



Wrangell Institute for Science and Environment

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WISE Newsletter: Volume 7 October, 2009

Our Web Site: www.wise-edu.org

W I S E

Copper River Country Nature Tour

By Janelle Eklund

Our Second full season for the Copper River Country Nature Tour was a big success. WISE is a vendor of Princess Tours and tours operated three days a week, with two tours available each of those three days. Independent travelers are also targeted so tours have the potential to operate more than three days a week. For 2009 there were a total of 232 guests. The program operated 45 out of 52 tour days and the program grossed \$11,800. WISE considers this program a big success, thanks to the dedicated naturalists, Bruce James, Karen Walker, Dave Wellman; and cost cutting measures which increased our margin. The naturalists were very popular guides with all of our guests. With 98% of the evaluations returned, the program was rated high quality and exceeded expectations or high quality and worthwhile. Comments included:

"The guides were great, very knowledgeable and thoughtful.



Thank you for a super tour." "Great trip. One of the best I have been on." "The tour was the most informative, best prepared and extremely well paced of all the tours we have taken. The guides were

exceptional in their knowledge and enthusiasm." "Loved it! It was nice to experience the 'true Alaska' not the normal tours that are so preplanned and almost commercial." "Our guides are so knowledgeable and personable – it made learning a pleasure!!"

WISE recognizes the importance of knowledgeable, dedicated, personable guides for the success of the Natural History Tour. That is what we strive for as we seek naturalists for the 2010 season.

With reports of tour bookings being down this year, because of the economic downturn, we are cautiously optimistic about the 2010 season.

WISE is in a good position to take advantage of the fact that of some vendors will not be in operation in 2010. This should provide more customers in a shrinking summer season. WISE is looking at ways of expanding its tour capacity.

The Rasmuson Foundation was instrumental in the success of this program through a grant that enabled us to purchase a 15 passenger van. The van was used throughout the season and was also used for our other youth programs. We would once again like to thank the Rasmuson Foundation for this generous contribution.

WISE Hires Staff

By Janelle Eklund

In February of 2009 WISE hired an Executive Director, Bruce James. Bruce brings with him great skills in non-profit management and organizational skills. Bruce organized Copper River Stewardship Program, Earth Discovery and Changing Seasons Programs, as well as helping with other outreach programs. Bruce was instrumental in developing a new joint partnership with the National Park Service,



called the "Junior Ranger Program" which was a great success this summer. We were very impressed with his abilities and accomplishments as both Executive Director and Naturalist. Bruce is passionate about wild areas and the challenges of living in remote Alaska.

In May, 2009, WISE hired a naturalist for the Copper River Country Nature Tour. Karen Walker came from Anchorage with a certificate as a naturalist from the Campbell Creek Science Center. Karen has impressive naturalist credentials with over 20 years of experience and brought to the program a wealth of knowledge on Alaska natural history, a desire to research more subject matter, and a personable rapport. WISE will be hiring a naturalist and intern for the 2010 season.

2009 WISE TALES

ENLIGHTENED CITIZENS MAKE WISE DECISIONS

continued

WISE is looking at ways to recruit local naturalist to fill these positions. WISE will be working with the National Park Service to help train and employ prospective naturalists and interns. If you might be interested in either of these positions, a full position descriptions and employment application can be found at www.wise-edu.org: click "Employment". For further information email or call Bruce James at bjames@wise-edu.org, 907-822-3575 or Janelle Eklund at jeklund@cvinternet.net, 907-822-3282.

Enthusiasm for Learning Evident at Earth Discovery Day

By Bruce James

Somehow the stretch of beautiful days lasted just long enough to enjoy the 7th Annual Earth Discovery Day on May 5th under warm sunshine. Over 100 students from the fourth, fifth and sixth grades participated in Wrangell Institute for Science and Environment's celebration of Earth Discovery Day held at the Wrangell St. Elias National Park and Preserve Visitor Center.



Presenters engaged the students with stimulating topics developed to connect them with their natural world and encourage a sense of stewardship. All the presentations met standards set forth by the State of Alaska for science education and some teachers will expand upon the day's learning with additional assignments once they are back in the classroom. Students learned skills that also qualified them as "Junior Rangers".

Fourth grade students experienced "Don't Dunk the Junk" with Arlene Rosenkrans of RC&D and Cliff Eames of Copper Country Alliance, "Planetarium" with Ted Hesser of SAPA, "Great Horned Owl" with Ed Podgorski of Alaska Wildbird Rehabilitation Center (AWRC), and "How Old is that Fish?" with Corey Schwanke of ADF&G.

