

HEALTHY RIPARIAN INITIATIVE: ENHANCING WATERSHED HEALTH IN THE MAT-SU BOROUGH

Protecting and restoring riparian zones for ecological balance

Presented By: Elise Blocker, AICP
MSB Project Manager: Paul Clark, Long Range Planner



AGENDA

- Welcome and Introduction
- What are Watersheds? Riparian Areas?
- The challenges in the Mat-Su
- Why we should act
- How you can help
- Community Engagement
- Test your Knowledge
- Call to Action



WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION

Elise Blocker, AICP

(American Institute of Certified Planners)

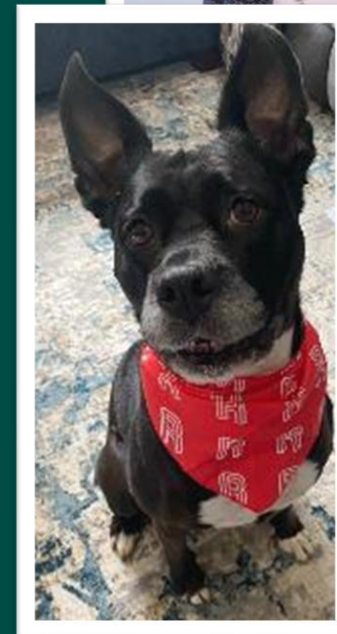
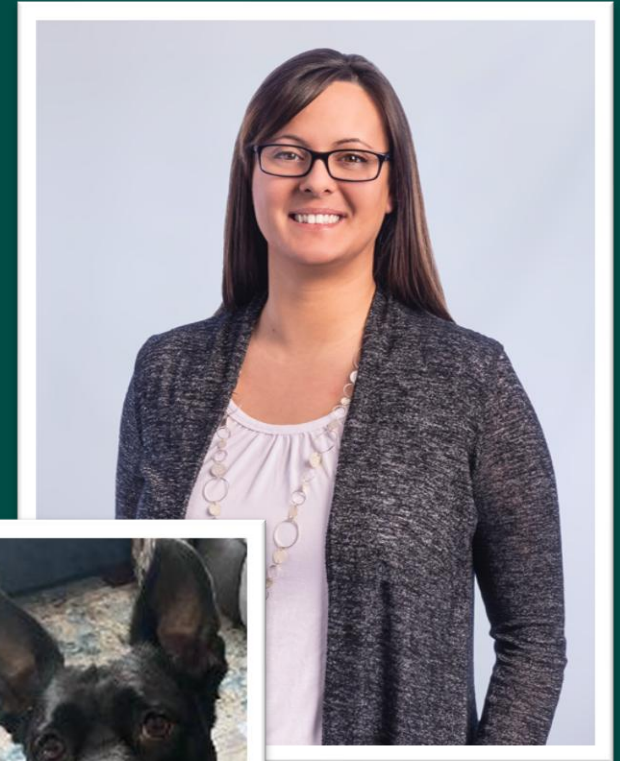
Role: Community Engagement Lead for Healthy
Riparian Initiative

Location: Palmer, Alaska

Focus Areas: Comprehensive Planning, Community
Development, and Collaborative Solutions

