

WISE 2012 Annual Report

Two thousand twelve was a challenging year with many changes, but we continued our excellent record of community outreach in environmental education. We had a full slate of well attended programs, welcomed new members to the Board of Directors, and saw dynamic staff changes. Bruce James did an excellent job as Executive Director, but had to cut back his activities this year due to health challenges. In early December he regretfully resigned his position with WISE. Bruce did an excellent job of leading WISE through the transition from all-volunteer to staff, and leaves a legacy of great new programs and partnerships. As 2013 begins we are looking to hire a new Executive Director, and also fill a vacancy for a VISTA volunteer to work on capacity building for the organization. Robin Underwood joined WISE as VISTA volunteer in September, but had to resign when she was unable to comply with VISTA requirements. Robin is currently serving as acting Executive Director of WISE until the position can be permanently filled.

Bruce James was honored with two community service awards in spring of 2012, both based on the excellent job he did as WISE Executive Director. The Donna Tollman Award from Copper Valley Development Association and Wrangell-St. Elias National Park's Andy Taylor Award were both awarded to Bruce for his community work, which started with WISE and reached beyond to touch many diverse facets of our local communities.

WISE celebrated our 10th anniversary with a potluck lunch and celebration in April. Founders and retiring board members were honored, and great memories shared from past programs. Among the 40 plus people attending were a group of teenagers who were second and third graders in 2005, and participated in a WISE supported program called "From the River and Classroom to the Sea and Back," studying salmon life cycles and travelling through Prince William Sound to Seward to experience firsthand the habitats of the salmon. The teens were great sports about watching movies of their younger selves and sharing memories from the trip. It was a wonderful affirmation of the positive effect we are having on our community and youth, helping them grow up with awareness of the natural world around them.

In September, WISE was invited to meet with a group of Alaskan school superintendants to present our model of cooperation for outdoor education. Marnie Graham of BLM spoke on identifying assets from Government Agencies, Non-Profits, School Districts, and Villages/Communities and combining strengths to offer outdoor programming. WISE provided a slide show of a years' worth of activities. There was a panel discussion introducing representatives from the different cooperating groups. Everyone present shared memories of early outdoor experiences, highlighting the

strong impact it had on their lives. This event was a great affirmation of the role of WISE as a facilitator for cooperation.

WISE once again received great support from our members, sponsors, and partners, enabling WISE to stay strong financially and continue our tradition of service to our community. In particular, our grant from the M.J. Murdock Charitable Trust enabled us to employ professional staff and grow the capacity of the organization. 2013 will be the last year of our Murdock grant, which came with the challenge of finding new ways to make the organization self-supporting. We look forward to the challenges and changes of the coming year, and the opportunities to continue the important hands-on work of environmental education.

Financial Status

WISE ended the year with a healthy balance sheet, even though WISE's income from grants and tour sales was down about \$20,000 from 2011. This shortfall was largely due to the slow bookings with Copper Country Discovery Tour, and limited fundraising efforts because of health issues. WISE ended the year with \$25,027 in the checking account and \$5000 in the capital improvements account. This is largely due to the reduced expenditures from payroll, because of Bruce's illness.

Two thousand thirteen could be more of a challenge for raising funds. BLM our largest grantor has limited funds for WISE's programs, due to budget cuts (about half from 2012). This is also the last year for the Murdock Charitable Trust grant. It will also take time for the new Executive Director to get their feet on the ground and establish relationships for fundraising. We are hoping the tour sales will be robust.

2012 Programs:

BLM-Take It Outside We cooperated with BLM for 7 youth hikes, attended by a total of 41 people for a total of 992 hiking hours. We provide transportation, logistics, advertising, and food for these outings. BLM also was a very active partner in the Copper River Stewardship Program, Aquatic Camp, and Ice Fishing Day, and provided professional support at Earth Discovery Day and Changing Seasons.

