

Friends can make all the difference to Kenai National Wildlife Refuge

by Amy George

It seems like everybody could use a friend at one time or another. Believe it or not, even the federal government needs friends. You might not realize it, but federal land is probably in your backyard.

Maybe you've taken summer guests fishing on the Upper Kenai River, hiking on Skyline Trail, on a float plane to Tustumena Lake, or canoeing along the Swanson River. If you've done any of these outdoor activities, you've recreated on Kenai National Wildlife Refuge, which is public federal land. Public lands are here for you to enjoy.

The Refuge covers nearly 2,000,000 acres of the Kenai Peninsula. If all of that land was privately owned, you might not be able to access your favorite fishing spot. You might not be able to hunt moose at Mystery Creek or Bear Creek or Moose Creek. There would be no Skyline Trail. Life would be very different.

But when the Federal Government (Washington D.C.) makes decisions about public lands that are unpopular, it often becomes difficult to see a difference between Kenai National Wildlife Refuge and Washington D.C., which is why Kenai National Wildlife Refuge needs friends.

Friends of the Refuge, by raising public awareness of the Kenai National Wildlife Refuge, can bridge the gap between the Refuge and the broader community. Friends that have a mission to support and work with the Refuge can become advocates for the Refuge. In return, these Friends can better involve the broader community with the Refuge.

Friends of Kenai National Wildlife Refuge is a public, non-profit organization made up of citizens from all over the Kenai Peninsula who share a passion for our public lands, and especially for the Kenai National Wildlife Refuge. Their mission is to "conserve the unique natural, cultural and recreational values of Kenai National Wildlife Refuge and to promote awareness of its importance to the surrounding communities."

This diverse group will be directly involved with the Refuge and the surrounding communities in a variety of ways, from building trails and preserving historical sites, to assisting with wildlife and plant surveys, to developing more public involvement programs.

Anyone can join Friends of Kenai National Wildlife Refuge, which is a public, non-profit group. All meetings are open to the public. There are no "hidden agendas," no "anti" sentiments toward one Refuge land use or another. Rather, Friends of Kenai National Wildlife Refuge hopes to ensure that our community feels a sense of ownership in the Refuge, thus becoming good stewards and advocates of all our public lands.

If you would like more information about the Friends group, call Amy George at 262-7021.

Amy George is the volunteer coordinator at the [Kenai National Wildlife Refuge](#). She has been well-known to Kenai-Soldotna area students and teachers since 1993 from her former role as Fire Education coordinator for the Refuge.