

Wrangell Institute for Science and Environment Annual Report January 1– December 31, 2010

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 was 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 eighth successful year for Earth Discovery Day held at the visitor center grounds at Wrangell St. Elias National Park and Preserve (WRST). There were 104 students that participated. It was the seventh successful year for Changing Seasons program. This program is held at Slana School, Glennallen School and Kenny Lake School where 83 students attended. Other schools attended at the various locations.

Leave No Trace

In early May, Janelle (a Master LNT trainer) held a two day class for park rangers at WRST. Four new LNT instructors were certified including Bruce. There was also a Leave No Trace station for the 6th grade group at Earth Discovery Day taught by Janelle Eklund and Glenn Hart.

Partner Programs

WISE helped plan and participated in the Youth Environmental Summit in Copper Center in May. Bruce James taught the Smelly Salmon curriculum and helped with the wetlands discovery; Janelle Eklund taught Native Plants; and Glenn Hart taught about Local Fish and the Migration Game.

In Valdez, WISE partnered with Wrangell-St Elias National Park & Preserve, the Glennallen office of the BLM and the Whitney Museum to put on four stations of outdoor learning for the local "Junior Rangers". Bruce did the Smelly Salmon curriculum, Glenn Hart brought an "Artist in Residence" from the Park to share Underwater Acoustics with the kids, WISE Advisory Board member Vic Bruss and his wife had the WISE bird collection to share and two ladies from BLM taught about insects.

In September, WISE, WRST, BLM and Wrangell Mountains Center partnered on a day camp at Twin Lakes on the Nabesna Road. "How Local Prepare Wildfoods for Winter Storage" was the topic and youths (a more than a few elders!) learned to clean snowshoe hares, ducks, and salmon. They also butchered a moose quarter for an elder, smoked the cleaned salmon and processed wildberries into jams and jellies.

In November, WISE, WRST, BLM, and Ahtna Heritage partnered to share the Wonders of the Wrangells with 73 middle school kids from the Mat-Su valley. A scavenger hunt in the Exhibit Hall, skins and skulls mystery boxes, the park movie and the Ahtna Heritage Museum were all part of the day.

In December, WISE and WRST hosted a Winter Fun Day at the park Visitor Center. A round of disc golf and crosscountry skiing/snowshoeing were outdoor activities. Indoors we had hot drinks and chili, read books and enjoyed the fireplace while warming up from the -31 temps outside!

Summer Camps, McCarthy Road

In June and July WISE conducted Aquatic Ecology camps on the McCarthy Road. Partnering with the Alaska Department of Fish & Game, WRST and BLM, young participants spent time at Silver Lake learning about rainbow trout life cycles and testing the water for pH, temperature, dissolved oxygen and other characteristics, discovered a wetlands further out the McCarthy Road where salmon spawn and spent a night camping at Mile 27. 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! This program was very popular and participants are asking for more, longer summer science and environmental education camps. In response, we may do an additional camp at Tangle Lakes in the summer of 2011.

Copper River Stewardship Program

Once again 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. In 2010, the partners decided to open the eligible areas to include all of Alaska to share this wonderful program with others. 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. 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 Cordova, one each from Valdez, Anchorage and Chickaloon and two from the upper watershed. This is a very popular program and WISE and its partners are working on integrating other logistics into it for 2011.

Lecture Series

The first lecture of the calendar year was River Webs by BLM biologist Tim Sundlov. Next was Alaska Homesteading by Bob King of the BLM. Later in the spring was Columbia Glacier's Disintegration Course by Tad Pfeffer, glaciologist from the University of Colorado at Boulder and then a Journey Through Africa by local photographer, O'Hara Fleming. The last one in the spring was An Evening with Raptors was conducted by the Wild Bird Rehabilitation Center in early May. In the fall we resumed with Alaska Geologic Resources with Bob Swenson, Director of Alaska Division of Geological and Geophysical Surveys. Finally, we had Living with Volcanoes in Alaska by Christina Neal of the US Geological Survey. All together we had over 140 people enjoy these popular lectures.