Ice Fishing Day in early April drew 70 people of all ages for a great day of fun and fishing. The event was held at Silver Lake on the McCarthy Road. Prizes were given for big fish and great attitudes. Lunch and hot drinks were provided. The Bureau of Land Management, Alaska Department of Fish and Game and Wrangell St. Elias National Park and Preserve provided expertise and shared gear.

Earth Discovery Day A gathering of over 100 4th, 5th, and 6th Graders from the Copper River School District and Homeschoolers met at the Park Headquarters of Wrangell St. Elias National Park and Preserve. Twelve learning stations were manned by agency partners, non-profit partners, and volunteers. A highlight was learning to

throw an atlatl at a woolly mammoth target. Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve has always been generous in hosting this venue and providing other resources for this event, contributing to its continued success.

Copper River Stewardship Program was attended by 10 teenagers, and put on in cooperation with BLM, Copper River Watershed Project, Wrangell-St. Elias National Park, and Prince William Sound Science Center. The program was all held in the Copper River Valley this year, and included visits to many points of interest, agencies and organizations, canoeing on Lake Louise, and a raft trip down the Tazlina River. WISE was key in planning and recruitment, and provided transportation, lodging, and logistical support throughout.

Project Healing Waters (A Wounded Warriors Program) WISE again partnered with Project Healing Waters and BLM to help with a 4-day fly-fishing excursion to Tangle Lakes, for 12 wounded Gulf War veterans and their families. WISE provided logistical support, meals for the volunteers, and media coverage in a local newspaper article.

Aquatic Ecology Camp We held one 4-day Aquatic Camp in July, with four participants. It was held at Silver Lake and other locations along the McCarthy Road. Activities included setting a minnow trap, meeting with fish and game biologists, dissecting fish, macro invertebrate study, learning about salmon migration, water quality, swimming, fishing, s'mores and spooky tales around the campfire.

Changing Seasons was held September 11, 12, 13 at Slana School, Glennallen, and Kenny Lake, with 4 learning stations. At Slana, 8 students attended from grades k through 5th, along with teachers and parent helpers. With this small group we did not have to split the kids into smaller groups, but did one presentation at a time. This gave other presenters a chance to watch, learn, and participate. Copper Center School students came to Glennallen on Wednesday, and on Thursday we went to Kenny Lake. A favorite quote from this year's Changing Seasons: teacher Carla Schierholt at Kenny Lake "We are not afraid of big words! Let's all say macro invertebrate!"

In-Class Science Programs were presented to 9 elementary classes in the Copper River School District. Presenters were Bruce James, Janelle Eklund and Paul Boos. These programs were developed in consultation with Copper River School District to match grade level expectations, and materials were purchased with grants from Copper Valley Electric Association and Copper Valley Telecom.

Lecture Series In May, WISE hosted presenters from Alaska Wild Bird Rehabilitation Center. These presenters gave a lecture at WRST Auditorium with their live birds, a magpie and a short-eared owl, attended by about 13 people. In October we partnered with Prince William Sound Community College to bring a video-conference lecture by Barrow archaeologist, Anne Jensen, to Prince William Sound Community College in

Glennallen, the Kenny Lake Public Library, and the Copper Valley Community Library. Seventeen people attended at the ITV sites.

Willow Creek Research Project WISE continued its efforts to hire and mentor students in scientific research. A local student, Tessa Wygant, was hired as a research intern to gather stream data on Willow Creek. Research coordinator Dave Wellman will be presenting his current findings at a public lecture March 29, 2013.

Other Partnering Programs WISE volunteers assisted with programs at Youth Environmental Summit in May. In October WISE volunteers helped with delivering a program for visiting Colony School junior high students at Wrangell-St. Elias National Park, and Bruce gave a presentation at the Kenny Lake Public Library Book Camp. WISE continued its presence at the Kenny Lake fair. A booth with an ecology game was set up along with a silent auction, for two gift certificates at the Moose's Tooth in Anchorage.

Thank you for your continued support

Janelle Eklund, President