Portage Lake Protection Project, Afognak Island

Prepared by Great Land Trust

March 27, 2018

Property Name:	Portage Lake
Owner:	Natives of Kodiak – Surface, Koniag, Inc - Subsurface
Agency Sponsor:	Alaska Department of Natural Resources
Acreage	Estimated 2880 acres
Appraised Value:	To be determined upon completion of appraisal – Appraisal expected to be finalized by May 2018
Funding Request	To be determined upon completion of appraisal – Not to exceed $11,500,000, including due diligence and closing costs

Overview:

The Portage Lake project was previously approved for purchase by the Council for $8,500,000 (Council Resolution 16-02). Significant work has proceeded toward completing this purchase, but changes in the timber market have resulted in a higher than estimated total purchase price of up to $11,500,000. The requested amount would reauthorize purchase of the Portage Lake property and increase the amount up to a total of $11,500,000, subject to the final appraised value. The final purchase may proceed in two phases as determined by a survey that is presently underway.

The project encompasses approximately 2880 acres surrounding Portage Lake on northern Afognak Island. The property is contiguous to Portage Lake, Portage Creek and the Portage Creek Estuary in Discoverer Bay. The Portage Lake property is accessed by float plane at Portage Lake, the existing road network on Afognak Island, or by boat in Discoverer Bay.

As described in the Proposed Management section, this property on Afognak Island will be managed by the State of Alaska, Department of Natural Resources and consistent with the management of Afognak Island State Park. Natives of Kodiak owns the surface estate and Koniag, Inc. owns the subsurface rights to the property. This acquisition involves the surface estate. The fair market value of property will be determined by an appraisal compliant with EVOSTC, USPAP, and UASFLA appraisal standards and reviewed by a State of Alaska approved review appraiser. Closing may be in two stages with the approval of the parties.

The Kodiak Archipelago contains high-priority habitat for EVOS species recovery and habitat protection. Protection of this large, ecologically-rich area contiguous to other EVOSTC protection projects would contribute to EVOSTC mission of ecosystem and species recovery and maintenance in the Kodiak Archipelago. EVOS-affected species in the Kodiak archipelago are dependent on the coastal, riverine, wetland, and upland habitats provided by the Portage Lake property. Protection of Portage Lake would complete a contiguous protected wildlife corridor between Afognak Island State Park and the Red Peak unit of the Kodiak Island National Wildlife Refuge for fish, shore birds, sea birds, migratory birds, and terrestrial and marine mammal species.

Protection of Portage Lake builds on Past Council Actions:

The Portage Lake protection project furthers the efforts of past EVOS Trustee Council actions focusing on Afognak Island.

In 1993, with Council support, the State acquired surface title to 41,549 acres on northern Afognak Island. This mature spruce forest is adjacent to highly productive marine waters, includes anadromous fish streams, and provides excellent habitat for bald eagles and marbled murrelet nesting. In 1994, the Alaska State Legislature designated these lands as the Afognak Island State Park.

In 1998, with Council support, the Afognak Joint Venture (AJV) transferred to the state and federal governments surface title to approximately 41,376 acres of land on northern Afognak Island and easements on an additional 400 acres.

In 2016, with Council support, the Ouzinkie Native Corporation transferred to State and federal governments surface title to 36,364 acres of land on northern Afognak Island and the Triplet Islands to be managed for conservation purposes. The Portage Lake property is directly adjacent to the lands acquired from Ouzinke.

Property Description and Habitat:

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service identifies Afognak Island among the most productive habitat in the Gulf of Alaska. The Portage Lake lands contain saltwater and freshwater access points, approximately three river and stream miles, and one navigable lake. Of the three river and stream miles, each of the miles support anadromous species identified in the Alaska Department of Fish and Game's Anadromous Waters Catalogue, including four species of Pacific salmon. This includes Portage Lake, which is a sockeye system. The property contains three miles of coastline in Discoverer Bay serving coastal wildlife communities such as seabirds identified as EVOS-affected species, Steller sea lions and sea otters. Fish and Wildlife Service's National Wetlands Inventory shows the property contains approximately 750 acres of wetland habitat. The Portage Lake lands also contain Sitka Spruce, salmonberry, and blueberry, among other native plant species. The property contains a mix of virgin forest and land where the timber has been harvested. The property is unimproved except for logging roads.

Restoration Benefits:

A number of EVOS-affected species would benefit from the protection of the Portage Lake property, including Pigeon Guillemots, sea otters, cutthroat trout, sockeye salmon, pink salmon, Dolly Varden, and bald eagles. Protection of Portage Lake would provide permanent habitat protection for these species and assist the EVOSTC in reaching and maintaining its recovery objectives in the Kodiak Archipelago.

The Portage Lake property also contains significant wetlands, including Fish and Wildlife Service-identified nationally declining wetlands. Significant portions of these wetlands are functionally connected. Estuarine wetlands on or adjacent to the property provide habitat for Intertidal Communities and other EVOS-affected species. Marine wetlands provide habitat for Subtidal Communities. Palustrine wetlands filter water entering lakes and streams used by fish and bird Injured Species. Palustrine and riverine wetlands also provide spawning habitat for sockeye salmon, pink salmon, and Dolly Varden. Protection of the property would assure high function of these wetlands, which would benefit EVOS-affected species.

The Portage Lake lands connect a habitat corridor between the Afognak Island State Park with the recent Ouzinkie Native Corporation protection and the Kodiak Island National Wildlife Refuge. These lands provide essential habitat and migratory grounds for more than 250 species of fish, birds, and mammals. The natural abundance and wild setting attract thousands of visitors to the Wildlife Refuge and State Park annually; addition of this property would benefit recreation and tourism, which were also identified by the EVOSTC as an Injured Service. In addition, the purchase of the property would benefit subsistence harvest levels, which is identified as an Injured Human Service.

Potential Threats:

Conservation of Portage Lake would eliminate the threat of future habitat fragmentation, road construction, subdivision, development and industrialization of northern Afognak Island. Without this purchase, these lands could be available for subdivision of recreational parcels around Portage Lake and sale of timber on the property like much of the adjacent land.

Conserving contiguous tracts of land reduces habitat fragmentation and thus removes barriers to species mobility. Species' ability to freely move across landscapes ensures a greater rate of reproductive success, greater access to food, and more opportunity to establish territory in higher-quality habitat. When populations experience barriers to reproduction, they are at greater risk of experiencing a decline in genetic diversity, and a decrease in genetic diversity decreases a population's ability to adapt to a changing environment and can increase the effect of deleterious alleles on the population. Conserving contiguous tracts of lands also protects pathways between resources. Ample access to resources reduces species stress and makes them less susceptible to disease and starvation.

Proposed Management:

Alaska Department of Natural Resources; conservation easement to the US/BLM.

Funding Request:

To be determined upon completion of appraisal – Not to exceed $11,500,000, including due diligence and closing costs.

Natives of Kodiak Land - Portage Lake, Afognak Island - Proposed New Boundary Map

Subject Property | Section Lines | Roads

Protected Area | Past EVOS Action | Anadromous Waterbody

Imagery: Esri et al. Captured 9.16.2010
Map Prepared: 9.14.2017

0 0.5 1 Miles

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Great Land Trust
EVOS Habitat Prioritization

Photo: Portage Creek

Photo: Portage Lake looking north to Discoverer Bay, Northern Afognak Island