Education: Bachelors of Science in Environmental
Planning

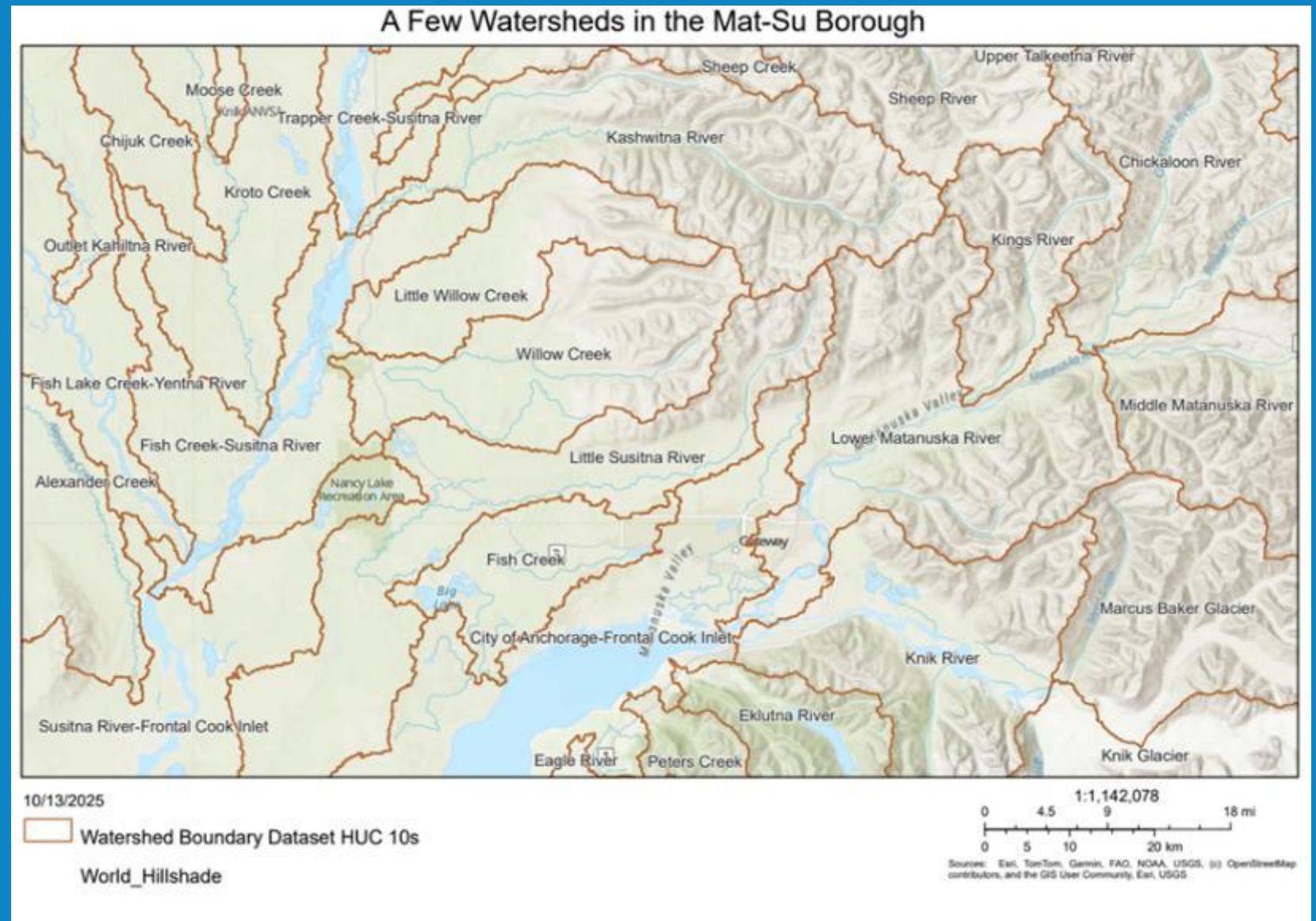
Career: 5 years with RESPEC in February 2026.



WATERSHEDS IN THE MAT-SU BOROUGH

Watersheds collect all precipitation including rain, snowmelt, and springs into rivers, lakes, and oceans, while riparian zones within them provide habitat for wildlife and filter pollutants before they enter these waters.

