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WISE TALES 2010

Presidents Message

By Janelle Eklund

This September I had the pleasure of teaching the web of life to second and third graders at our Changing Seasons program. I hadn't done it for a few years and had forgotten how inspiring it is to see the students interact as their web of life knowledge expanded. Teachers and chaperones also participated in the game. Each person wore a picture of what they represented - a bug, bird, animal, plant, soil, water, air, sun. Each took turns identifying what they needed to survive. A ball of yarn was unwound and passed to make the connection and form a web. After each person had their turn, an intricate web had been created. It became apparent that everything on earth depends on everything else to survive and be healthy. The role of humans was also discussed as being part of the web. Each connection is a vein that gives life blood to the whole unit. It pulsates and keeps the heart of the earth beating healthy.

This activity got me to thinking that WISE also has an intricate web of life. Many connections keep it healthy, strong, and growing. The life blood of WISE is it's students, partners, members, donors, grantors, and fee based programs. We feel very fortunate this year to have strengthened our partnerships with the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and Wrangell St. Elias National Park and Preserve (WRST). The "Take it Outside" initiative through BLM, has given WISE funding and staff to help administer the aquatic summer camp, the Copper River Stewardship program; Earth Discovery Day, Changing Seasons, and summer hiking adventures. This funding will help sustain these programs for five years. A partnership funding with WRST has also helped to sustain these programs along with the Nabesna Day Camp. All Support from members, donors, revenue sharing, corporate dollars and other partners also play an important role in the sustainability of WISE programs. We are grateful for your generous giving throughout the years. Your investments have grown WISE a healthy heart.

Another vein that will give WISE nourishment over the next three years is a generous grant from the M.J. Murdock Charitable Trust

Continued on page 2

Bruce leading hikers towards camp on Tangle Lake

Lots of Miles...Lots of Smiles!

By Bruce James

"Are you guys ready to go yet?" "Hey, look at that neat mushroom!" "What kind of track is this one?"

These were often heard comments this summer as the Glennallen Field Office of the Bureau of Land Management and Wrangell Institute for Science and Environment teamed up to take local youths on hikes in our "neighborhood". Hikes were from 3-5 hours long and many different trails were enjoyed by the participants and chaperones alike. The trails included walks in our boreal forest, high above tree line, an overnight campout, the local mud volcanoes, a trip to pick blueberries, a chance to go swimming and a hike through a rainforest (of course it was raining too!).

Thirty nine youths joined us over the summer and many of them went multiple times. Of special note, two youths made every hike; Nicky Holstrom and Sophia Tyone of Gulkana. In addition to youths, we had twenty different adults join the fun ranging from moms to grandmoms and high school aged interns to senior citizens. A big thanks to all who participated!

Along the way we all had fun learning outdoors skills and ethics while enjoying some healthy exercise. Of course, when taking youths anywhere, we also heard "Are we there yet!" many times this summer. It always brought a smile to our faces though as that meant they were ready for another hike! If the weather cooperates, maybe we will strap on some snowshoes in a couple months and try it again!

Photo by Marnie Graham

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President's Message *continued from page 1*

which will bring on our Executive Director, Bruce James, and a summer naturalist, on full time. In order to receive the funds for the second and third year of the grant we will need to match their giving. So we will be throwing the ball of yarn to our partners, members, donors; and expand our fee based tour program.

All of these connections are the life blood of WISE. Those connected at the giving end benefit through the participation and/or knowledge that you help instill a stewardship ethic for a healthy planet.

If you are not already a part of the WISE's web, we invite you to catch the ball of yarn and become one of the veins in the web of life taught at Changing Seasons. We thank everyone for all of your generous support and expertise in keeping WISE healthy. You are an important player in the web of life.

With Best Regards, Janelle

Bruce James discusses witch's broom with guests

Copper Country Nature Tours

By Bruce James

Our nature tour program was a big success this past summer! Once again WISE was able to share the wonders of our local environment with visitors to the area while also generating revenue to help support our other programs. Highlights of the summer season included having a black bear listen to us discussing volcanoes on Father's Day morning and a cow moose and calf greeting us at the pipeline. We also enjoyed having Derrick Sinyon join us as a Naturalist Intern for the summer (see separate article on page 3).

While guests only get a onetime look at our Boreal Forest, our Naturalist crew sees the evolving changes through the season. The weather was also highly variable; early summer brought warm sunny days, mid-summer was dreary and wet for weeks on end, followed by some dry weather at the end of the tour season. Of course, just as the tours ended, we had a most beautiful Indian Summer! The wet weather provided a bounty of mushrooms earlier in the summer than usual and the beaver pond filled in well. Speaking of our beavers, they really got industrious in September! They greatly enhanced the dam and now as snows begin to fall, they have a large backwater ready for their underwater winter habitat. The wet weather in midsummer also brought a bounty of berries! The lowbush cranberries in the local area were plentiful and plump. In areas where blueberries grow, they were also prolific!

