND PANS for McNeil River Base Camp have been Donated by Friends of McNeil River for use starting in summer, 2012. We hope that visitors enjoy them and the fact they don’t have to transport cookware in their travels!
McNeil River Hats($20): We currently have about 15 colors available. This year we have a couple of hat colors available in a weather resistant hat ($25). We also have some knit stocking hats in a few colors-embroidered the same way and at the same $20 price as the rest of the caps. Please add $2.50 each for postage and handling, unless picked up in Anchorage or one of the following locations. 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, Northwind Aviation and Steller Air.

3rd Edition, McNeil River Photo ID Fieldbook
This is a MUST HAVE for everyone’s trip to McNeil!!!
(3rd Edition Cover photography by Drew Hamilton)

With the generous support of a Rasmuson Foundation Grant, FOMR published the original 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. Both of the first two editions published in 2009 and 2010 were well received. The second edition was published with thirty-eight identified bears, new maps, and a more comprehensive photo guide of the plants of McNeil River. Books are available for sale through our website. www.mcneilbears.org. To be fiscally responsible, we are recycling approximately 200 of the unsold 2nd editions by adding a new cover, adding additional information on which of the bears formerly in the book are no longer seen regularly and adding two new bears. The 3rd edition fieldbooks are available for purchase on-line, by calling 907-244-4041 at some Homer air carriers, and in basecamp with payments sent to FOMR by mail.

We look forward to your thoughts and comments on this exciting project! Thanks go to Tom, Shawn, Larry, Colleen, Mike, Joe, Ed, Doug, Lennie and Drew for all their collaborative efforts. We could not do it without your help. This is a “Must Have” for your trip to McNeil River and is excellent as a gift for friends and family.

Legacy Donations: We received our first this year and encourage you to include FOMR in your will for sharing in your after-life distributions of life savings. Thank you very much!!!!

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 very much for caring for the bears of McNeil River.

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

2015 Friends of McNeil River Newsletter
POB 231091, Anchorage, AK 99523-1091
Contact: Mike@mcneilbears.org or visit our website at http://www.mcneilbears.org/