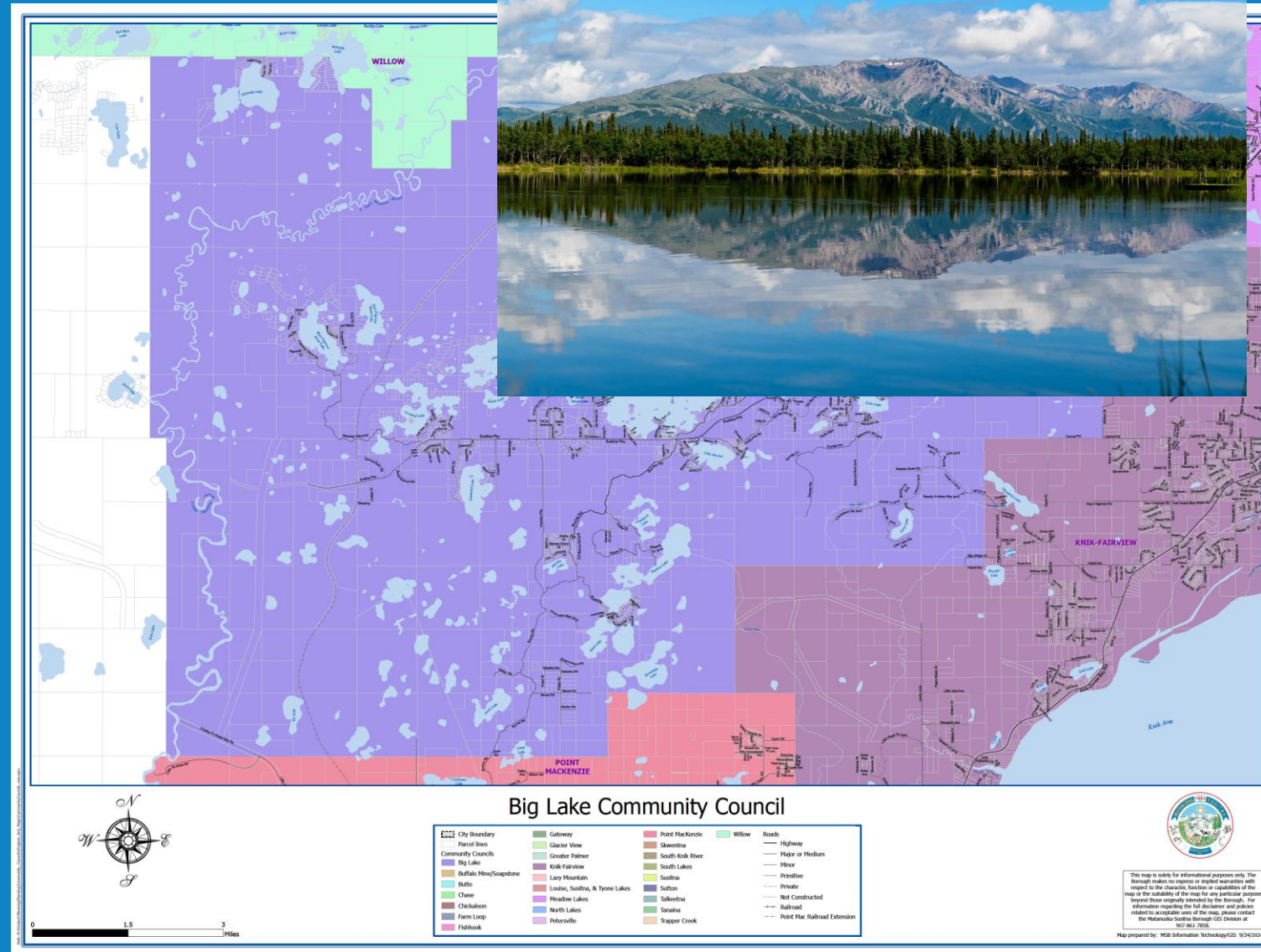
- Over 20 major watersheds shape the Mat-Su landscape
- Key rivers: Susitna, Matanuska, Knik, and Talkeetna systems
- Watersheds influence water quality, habitat, and community resilience
- Healthy riparian zones protect fish, wildlife, and drinking water
- Collaboration is essential for sustainable watershed management



WATER BODIES IN THE BIG LAKE CC

Big Lake Community Council Area covers roughly 145 square miles with roughly 13 square miles of water. This equals 9% of the total area!

