

Secretary Salazar Presents Awards to The Nature Conservancy in Alaska *The Conservancy and Partners Share Conservation Honor*

ANCHORAGE — The Nature Conservancy in Alaska shares in two Partners in Conservation Awards presented by Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar in Washington, D.C. today. The Conservancy and its partners were honored for their roles in the Rat Island Seabird Restoration Project as well as the Southwest Alaska Salmon Habitat Partnership.

“These awards recognize the work of the Conservancy and its partners to achieve lasting conservation results in Alaska,” said Randy Hagenstein, director of The Nature Conservancy in Alaska. “Collaborative conservation is making a difference in Bristol Bay and the Aleutian Islands, and similar collaborative efforts underway across Alaska are protecting and restoring the healthy lands and waters for people and wildlife.”

The U.S. Department of the Interior Partners in Conservation Awards recognize conservation achievements resulting from the cooperation and participation of individual landowners; citizens’ groups; private sector and nongovernmental organizations; and tribal, federal and state governments.

“The Partners in Conservation Awards demonstrate that our greatest conservation legacies often emerge when stakeholders, agencies, and citizens from a wide range of backgrounds come together to address shared challenges,” Salazar said.

Southwest Alaska Salmon Habitat Partnership

The Conservancy and The Conservation Fund helped form the Southwest Alaska Salmon Habitat Partnership with a range of public and private partners. The partnership’s mission is to protect wild salmon habitat in a region of more than 62,000 square miles, which includes the Bristol Bay watershed and portions of the lower Kuskokwim River watershed. In a region with a mix of so many private and public landowners, the salmon habitat partnership is especially effective at protecting salmon.

“The Alaska Salmon partnership’s record of accomplishment in preserving fish and wildlife habitat is nothing short of extraordinary,” Salazar said. “Since 2001, more than 70 diverse partners from tribal, state, federal and private entities have come together to conserve and protect 94,000 acres of habitat including rivers that are prime spawning grounds for salmon and other fish.”

Since its creation in 2008, the Southwest Salmon Habitat Partnership has led efforts to research and file for in-stream flow reservations on the Stuyahok and Mulchatna rivers and Kaskanak Creek. This continues the work that began in 2000 with the habitat partnership’s predecessor, the Southwest Alaska Conservation Coalition, which raised \$30 million for conservation.

“The salmon habitat partnership has become the forum, in the absence of any other, in which all landowners in Southwest Alaska can work together to achieve real protection for salmon habitat,” said Tim Troll, who directs the Conservancy’s program in Southwest Alaska. “With this infusion of support, we’re able to imagine a future in Bristol Bay that emphasizes cooperative land and resource management in the way Gov. Jay Hammond envisioned.”

Rat Island Seabird Restoration Project

Along with Alaska Maritime National Wildlife Refuge and Island Conservation, the Conservancy helped lead the effort to bring back dozens of native bird species by eradicating a population of non-native, invasive Norway rats on a remote island in the Aleutians. Invasive rats have pillaged seabird nests here since they first spilled from a 1780’s shipwreck.

“In the Aleutians, colonies of seabirds such as puffins and auklets are like the biological engine that keep these rich systems humming,” says Steve MacLean, director of the Conservancy’s Bering Sea program. “An Aleutian Island without seabirds is missing something vital.”

The September, 2008, field mission to the ten-square-mile Rat Island was the most ambitious island habitat restoration project ever undertaken in the northern hemisphere, involving helicopters and the R/V Tiglax.

Alaska’s Aleutian Islands are home to 50 million seabirds, making this far-flung archipelago one of North America’s 10 birding hotspots — and the best seabird habitat in North America.

The Rat Island restoration is one example of new global efforts to eradicate invasive species in otherwise healthy island ecosystems. Invasive rats have been introduced to about 90 percent of the world’s islands and are responsible for 40 percent to 60 percent of all recorded island bird and reptile extinctions.



Subsistence fishing at Bristol Bay’s Kakanak Beach © Clark James Mishler



Rat Island Seabird Restoration © Steve Ebbert/USFWS