Copper River Country Nature Tour Program

Tours began June 1 and ended August 31. There were a total of 218 paying guests. There was about 75 hours of volunteer time that went into hiring, training, pay periods/bookkeeping, etc. The program grossed \$21,000 and netted \$6,900. In 2009 the program grossed \$22,000 and netted \$11,500. Additional expenses included some van repairs (both vehicles) and higher Naturalist wages and gas prices. New this year was the partnership with Ahtna, Inc. Together we recruited, selected and trained a Naturalist Intern. This young native man added a more credible native culture component to our tours and was a big help with larger groups and guests with handicaps.

In 2009 we averaged 2.4 guests/available trip and in 2010 we had 3.1. This helped with our net revenue as adding guests on a trip is almost all a net gain. During the winter months WISE has focused on developing new partnerships from other tour companies coming through the Copper Valley to add even more guests to each trip. This program will be a large part of our future sustainability so generating increased revenue is an important goal.

Adopt a Road

On May 8 we picked up litter along the WISE Adopt a Highway section of the Richardson Hwy at mile 105-106.

Local Fairs

In August, Bruce had a booth at the Glennallen Health Fair with equipment for a safe backcountry hike as the focus. Later in the month WISE had a booth at the Kenny Lake Fair with a display of our programs and a craft project for kids.

National Public Lands Day

In June Bruce helped the Bureau of Land Management at their clean-up event at Paxson Lake Campground. He also helped by being the BBQ grill cook for the outdoor lunch.

Conferences and Classes

WISE participated in several teleconference training sessions. "In person training included Janelle and Dave at the Alaska Tour Guide Training Workshop put on by the Dept of Commerce, Community and Development. In August the board enjoyed having Dennis McMillian for Foraker spend a morning with us discussing the future of non-profit organizations in Alaska. In October, Bruce spent a week in Soldotna with the Executive Director of the Kenai River Sportfishing Association to be mentored in the ways an ED runs a successful non-profit organization.

Thank You to Our Sponsors, Members, and Partners

Grants: Revenue Sharing Kenny Lake and Glennallen \$9,000; Wrangell St. Elias National Park and Preserve Cooperative Agreement, \$2,500 and Jr. Ranger program \$2,000; Studebaker Environmental Education Fund, \$1,700; Alaska Conservation Foundation, \$500; Take it Outside, BLM \$6,000; Wells Fargo, \$500, First National Bank of Alaska \$200 and Ahtna, Inc \$500 (reimbursement towards Naturalist Intern expenses).

The biggest news under the title of grants was the generous grant awarded to WISE from the M.J. Murdock Charitable Trust. This grant covers three years and a total of \$72,000 is available if WISE can generate enough new funding to meet their matching requirements. This grant is to increase programming and develop sustainability. A direct result of the grant is the transition of the Executive Director and Naturalist (seasonal) to full time employees. Income in 2010 from this grant was \$15,000.

Membership, Individual: \$2723

Board Dues: \$275

In-Kind Services: Alaska Dept. of Fish and Game; Alaska Division of Geological & Geophysical Surveys; Alaska Wild Bird Rehabilitation Center; Ahtna Heritage, Inc; Advocates for Victims of Violence; Vic and Trisha Bruss; Bureau of Land Management; Copper Country Alliance; Copper Valley Development Association; Copper River Princess Wilderness Lodge; Copper River School District; Copper River Stewardship Program; Gateway School District; Kenai River Sportfishing Association; Natural Resource Conservation Service; Kenny Lake Soil & Water Conservation Service; Mt Sanford Tribal Consortium; Native Village of Gakona; Native Village of Tazlina; O'Hara Fleming and Geoff Bleakley; 4H; Prince William Sound Community College; Prince William Sound Aquaculture; Resource Conservation & Development; SAPA; University of Alaska HAARP Education Outreach; University of Alaska Fairbanks; University of Colorado; US Geological Survey; Wrangell St. Elias National Park and Preserve and the Whitney Museum. And thank you to all the volunteers and members.

Financial

WISE received \$5,200 in membership, individual, board dues and other income; \$15,000 from the Murdock grant, \$22,900 in other grants; and \$22,700 in Nature Tour receipts for a total of \$65,800. Total Expenses were \$69,500. A full financial report is available upon request.

For day to day operations in-kind hours from board members, partners, and volunteers was about 3,000 hours - \$90,000.