- **Big Lake** – 3,085 acres. Popular for recreation and salmon habitat.
- **Mud Lake** – 53 acres. Popular for scenic views and fishing.
- **Flat Lake** – 317 acres. Popular for fishing and boating.
- **Fish Creek** – Popular for salmon spawning and attracting wildlife such as bald eagles, mink, and waterfowl.
- **Meadow Creek** – Popular for fishing, salmon habitat, and wildlife and scenic views.
- **Little Susitna River** – A scenic river popular for fishing, wildlife viewing, and kayaking.

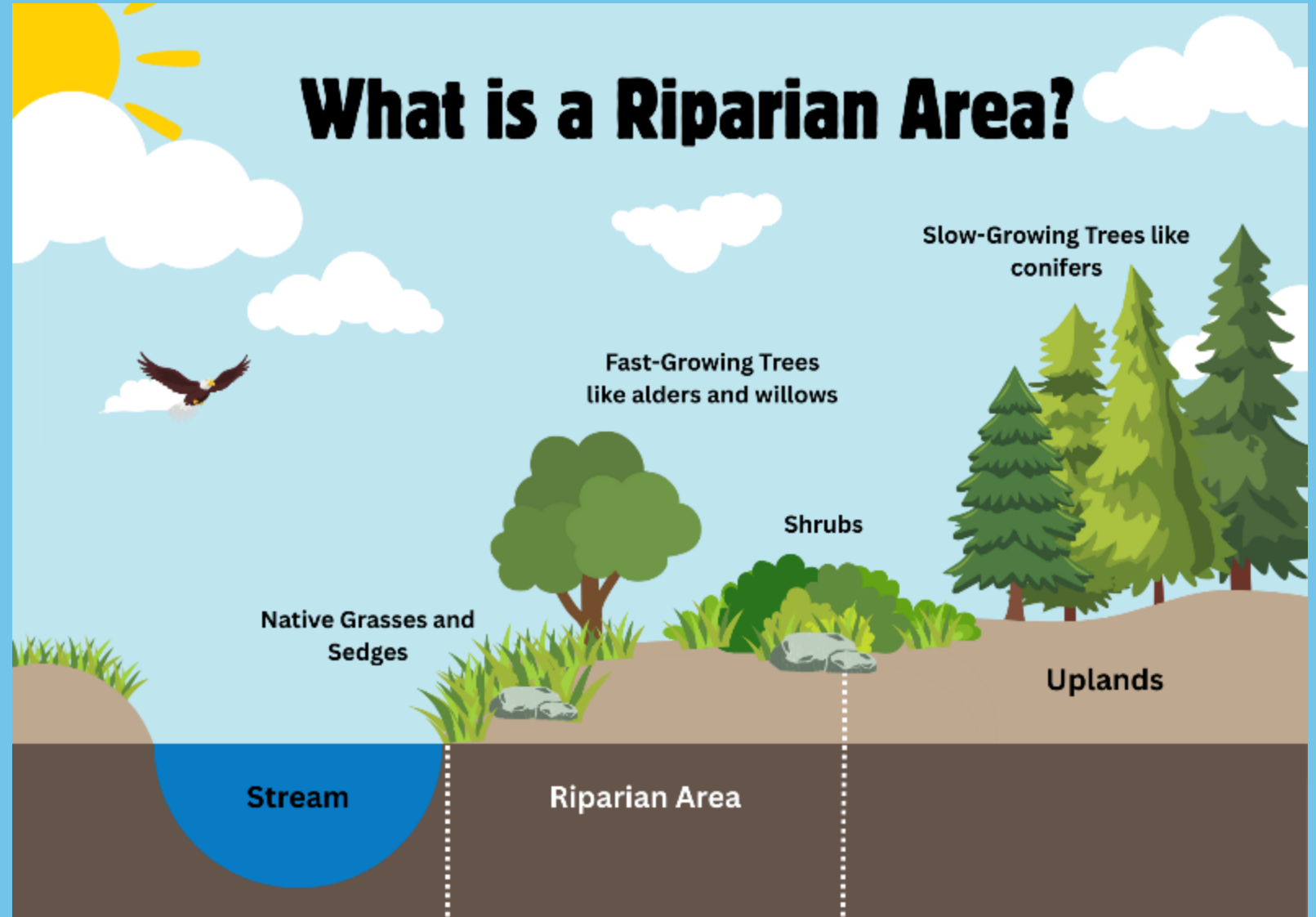


WHAT ARE RIPARIAN AREAS?

A riparian area is land along rivers, streams, lakes, or wetlands that forms the transition between aquatic and upland zones.

Key functions:

- Stabilize banks / protect property
- Maintain water quality and biodiversity.
- Provide habitat and shade for aquatic life.
- Filtering out pollutants before entering rivers and lakes.



THE CHALLENGES IN THE MAT-SU



Growth and development along waterbodies



Infrastructure -> higher pollution risk



Code Violations



Impaired waterbodies (pollutants, turbidity)



Wetland changes (acres disturbed)



What issues or concerns are you noticing in your council area?



WHY WE SHOULD ACT

Protect Our Way of Life

Fishing, hunting, and recreation depend on healthy watersheds.

Community Stewardship

Everyone plays a role in protecting riparian areas and water quality.

Local Codes & Regulations

Setbacks for structures and septic systems safeguard waterways.

Every action, big or small, helps protect our rivers, lakes, and streams for people and wildlife.