Fifth graders learned about ATV safety and Tread Lightly with Ian Dorsey, the Kenny Lake 4H Club and BLM staffers; "Observations" with Clair Scribner of the Native Village of Gakona; bird adaptations with Dave Wellman of WISE; and Songbirds with Vic and Trisha Bruss.

Sixth grade students enjoyed presentations about tree identification with Paul Boos of WISE and Ben Seifert of BLM, "Leave No Trace" with Glenn Hart of NPS and Janelle Eklund of WISE, Watershed with Doug Vollman of KLSWC, and Saw-Whet Owl with Nancy Wade of AWRC. Students shared some of the things they learned during the day – "Not to litter and to keep the earth healthy", "I will be safer on ATVs and alert around my surroundings",

continued

and "I'll try to protect the environment." When asked how they will use what they learned during the presentations, the response most often given was "I will share what I learned with my parents/family". *What did your student tell you? How will you encourage your student to make a difference?*

Many people and organizations helped make this day the success it was. WISE would like to thank the presenters and their agencies/organizations, the volunteers who helped keep the day on track, the teacher and parent chaperones, and WRST for once again offering the use of the Visitor Center grounds. We would also like to thank our membership and sponsors Alaska Conservation Foundation, Studebaker Environmental Education Fund, Wells Fargo Bank and WRST for their generous financial support.



Changing Seasons Teach Nature's Transition to Winter

By Bruce James

The beauty of the Copper River Basin's autumn colors slips away all too quickly. While we enjoy the colorful display, we are left with thoughts of the approaching winter and the



preparations needed to get through it. The basin's plants and animals also make their preparations and these were the topics at the seventh annual Changing Seasons event hosted by Wrangell Institute for Science and Environment. The event was held three days at three different schools. All Basin second and third graders

attended presentations on tree and animal preparations for winter, fall gathering of local foods by basin residents and observations of our boreal forest. Students marveled at the unique gill structure of the underside of a mushroom when viewed through a microscope and then did colorful leaf tracings to take home. They also learned about locally grown and collected foods, the local tradition of sharing abundant foods with those who might not be as well off, and how wood frogs freeze during winter and then revive in the spring. The event was kicked off by playing the Lynx and Hare game to learn a little about predators and prey while also stretching their youthful legs. School District Standards are applied to each presentation. The essential question was "Why is it important for plants, animals and humans in the Copper Basin to migrate, hibernate or adapt?" At the end of the program students answered the question and then drew a picture of something they learned.

WISE PROGRAMS

continued

WISE would like to thank the presenters and their agency/organization that made the day possible: Arlene Rosenkrans, Natural Resource Conservation Service; Doug Vollman, Kenny Lake Soil and Water Conservation Service; Melissa Blair, National Parks Conservation Association; Janelle Eklund, WISE; Paul Boos, WISE; Bureau of Land Management volunteers; Glenn Hart and other employees, National Park Service; and Kenny Lake high school students Keaton Shepherd, Ryan Cudo, and Neil Finnesand. WISE also thanks the Alaska Conservation Foundation, Studebaker Environmental Education Fund, Wells Fargo, Wrangell St. Elias National Park and Preserve, and members for their generous financial contributions.

Copper River Stewardship Program

By Keaton Shepherd

"10 Days of Environmental Enlightenment: The Copper River Stewardship Program"

The Copper River Stewardship Program, a youth environmental leadership curriculum, began on the crisp morning of July 21, 2009. Daniel Leahy of Kenny Lake, Alaska, and I sat at the end of his driveway at mile 74 on the Richardson highway, atop of our weatherproof backpacks, stuffed to the brim with supplies for a ten day adventure in the Copper River Watershed. We were awaiting the arrival of our adult chaperones, with whom we would be travelling to Valdez to meet our Cordovan counterparts. The opportunity to participate in the Copper River Stewardship Program was given to five outstanding applicants from the Copper Basin, and five from Cordova. The selection process for the program involved writing an essay in response to questions such as a list of five reasons why you should be selected to participate in the Copper River Stewardship Program as well as a description of your family's cultural or historical tie to the watershed. Those selected were notified in mid-May, allowing plenty of time to gather the necessary supplies for the Program's climactic rafting trip from Chitina to Miles Glacier.



This event was obviously the major incentive; rafting one of the most powerful glacial rivers in the world is an once-in-a-lifetime experience! Though the raft trip was amazing, the awareness that we all gained through the educational portion of the Program outweighs on a scale of importance. We were challenged to look at the watershed, and the world around us.

