

# History of Friends of Creamer's Field



Our Mission is "To inspire environmental stewardship and lifelong learning through experience, awareness, appreciation and conservation of the natural and historic resources of Creamer's Field Migratory Waterfowl Refuge."



## INTRODUCTION

The Creamer's Field Migratory Waterfowl Refuge encompasses 2,200+ acres of wildlife habitat and open space within the urbanized area of Fairbanks, Alaska. The core area of the Refuge includes lands and historic buildings that were once an active dairy farm operated by the Creamer family. Beginning around 1910, the farm has attracted large numbers of waterfowl passing through the area on their seasonal migrations.

Public interest in this unique area and adjacent state lands with valuable wildlife habitat resulted in the establishment of the area as a state game Refuge in 1979. The Refuge is managed by Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G) according to a Refuge management plan developed in 1993 through a citizen-based cooperative planning process.

Friends of Creamer's Field (FOCF) is a non-profit organization that works in cooperation with ADF&G to provide nature-oriented interpretive and educational programs at the Refuge and to operate the Refuge's Farmhouse Visitor Center. FOCF also provides interpretive information on the history of the Creamer's dairy and historic buildings and raises funds to support the Refuge. Friends of Creamer's Field is unique as a nature education organization in that its focus centers on a single Refuge that lies within the urban area of Fairbanks, Alaska.

Over the years FOCF has developed a year-round calendar of programs with trained volunteers staffing the Visitor Center and leading nature walks on the Refuge. These programs fall into a variety of types— Interpretive, Education, and Refuge appreciation. Some of the community

events and activities that are sponsored by FOCF on an annual basis include:

- ◆ One Day Programs
- ◆ Ongoing programs
- ◆ Day Fests
- ◆ Camps

Other nonprofit organizations, most notably the Alaska Songbird Institute, also use the Refuge for various activities that compliment, but do not duplicate, FOCF programs. Creamer's Refuge includes a system of summer and winter trails that are used extensively by the community and several trail user groups including the Alaska Dog Musher's Association and the Alaska Skijorers and Pulk Association who are actively involved in trail management issues. FOCF works with ADF&G and the Northern Alaska Environmental Center to operate Camp Habitat, a summer nature discovery camp on the Refuge for children ages 4-11.

In 2006, FOCF received a major grant from ConocoPhillips to rebuild the Refuge's Boreal Forest Trail and add enhancements including a wheelchair accessible loop. The grand reopening of the Boreal Forest Trail was held in September 2008.

FOCF's partnership with ADF&G has resulted in compounded resources for both organizations and helped to expand community awareness and involvement in the Refuge in addition to increased educational opportunities. Through FOCF the public has gained much more knowledge and enjoyment of wildlife and their habitats during their visits to the Refuge. Because of Friends of Creamer's Field, Creamer's Refuge has better served an increasing number of visitors.

## ***ORGANIZATIONAL PROFILE AND HISTORY***

The Alaska Department of Fish and Game and Friends of Creamer's Field have been close partners since the inception of FOCF in 1990. FOCF was born during the development of the Creamer's Refuge management plan. The Creamer's Refuge Advisory Group, a cross section of Refuge users and community members with an interest in the Refuge, worked with Department staff for several years on the management plan, and, together with the Department, foresaw the need for a community group to continue working with the Refuge. Initially, FOCF's efforts focused on renovation of the Farmhouse as the Refuge Visitor Center. However, by the time they gained tax-exempt corporation status, FOCF had broadened their mission to include the development and implementation of programs and facilities to increase public appreciation and enjoyment of the Refuge. In 1990 ADF&G and FOCF developed a cooperative agreement to clarify the roles and responsibilities of both organizations involving the Refuge.

Through most of its existence FOCF has been successful in running its programs with a volunteer Board of Directors and staff. In 2001 an Executive Director was hired. In 2005, a part-time Program Director was added - to ensure consistency and quality in program delivery. The 13 member volunteer Board of Directors represents a diversity of community interests in the biological and historic resources of the Refuge. Board members possess a variety of skills vital to the organization including management, finance, fundraising, education, and nature interpretation. Board meetings are held monthly and Board members also serve on at least one committee.

FOCF relies on volunteers to support many of their interpretive programs and activities. Each year many volunteers contribute thousands of hours of volunteer time.

FOCF maintains strong and active donor Friends of families and individuals, including residents of Fairbanks and visitors to the Refuge. Friends are also involved in the organization by serving on various planning committees and serving as event and program volunteers.

As a non-profit organization FOCF obtains its funding through donations, sales in the Farmhouse Visitor Center gift shop, and grants from a variety of sources. All funds are used to support the organization's mission of inspiring environmental stewardship and lifelong learning through experience, awareness, appreciation and conservation of the natural and historic resources of Creamer's Refuge.