What if a Property is Non-Compliant?

If a property owner has received a warning notice from MSB Code Compliance regarding the water body setback ordinance the property owner can:

- Check to see if the structure meets the requirements to be a legal non-conforming structure (i.e. has grandfather rights)
- If not, an owner can apply to obtain a variance
- If neither of these are possible, the remaining option is to move to structure to comply with the setback.

To get more details and explore options, landowners with non-compliant structures should contact the MSB

Permit Center at
permit.center@matsu.gov.



COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Events we have attended

- Fall 2025: Salmon Symposium – Connect with watershed partners



Events we are planning for

- Spring 2026: Mat-Su Home Show – Interactive displays & staff Q&A
- Spring–Summer 2026: Volunteer Stream Restoration Day – Engage volunteers
- Summer 2026: Montana Creek Riparian Volunteer Day – On-site education
- Fall 2026: Salmon Symposium – Share outreach findings
- Ongoing: Outreach at impaired waterbodies – Install signage & distribute materials

Community Council Presentations in 2026

- Big Lake
- Butte
- Chase
- Chickaloon
- Gateway
- Glacier View
- Knik-Fairview
- Lazy Mountain
- Louise Susitna, Tyrone
- Meadow Lakes
- North Lakes
- Point MacKenzie
- South Knik River
- South Lakes
- Susitna
- Sutton
- Talkeetna
- Tanana
- Trapper Creek
- Willow

TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE!



