

Wrangell Institute for Science and Environment Annual Report January 1– December 31, 2009

Presidents Report

It was an exciting and prosperous year for Wrangell Institute for Science and Environment (WISE). In February WISE hired Bruce James for the Executive Director position. He came to us with a strong managerial background, a love for the environment and working with young people, and a positive and can-do attitude. Bruce grew the summer science camp programs along with working with our partners on other programs. These included the Jr. Ranger program with the National Park Service; the Youth Environmental Summit with the Native Village of Gakona; Wrangell Mountains Center youth programs; and the Copper River Stewardship Program partnership with Copper River Watershed Project, Prince William Sound Science Center, Bureau of Land Management and Wrangell St. Elias National Park and Preserve. He not only organized the Jr. Ranger program, but also acted as instructor. He has a good rapport with youth, as well as adults, and makes learning fun and exciting. Bruce is working with the Copper River School District on incorporating curriculum into WISE programs that correlates with what is being taught in the classroom. He worked diligently and tirelessly on organizing the Earth Discovery Day and Changing Seasons programs, which were both, once again, a great success. Bruce is part time but we are working hard to bring him on full time permanent.

WISE has become well known throughout the State of Alaska and has been approached to conduct programs for students from urban areas. Meetings are being set up with potential partners to brainstorm ideas for the 2010 year.

A fee base will be implemented into some of our programs starting in 2010 to bring in revenue, helping to make WISE a sustainable organization.

The process for creating a Cooperative Agreement with the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) is underway. WISE partnered with BLM in 2009 to insure that the Copper River Stewardship high school program took place, under a Memorandum of Understanding. We are now taking the steps to move into the Cooperative Agreement. A Memorandum of Understanding was also implemented with the Copper River Watershed Project as we worked together on the Stewardship program. WISE continues the Cooperative Agreement with Wrangell St. Elias National Park and Preserve.

Programs

Earth Discovery Day and Changing Seasons

This was the seventh successful year for Earth Discovery Day held at the visitor center grounds at Wrangell St. Elias National Park and Preserve. There were 104 students that participated. It was the sixth successful year for Changing Seasons program. This program is held at Slana School, Glennallen School and Kenny Lake School where 80 students attended. Other schools attended at the various locations. Executive Director, Bruce James, did an excellent job coordinating these programs. Positive input from teachers has helped us to re-evaluate curriculum to correspond to classroom curriculum.

Leave No Trace

There was a Leave No Trace station for the 6th grade group at Earth Discovery Day taught by Janelle Eklund and Glenn Hart. Bruce set up the Jr. Ranger program through the Valdez Museum where Janelle taught Leave No Trace to about 35 youth. Janelle also taught the Leave No Trace Camp Oh No to about 35 youth at the Youth Environmental Summit. WISE received a grant for materials from Leave No Trace, Inc. for the Youth Environmental Summit. Leave No Trace, Inc. gives awards to those organizations that make a difference for the Leave No Trace message. WISE received this award, which came in a nice frame, and is listed on the Leave No Trace, Inc. web site as one of the recipients.

Jr. Ranger and Partner Programs

WISE helped plan and participated in the Youth Environmental Summit in Gakona in May. Bruce James taught diamond willow carving and medicinal qualities of the plant; Janelle Eklund taught Leave No Trace; and Glenn Hart taught a trail walk scavenger hunt.

In June, at Wrangell Mountains Center, Bruce conducted a WISE day camp focusing on the Boreal Forest. The presentations included a scavenger hunt and a “quiet time” observation activity where they were encouraged to close their eyes and “hear, smell and feel the forest”.

In Chistochina in mid-June, WISE helped Wrangell Mountains Center again at a day camp that focused on traditional Native learning and language about birds. Along with a local expert on birds, Vic Bruss, WISE (Bruce) taught the Junior Rangers about bird nesting behaviors and then took them for a walk through the woods collecting materials to build a loon nest.

At the Whitney Museum in Valdez, WISE partnered with Wrangell-St Elias National Park & Preserve to put on four stations of outdoor learning for the local “Junior Rangers”. Diamond willow was again part of the program along with Leave No Trace, animal skins & skulls, and animal tracks & scat.

Summer Camps, McCarthy Road

In July WISE conducted a pilot program to determine the feasibility of an Aquatic Ecology program on the McCarthy Road. With help from the Alaska Department of Fish & Game, young participants spent a day at Silver Lake learning about rainbow trout life cycles and testing the water for pH, temperature, dissolved oxygen and other characteristics. They also looked at watershed observations, lake bottom sampling, collected trout with a fyke net and inspected macro-invertebrates under a stereo microscope. Finding some time to actually use fishing tackle to catch more trout was an added bonus for the kids! With the great success of this pilot program, WISE expanded it three weeks later into a two day event. Added to the Silver Lake curricula was time studying the life cycles of salmon, water ecology and chemistry at a beaver pond that salmon spawn in and a tour of the Long Lake salmon weir that is run by the National Park Service. At the weir the participants also learned to take scale samples of sockeye salmon and the use of minnow traps to collect small fish for scientific studies. The highlight of the second program was a campout beside the Chokosna River complete with roasted s'mores over a campfire and lots of bear stories! This program was very popular and participants are asking for more, longer summer science and environmental education camps.

The Jr. Ranger program attracted over 300 participants.

