

Leaving the Kenai!

by Jim Hall



Photo of Jim Hall. Photo credit: Robin West/USFWS

After living in one of the most beautiful places on Earth for the last 7+ years, and working at one of the most exciting National Wildlife Refuges in the United States, I will be leaving the Deputy Refuge Manager position of the Kenai NWR on November 25, 2007. I'm leaving the Kenai for an exciting job opportunity in Washington, D.C. as the new Chief of the Branch of Law Enforcement Operations for the National Wildlife Refuge System.

With this new job opportunity will come many new experiences, and many regrets from leaving such a special place. The Kenai NWR truly is one of the "Crown Jewels" of the National Wildlife Refuge System, and I will miss working and living here.

What will I miss the most about the Kenai? Besides

the stark beauty of the Peninsula, I will miss the people the most. The employees of the Kenai NWR are some of the most dedicated, professional and hard working folks that I have ever had the opportunity to be associated with. Their efforts, everyday, make the Kenai NWR one of the top places in Alaska where people like to come and visit. I appreciate all of their hard work and dedication. Another that I will miss will be my boss, Refuge Manager Robin West. Robin is one of the most competent and professional managers in the entire National Wildlife Refuge System, and I can honestly say that I have gained as a leader by working for him.

Then there's all of the others. Those men and women working for the Kenai Peninsula Borough, Alaska Dept. of Fish & Game, the Kenai Fish & Wildlife Field office, Alaska State Parks, and Division of Natural Resources, USFWS Regional Office and other Service field stations, EPA, the Kenai River Center, Alaska State Troopers, Alaska State Forestry, the Chugach National Forest, Kenai Fiords National Park, Alaska Fire Service and others. You folks help make the Kenai the special place that it is, and you keep it safe for us and our children! Thank You!

I also want to thank all of the folks that I have worked with through the years that are outside government agencies: Marathon Oil, Chevron Texaco, UNOCAL, Chugach Electric, Homer Electric, Alaska Dept. of Transportation, Federal Highways, and the numerous contractors that work for these and other groups. Thanks for being willing to look and think "outside the box" on resource issues that affected the Refuge and your groups. It has been a pleasure working with you!

There have been many high points in my stay here in Alaska, but the ones that stand out the most include: leading the Service for the Refuge System Centennial Celebration in 2003, and celebrating the day with 3,000 friends and partners at the Ninilchik State Fair Grounds; working with multiple state, federal, local and private partners to develop a program to mitigate wildlife/ vehicle collisions on the Sterling Highway to try and protect people and critters; and planning and assisting in the transition and development

of the management divisions for the Refuge. There were many, many other notable events that transpired while I was here at the Kenai including my involvement in the large wildfires that have occurred in the last few years, but, alas, I'm running out of room in my article!

I will be trading vistas of mountains and lakes for historic buildings and museums, the Sterling Highway for the D.C. Metro, and wildlife for another form of wildlife altogether. With that said, I will miss the Kenai, and look forward to new adventures.

In closing, know that I have very much enjoyed my stay here in Alaska (It was always a life dream for me to come to Alaska), and that I will stay in touch with a

great many of you. For well over a hundred years folks have talked about the resources of the Kenai Peninsula, and the need to protect those resources (e.g., *Outdoor Life*, 1898). The Kenai Refuge finally came into existence in 1941, and the Refuge is now over 66 years old! My grandson was born at the Central Peninsula General Hospital in June of 2006, and I trust the lands and critters of the Kenai NWR will still be here for his grandchildren to enjoy when they grow up. Farewell!

Jim Hall and his wife Elaine moved to the Kenai National Wildlife Refuge in 2000 from St. Catherine Creek National Wildlife Refuge in Natchez, Mississippi. Previous Refuge Previous Refuge Notebook columns can be viewed on the Web at <http://www.fws.gov/refuge/kenai/>.