As I discussed on the tours, a subsistence lifestyle is one where people not only derive much of their diet from the local environment, they also look out for each other. In a rare change of events, I did not get a moose this year and none was donated from the hunting operation in our neighborhood. To the rescue however were other friends. A neighbor got his moose and when he heard our freezer was empty, he was down here the next day with a big box of meat for us. Another friend has also shared some of his bounty of sheep and caribou. We also got a big bag of home grown vegetables!

On the business side, our total number of guests was down this year but the number per trip was up 31% from 2009. The drop in total numbers was obviously due to the shortened season. The good news is that Princess has decided to return to a full season in 2011! WISE also did a pilot program for Tauck Tours that could generate a new partnership for the future. WISE is exploring ways to increase tour participation be contacting other tour companies visiting the Copper Basin.

Finally, WISE would like to thank everyone that joined us on our tours this summer. We really enjoyed the opportunity to share what we feel is a very special place! If you also enjoyed the tour, please recommend us to your friends; better yet, come back for another visit! Maybe you can turn them on to our web site at copperrivertours.com.

Oh, by the way, the Red Squirrel outside the tent harvested and dried a big crop of mushrooms for the coming months and his midden looks ready for the long winter ahead!

Photo by Janelle Eklund

Ten Budding Field Biologists Find…That a Perched Culvert Is a Bad Culvert!

By the June Aquatic Ecology Class

Wrangell Institute for Science and Environment (WISE) recently hosted enjoyable two day camp on the McCarthy Road exploring Aquatic Ecology. Seven youths from upriver along with four BLM interns spent time at Silver Lake and then a wetland further out the road.

Young participant is excited about the trout we caught at Silver Lake

While at each, they performed field tests just like a fisheries biologist would. Measurements were taken for temperature, pH, dissolved oxygen, nitrates and phosphates. Then bottom samples were taken and macro invertebrates were found to study under the microscope. Plankton was also screened from the water for inspection. Under a permit from ADF&G, minnow traps were set in both locations along with a *fyke* net at Silver Lake. The evening was spent at a private campground at mile 27 where the youths enjoyed a campfire, s'mores and stories before retiring to their tents and cabin for some rest.

The next morning, after breakfast, the students enjoyed a "water table" demonstration put on by Luke Ringger, a student intern with BLM. He showed the youths why rivers meander and how culverts can obstruct salmon's ability to make it upstream to spawn. Specifically, they learned about perched culverts where the downstream end is above the water level, thus forcing the salmon to try and jump up into it and swim under the road.

The youths found this exact condition at mile 26 of the McCarthy Road. On the upstream side of the road a series of ponds is where some salmon spawn…*if they can get there!* The downstream end of the culvert is almost two feet above the lower end of the creek, forcing salmon that have already swam hundreds of miles without eating, to jump. To complicate their task, the creek is shallow and the culvert opening is small. With the proper culvert design, however, the students found that efficient water passage could be achieved without hindering the salmon!

While these junior biologists enjoyed two days of beautiful weather and exploration, they were left with the question…why doesn't somebody redesign that culvert? Aren't the salmon important?

Photo by Bruce James

Preparing Our Winter Food

By Bruce James

Wrangell Institute for Science and Environment (WISE) and its many partners continued a long tradition by hosting the 2010 edition of the Nabesna Day Camp. The event was held at the Twin Lakes Campground on September 11th under beautiful fall skies. Youths from Tazlina to Slana enjoyed some "hands on" game cleaning and berry processing.

The morning activities started with youngsters identifying and then plucking ducks. Two mallards and a green wing teal were made ready for the roasting pan along with the giblets. Then, three silver salmon were split open and placed in a small smokehouse built on site made from local materials. After getting a smoldering fire going of green alder, the kids moved over to the next table where lots of berries and jam making supplies awaited their enthusiasm. After some instruction on safe and sanitary methods, the berries were soon in a couple big pots and boiling. One turned out to be blueberry and lowbush cranberry jam and the other was highbush cranberry and moss berry syrup.

Next on the agenda was a front quarter of moose. We first discussed the need to keep it clean and dry while letting it age, then the knives came out and soon it was just a big pile of steaks, roasts and burger meat! This was all done under the watchful eyes of Irene and Janelle Johnson, the ones that would be enjoying the meat later this winter. The kids had fun labeling the wrapped meat with smiley faces and words of encouragement. The last activity was to clean three snowshoe hares and the kids were amazed how quickly they could be done compared to pulling the feathers from the ducks.

Over the course of the day the youths and even some of the adults learned some new skills that will increase their enjoyment of the outdoors and built a stewardship ethic. Many elders from the area also attended and enjoyed watching the youths perform tasks they had done many times over the years.

Along the way, everyone enjoyed a special lunch provided by Wrangell Mountain Center. Additional thanks goes to Wrangell St. Elias National Park and Preserve for funding and manpower, the Glennallen Field Office of the BLM for lots of help making the "fur fly" and keeping the fires going, Mt Sanford Tribal Consortium, the Native Village of Gakona and Wilson Justin for the lunch blessing and a short remembrance of the tragic loss our country endured nine years ago on 9-11. But most especially, I'd like to thank the kids that were so willing to get their hands bloody while cleaning the small critters and to taste test the jams! Yum! Yum!