Copper River Stewardship Program

This year WISE partnered with Prince William Sound Science Center (PWSSC) and the Copper River Watershed Project in Cordova; and Wrangell St. Elias National Park and Preserve (WRST) and Bureau of Land Management in the Copper Basin to continue the Copper River Stewardship Program. In 2007 WISE worked with WRST to conduct this program, which was then called the Watershed Leadership Program. PWSSC also had a similar program in past years. WISE, along with these organizations and agencies, decided to partner and marry the programs together in order to bring students from Cordova (lower watershed) and students from the Copper Basin (upper watershed) together and make it one program. This partnership allows for collaborating and being able to offer the program every year. This is a ten day program which includes a five day raft trip on the Copper River. The upper and lower watersheds, as well as life styles of residents have many differences and some similarities. It is the goal of this program for students to share information about these differences and similarities through visits with native organizations, agencies, businesses, and other organizations that have an impact on the watershed. Students learn about flora; fauna; weather; ecology; geology; commercial fisheries; subsistence fishery

and life style; possible oil spill impacts and contingency plans from the trans Alaska pipeline; Leave No Trace; rowing techniques; camping and leadership. At the end of the program each student is responsible for giving some sort of report in the form of a web site, power point for public lecture, a newspaper article, a documentary DVD, etc. In the end a sense of stewardship is instilled in these students and they have a better insight into what goes into keeping a watershed healthy. Ten students participated in the program, five from the lower watershed and five from the upper watershed. This is a very popular program and WISE and its partners are working on integrating other logistics into it for 2010.

Copper Center School Trails Project

Natural Resources Conservation and Development has received a grant to work with the Copper Center School to develop an interpretive trail for the School. WISE was approached to give their expertise on mapping out the trail and one day was spent walking and flagging, and giving input on the interpretive message.

Lecture Series

Lights in the Sky by Todd Pedersen, USAF Research Scientist gave a lecture on natural and artificial optical emissions from the upper atmosphere in March where 21 people attended. In April the Ocean Film Festival was viewed by 41 people. An Evening with a Raptor was conducted by the Wild Bird Rehabilitation Center in May. Dr. Glenn Shaw gave a lecture on Making the Planet Work: Green Power on a Large Scale, in April with 19 people attending. On December 18 Dr. Kenji Yashikawa, from the University of Alaska Fairbanks, talked about Permafrost Monitoring where 12 people enjoyed listening to his innovative ways of bringing his curriculum to many village high schools around the State of Alaska, and to other countries around the world.

Copper River Country Natural History Tour Program

Tours began May 22 and ended September 11. There were a total of 232 paying guests. There was about 175 hours of volunteer time that went into hiring, training, pay periods/bookkeeping, etc. The program grossed \$22,000 and netted \$11,500. In 2008 the program grossed \$21,552 and netted \$2,990. So we consider this a good success. We increased our income by re-configuring the tour and hiring one naturalist instead of two. Again, this year, the naturalist was part-time, only working when guests were signed up for the tour. We hope to make the naturalist position full time for 2010, and when there are no tours, the naturalist will work on other WISE programs. WISE also purchased a 14 passenger mini-bus in October for the tour program, making for roomier and increased seating; and freeing up the 15 passenger van for other summer programs.

Adopt a Road

On May 9 we picked up litter along the WISE Adopt a Highway section of the Richardson Hwy at mile 105-106.

Glennallen Health Fair

In August, Bruce had a booth at the Health Fair with local medicinal plants as the focus.

National Public Lands Day

In late September Bruce and his wife Kayane helped the Bureau of Land Management at their clean-up event on the Tiekel River. He also provided courtesy van service for the event as there was limited in the area.

Conferences and Classes

Bruce attended the Alaska Wilderness Recreation and Tourism Conference in Girdwood in February. Sessions and networking helped him make contacts for programs and gain information for the Natural History Tour.

Janelle and Paul participated in a teleconference with Foraker about sustainability model and giving input to Foraker on evaluating their programs.

Janelle and Bruce participated in the Foraker teleconference Building Relationships: Raising Sustainable Charitable Income.

Thank You to Our Sponsors, Members, and Partners

Grants: Revenue Sharing Kenny Lake and Glennallen \$5,000; Wrangell St. Elias National Park and Preserve Cooperative Agreement, \$2,500 and Jr. Ranger program \$11,000; Studebaker Environmental Education Fund, \$1,500; Alaska Conservation Foundation, \$1,000; Take it Outside, BLM \$3,000; American Legion Post #27, \$1,000; British Petroleum, \$1,000; Wells Fargo, \$500.

Membership, Individual: \$3,375

Board Dues: \$520

In-Kind Services: Alaska Dept. of Fish and Game; Alaska River Expeditions; Alaska State Troopers; Alaska Wild Bird Rehabilitation Center; Ahtna Heritage, Inc; Vic and Trisha Bruss; Bureau of Land Management; Copper Country Alliance; Copper Valley Development Association; Copper River School District; Gateway School District; Natural Resource conservation Service; Kenny Lake Soil & Water Conservation Service; 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; Mark Hem Charters; Bev Oatman; Sandy Williams; University of Alaska HAARP Education Outreach; University of Alaska Fairbanks; Wrangell St. Elias National Park and Preserve and the Whitney Museum. And thank you to all the volunteers and members.

Financial

WISE received \$4,105 in membership, individual, board dues and other income; \$24,755 in grants; and \$22,010 in Natural History Tour receipts for a total of \$50,870. Total Expenses were \$41,623. A full financial report is available upon request.

For day to day operations in-kind hours from board members, partners, and volunteers was about 2,000 hours - \$60,000.