

Mother nature leaves Refuge fishing facility unusable

by Bill Kent



Ice damage photo at Moose Range Meadows fishing facility. Credit: Jim Neely/USFWS.



Ice damage to stringers and pilings at Moose Range Meadows fishing facility Photo Credit: Jim Neely/USFWS

Everyone living here on the Kenai Peninsula knows the Kenai River is an unrivaled resource for the local community. The thought of landing a record King salmon or a monster trout lures folks from around the country and indeed the entire world. Fishing on the river has always been popular, and the opportunities for harvesting the unparalleled fishery resources in the river are numerous and varied.

Visitors came from all walks of life and many countries to fish the Kenai. A variety of facilities have been constructed along the river in the past few years to reduce (and hopefully eliminate) the loss of river-

bank vegetation resulting from trampling by fishermen. Thousands of visitors have utilized these facilities each year, and the riverbank generally has been protected from excessive trampling.

However, damage resulting from the flood of this winter has impacted many of these fishing facilities along the river, and Kenai Refuge's Moose Range Meadows facility was no exception. The ice floes stacked along the riverbanks in this area heavily damaged the support structures which underlie the light-penetrating walkways. Many of the six-inch pilings were twisted or bent, and a number of the 4x8 stringers were carried away.

Now that the ice has finally melted off, the Refuge staff has requested an inspection by our Engineering office in Anchorage. This will provide an evaluation of the damages and an estimated cost of replacement. Once the results are provided to us, we can request funds to get these facilities repaired and returned to public use. The Moose Range Meadows access boardwalks were constructed with funds derived from a variety of partnerships and had the strong support of Senator Stevens. However, no funds are available at this time to repair these structures, as budgets for the entire Department of the Interior including the Refuge System have not kept pace with the rising costs of utilities and other fixed costs over the past few years.

When we take all those factors into consideration, it becomes clear that the facilities will not be repaired this year, and may not get fixed for a few years since the work far exceeds the Refuge's annual maintenance budget, not just for one year but many, many years; repairs will occur only through "special" funding. Another facet of the repairs is that the original work was done in winter to protect sensitive riverbank vegetation and soils; repair work would follow the same criteria. This means a multi-season, if not multi-year, project to remove the damaged structures and construct new facilities.

We are hopeful that repairs can be accomplished as quickly as possible, and are trying to determine what "emergency" funds may be available for such a large project. We will keep you posted in the coming months of our success or failure. Please, rest assured

that we want the facility repaired as quickly as possible and available once again to you and other Refuge visitors.

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Refuge. The Kent's live in Sterling. Previous Refuge Previous Refuge Notebook columns can be viewed on the Web at <http://www.fws.gov/refuge/kenai/>.