Squeezing the berries for jelly

This article originally was published in the Copper River Record in the fall of 2010. Photo by Marnie Graham

Another Beautiful Day in Our Neighborhood -- Earth Discovery Day 2010

By Bruce James

Tuesday, May 4, 2010, students throughout the Copper River Basin gathered at the Wrangell-St. Elias NPS visitors' center to engage in active learning at the eighth annual Earth Discovery Day celebration. Fourth, fifth, and sixth grade students from the Copper River School District, Mentasta

and home school programs joined the Wrangell Institute for Science and Environment (WISE) and many partners for a wonderful day.

Fourth graders enjoyed Ahtna Respect for Salmon, Planetarium, Wonderful Wrangells, and Don't Dunk the Junk. Fifth grade students learned about Songbirds and How They Sing, Responsible ATV Use, Funky Fish, and a Great Gray Owl. Sixth grade students took part in presentations about Leave No Trace, Enviroscape, Tree ID, the Leaf Relay and a Rough Legged Hawk.

A tradition, begun at Earth Discovery Day 2009, expanded this year as area high school students lead and/or assisted the presentations. At the end of the day, all the participants raised their hands and took the Junior Ranger oath, affirming their willingness to help preserve and protect our great local park.

Students then assessed what they learned and how they will use that new knowledge. Their responses to the question "What did you learn?" included: "I learned more star constellations"; "That owls can turn their heads 270 degrees"; "That Sc'uyaan'de means "Let's eat" in Ahtna."When asked "How will you use what you learned," students replied: "To help the earth!"; "I will use it by doing it and teaching friends"; "To get a job."

Most importantly, the students' youthful enthusiasm, laughter, and over-all enjoyment of the activities made Earth Discovery Day 2010 special. *Photo by Cathy Hart*

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Pick.Click.Give.

Wrangell Institute For Science and Environment is pleased to announce that we are part of the new PFD Charitable Contributions Program for 2010. The Alaska Legislature passed a law in 2008 making this new way to give contributions for all Alaskans filing for their PFD on-line. We are excited about the opportunity that it provides all Alaskans to give to their favorite nonprofit organizations. This program provides a safe, secure and easy way to make a donation to WISE and help support our educational programs. WISE is expanding its efforts to increase opportunities for giving. To learn more about the program you can visit our web site at www.wise-edu.org or www. pick-clickgive.org. Thanks for all your support.

A New Partner … Ahtna, Inc.

By Bruce James

Almost a year ago, WISE board members discussed the need to find a local Naturalist to help us with our tour business with Princess. Because of the way the business is set up, there are only tours on three days a week and then some opportunities are lost due to the lack of bookings. This work schedule has made it difficult to find a trained guide that is willing to work what amounts to a part-time schedule. The board felt the person most likely to be satisfied with this arrangement would be a local. They also felt training a native youth as a naturalist would accomplish several goals.

With this in mind, I contacted Jeremy Hegge, the Development Coordinator for Ahtna, Inc. I told him about our ideas and we brainstormed how the project could benefit both organizations. To accomplish this task, WISE and Ahtna, Inc formed a partnership. I developed a job description and training plan and Jeremy began recruiting. In the end, WISE hired our first Naturalist Intern - Derrick Sinyon.

Mr. Sinyon is a young man from Gakona who graduated from Glennallen High School a couple years ago. He had been attending college in Virginia with a dream to become a teacher at Glennallen. Derrick joined me on the Friday and Sunday tours all summer up until his return to college. In the beginning he helped with the guests and taking care of the van and paperwork. After a while, he felt comfortable enough to start doing some of the programming. In particular, he did the skins and skulls demonstration and led some of the walks in the Boreal Forest. I think, however, the guests most enjoyed hearing of his culture and growing up in a subsistence lifestyle.

With the summer tour season end, Derrick returned to college, only this year he has chosen to attend the University of Alaska - Anchorage to be closer to home. The partnership with Ahtna, Inc was a great success on several levels. First, our guests and WISE benefited from Derrick's enthusiasm and background during the tours and we look forward to his return in 2011. Second, we were able to share the wonders of our local environment with a young man that aspires to be a teacher at a local school. Finally, WISE and Ahtna, INC have developed a new partnership that holds unlimited potential! *Photo by Paul Boos*

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Murdock Charitable Trust Opens A New Chapter For WISE

By Bruce James

The coming New Year will usher in a big change for WISE. With the generous grant from the Murdock Charitable Trust, WISE will move up from a part time – seasonal staff to full time paid employees. This will vastly increase our ability to provide educational services to the residents of the Copper River Basin.

Part of the grant conditions, however, require WISE to generate new sources of income to receive the full grant total. This is where the citizens, businesses and organizations around the basin can help us achieve that goal. Please join us as a member via a monetary donation. Business members are especially needed! Without this new money, our grant will be reduced and WISE will have to down size our staff and services to previous levels. ***Thanks!!***