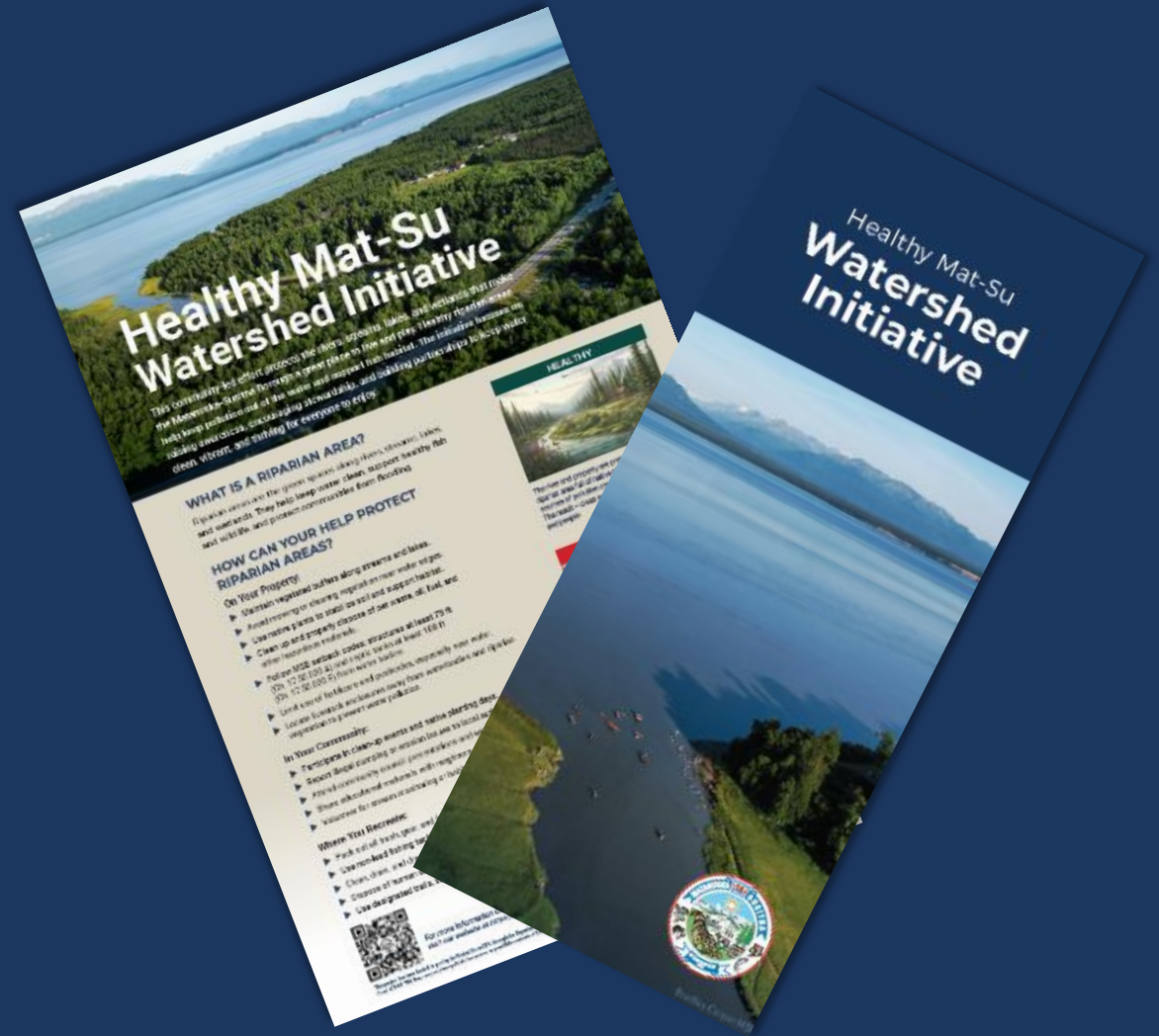
The river and property are protected by a healthy riparian area full of native plants, and potential sources of pollution are not close to the water. The result – clean water and healthy fish, wildlife, and people!



This river does not have riparian plants along the banks, and the house, garden and path are located too close to the water. This leads to faster erosion, an increased risk to structures, and a higher chance of pollution entering the water. Poor water quality impacts fish, wildlife, and Mat-Su residents.

CALL TO ACTION

- Share educational materials with neighbors.
- Join or organize local events.
- Find funding for projects
- The Streambank and Shoreline Rehabilitation and Protection Program
- Alaska Streambank/Lake Shore Restoration Cost-Share
- Habitat Rehabilitation Workshops, Alaska Department of Fish and Game



What are some actions you would like to explore in your community council area?

THANK YOU!

ANY QUESTIONS?

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For more information, please visit our website <https://healthywatershed.matsu.gov/>