



Photo by Natalie Sopinka

2023 Kenai Peninsula Fish Habitat Science Symposium

Final Report



Compiled by Melissa Smith, KPFHP Coordinator

Summary: The 2023 Kenai Peninsula Fish Habitat Science Symposium was held on April 20-21, at the Kenai Visitor Center. This year's symposium was co-hosted by the Kenai Peninsula Fish Habitat Partnership (KPFHP) and the Kenai Peninsula Cooperative Invasive Species Management Area (KP-CISMA).



The mission of the KPFHP is to protect, maintain, restore, and enhance fish habitat. The symposium helps realize this mission by creating space for collaboration between the many agencies and organizations doing fish habitat work across the Kenai Peninsula. Collaboration is crucial to reduce redundancy in research, fill information gaps, allow for resource sharing, generate new ideas, and connect with diverse stakeholders and decision-makers to ensure healthy salmon habitat persists into the future. The KPFHP has hosted this symposium every other year since 2010; however this was our first in-person event since 2019.



Synopsis: The symposium was kicked off with a welcoming talk by Kenai Borough Mayor Peter Micciche. Dr. Peter Westley, Associate Professor, College of Fisheries and Ocean Science, University of Alaska Fairbanks delivered the keynote address titled “Some modest advice for managers and practitioners: key lessons from salmon conservation science”.

Photo: KPB Mayor, Peter Micciche delivers the welcoming remarks.

The remainder of the symposium consisted of 28 additional technical talks from individuals working in various aspects of fish habitat around the Kenai Peninsula Borough. Topics included proactive conservation, water quality, invasive species, outreach, historic and social-ecological perspectives, and more. Future development projects were presented, such as the City of Soldotna's Riverfront Redevelopment Project, and the Sterling Highway MP 157-169 Rehabilitation. While an independent scholar, Shana Loshbaugh, presented a historical view of the Kenai Peninsula's ecology and its fisheries.

Two sessions were dedicated to invasive species, where presenters gave updates on the current status of invasive species in our region, such as reed canary grass, european green crab, northern pike, and more.

Another highlight was a panel discussion, Translating Science to Policy, which included multiple local researchers and representatives of various levels of government. Acknowledging that turning good science into policy can be complicated and confusing, this panel took an in depth look at the process and existing barriers.



Translating Science to Policy Panel Discussion

The symposium also included a poster session and two poetry readings from Steve Schoonmaker, a local poet and commercial fishermen. An evening social was held at the Kenai River Brewery on April 20, offering attendees additional networking opportunities. A total of 97 people attended the two day symposium. Participants included representatives of state, federal, and local government, academic institutions, tribal organizations, and nonprofits.



Photo: Hal Shepard presents on "A Vision for a Resilient Kachemak Bay Watershed".



Sverine Bentz and Katherine Schake presenting Coowe Walker with a service recognition plaque.

Post Symposium Survey:

- ❖ 31 completed surveys were received.
- ❖ 94% said they learned something new they would apply in the future.
- ❖ There were 23 positive comments indicating that networking and project updates were the most worthwhile aspects of the symposium.
- ❖ Few criticisms were reported overall. One participant stated the audio needed improvements. Another said they wanted to see more of a diversity of presenters.
- ❖ All respondents indicated that the symposium increased their understanding of fish habitat and local research, enhanced their ability to access information and connect with other practitioners, and motivated them to participate in research on the Kenai Peninsula.
- ❖ Most said they would like to continue to see a symposium every other year.



Steve Schoonmaker sharing his poetry.



Adam Cross presents on a major habitat restoration project on Resurrection Creek.