It was here that we began to realize the importance of the salmon run; not only does it support the rural Alaskans who depend on the salmon for subsistence, it also provides commercial fisherman. We also met with a representative from the Bureau of Land Management, who was focusing on the preservation of one of our nationally designated Wild and Scenic Rivers, the Gulkana. We learned the importance of practicing leave-no-trace ethics, as, though we may not realize it, our presence in the natural environment can cause great damage. The most thought provoking meeting for me was the campfire chat about danger that the Alyeska Pipeline poses to the watershed, as it crosses several major tributaries. The meeting left us with the question: Will we, as the leaders of tomorrow, be prepared to

keep our watershed safe from the many threats that it is faced with?

Throughout the Program, we learned that we are a part of a much greater system; we are all connected by water, water that we all need in order to survive. This type of awareness is crucial, especially since so many people take water for granted, and, though we may not realize it, we are the next generation, and we will have to work hard to preserve the few resources we have left. I am so incredibly thankful for the experience, and I can honestly say that after the Program, I am much more conscious of my impact on the fragile environment. It is my sincere hope that the Copper River Stewardship Program continues to change the lives of High School students for years to come; it is a great investment for the future of the watershed! I would like to thank our sponsors Wrangell Institute for Science and Environment, Copper River Watershed Program and Prince William Sound Science Center for providing this once in a lifetime opportunity. Check out <http://emmiesrafttripexperience.weebly.com/>

Junior Ranger Program - A Partnership with Wrangell St. Elias National Park and Preserve

by Bruce James

"Was that a midge or a mite? "I don't know but it definitely doesn't look like the last thing we caught!" These were familiar comments as local youth had the chance to learn about the ecology of some of our lakes, streams and ponds this summer along the McCarthy Rd. WISE hosted or participated in eight different events enlisting over 300 new Jr. Rangers, a partnership



that culminated through a grant from Wrangell St. Elias National Park & Preserve (WRST). This funding helped cover a couple of our traditional events, Earth Discovery Day and Changing Seasons; provided seed money for a new ecology class on the McCarthy Road, and learning stations to Valdez youth; and incorporate the Jr. Ranger program into several functions hosted by other organizations (Youth Environmental Summit; Wrangell Mountains Center day camps). Lessons focused on learning about local aquatics while getting their hands (and feet!) wet; Leave No Trace; the importance of willow to the environment; animal tracks, scat and identification; plant structure, identification and medicinal qualities; using stereomicroscopes to get an up close and personal view of things they pass by in the woods every day; and quiet time to listen, write, sketch, and soak in the wonders of the natural world. The "WOW", "AWESOME", and "That is so cool!" comments made it all worthwhile. WISE is very grateful for the WRST Jr. Ranger partnership and the help we received from all over the Copper River Basin.

Pick.Click.Give.

When you go on-line to sign up for your Permanent Fund Dividend, you will see the option called "The Gift of Giving." Search for us by choosing Region (Judicial District 1) and Wrangell Institute For Science and Environment. Click and follow the instructions. Please provide your contact information to us so that we can acknowledge and recognize your generous support. For more information go to www.pickclickgive.org or call us at 822-3282. Thank you for your support.

ENLIGHTENED CITIZENS MAKE WISE DECISIONS



A *WISE* Thanks To Our Generous Donors

Wise is making a positive impact on citizens of the Copper Basin thanks to contributions from you. This revenue helps fund programs and works towards developing others.

MEMBERS 2009

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GRANTS 2009

Alaska Conservation Foundation; American Legion Post #27; British Petroleum; Bureau of Land Management; Kenny Lake and Glennallen Revenue Sharing; Studebaker Environmental Education Fund; Wells Fargo; Wrangell St. Elias National Park and Preserve.

IN-KIND HELP 2009

Alaska Dept. of Fish & Game; Alaska River Expeditions; Alaska State Troopers; Alaska Wildbird Rehabilitation Center, Vic and Trisha Bruss; Bureau of Land Management; Copper Country Alliance; Copper River School District; Gateway School District; Kenny Lake Soil and Water Conservation; National Parks Conservation Association; Native Village of Gakona; Native Village of Tazlina; 4H; Prince William Sound Community College; Prince William Sound Aquaculture; Resource Conservation & Development; SAPA; Bev Oatman; Sandy Williams; University of Alaska HAARP Education Outreach; Wrangell St. Elias National Park and Preserve; and numerous volunteers from throughout the Copper Basin.

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