



Hands-On Education



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Copper River Stewardship Program participants Warren Brower and Josie Beauchamp transplant Sweet Gale while landscaping Dusky Canada Goose nest islands on the Copper River Delta Sound

Welcome!

November 12, 2018

Dear WISE Friends,

Welcome to our 2018 annual newsletter and showcase of the wonderful hands-on educational programs and partnerships that WISE has cultivated throughout the last year.



So much is happening in the natural world around us, mostly beyond what meets the eye. The time we take to observe and examine these events is invaluable.

No price can be put on a fresh snowfall, when wandering through the unclear lines where nature and humanity meet, tracks of coyotes that passed in the quiet of the night are revealed. Or the silhouette of an owl overhead, caught in the corner of your eye, causes you to leave your own thoughts to wonder what its current mission is. For some of us, observation comes naturally, like children who are innately curious about the world around them.

Some of us participate in subsistence and traditional activities and, therefore, are interested in the habitat that moose, caribou or fish live in – and we take notice. Or maybe you like to identify birds, medicinal plants, or are interested in the subtle differences among the more than 60 species of willow that thrive in our area.

In our complex world, it's also easy for adults, adolescents and children alike to be removed from what is going on in the “real” world around us.

WISE's array of programs, hikes, and lectures offer opportunities for people of all ages to gather, share in our wonderful natural world, and experience hands-on education. Our partnerships with local organizations such as BLM, Wrangell St. Elias National Park, Copper River Watershed Project, and the Copper River School District draw on the diversity and expertise in our area.

Our programs would not be possible without the contributions of many. A big thank-you to Jolene Nashlund and Judith Lorenz for being outstanding guides for the Copper Country Discovery Tour. Every year it seems we have a record number of participants, with an all-time high of 390 this year! Thanks to Mikaela Dalton, brought to us through AmeriCorps, and Matt Roman, WISE's summer intern. These two were true “boots on the ground,” helping implement hands-on education through the Willow Creek Research Project and many summer hikes and backpacking trips. In addition, Mikaela put her background in experiential learning to work developing the (OWLS) Outdoor Wilderness Leadership Skills program. And thank-you to Robin Mayo, whose unending energy and creativity has boldly led WISE as executive director for 6 years now. Her visionary talents and infectious enthusiasm have helped WISE expand new programs and partnerships that keep WISE vibrant.

Thank-you to the WISE board and advisory board members who take time out of their busy lives to contribute and keep the business affairs in order.

Last but not least, a huge thank-you to the reader! Without your interest and support we would not be able to continue our hands-on approach to getting outside, learning, sharing, and discovering new connections. As you explore our annual newsletter and program highlights, I want to encourage your continued support through participation, volunteering, and your kind donations which keep WISE providing these unique opportunities.

Reflecting on the words of John Muir, “In every walk with nature one receives far more than he(she) seeks.” I think you will find that WISE programs have certainly provided that opportunity for many.

Gratefully,

Jenny Moser, WISE Board of Directors



Jenny has served on the WISE Board of Directors since 2014, and occasionally joins us for programs. Here, she teaches salmon ecology at Changing Seasons. Jenny works as a wildland firefighter and is building a small farm at Kenny Lake with her partner Kelly.

Thank You!

Cover Photo: Lauren Bien, Prince William Sound Science Center
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2018 Program Highlights

Winter Fun Day

We helped Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Ahtna Heritage Foundation host this event during Christmas Break, with indoor and outdoor activities to celebrate the season, including a snowshoe obstacle course, wildlife tracking, and snowmachine repair.

Alaska Forum on the Environment

Students from Copper River Stewardship Program designed and presented a session called "Watershed Haiku" at this statewide meeting. We invited the audience to join us in an impromptu Poetry Slam, and were delighted with their creative efforts.

Family Ice Fishing Day

About 100 people enjoyed the spring warmth and caught some lovely Rainbow Trout at Silver Lake in early April.

In-Class Science Lessons

We visited Slana, Valdez, and all the schools between. This year we added new lessons focused on cold, including snow science, glaciers, and homemade ice cream.

Camp Chosen Frozen

Junior High students camped at Sourdough, took a ski expedition to Paxson Lake, and learned to make survival snowshoes at the 5th Annual Camp Chosen Frozen.



Earth Discovery Day

This was WISE's first program, and still a favorite time for local educators, 4-5-6 grade students, and visiting experts to celebrate the beginning of the outdoor season at Wrangell-St. Elias National Park Visitor Center.

Science Lecture Series

Local and travelling experts shared a wealth of knowledge, from glacier ice caves to medicinal plants, in 6 well-attended lectures this season.

Project Healing Waters

Stories from adventurers around the world were heard around the campfire at Tangle Lakes at this annual fly fishing excursion for wounded veterans.

Copper River Stewardship Program

Our theme this year was movement, and we travelled by a myriad of means, including sailboat, river raft, canoe, and hiking. The synergy of students from Copper Basin and Cordova exploring together makes this program special. See student projects on page 7.

WISE/BLM Summer Hikes

We hosted 8 hikes this summer and had record attendance. It was a treat to have hikers of all ages, from babes in backpacks to senior citizens.

Aquatic Ecology Camp

The super creative team at Aquatic Camp not only learned about macroinvertebrates, fish, and aquatic mammals, they also treated us to a condensed version of Romeo and Juliet. An evening visit from a beaver was a highlight.



Copper Country Discovery Tour

Our Revenue generating tour program had a record year with 390 guests, thanks to the hard work of our two local guides. We are delighted to be giving tourists a chance to meet real Alaskans and learn about the unique Copper River Valley.

Field Sketching and Watercolor Tour

This tour was offered at the Princess Lodge for a second year and had increased attendance with lots of happy creative guests.

Wings over the Wrangells

We helped students dissect owl pellets at this event sponsored by Wrangell-St. Elias National Park.

Willow Creek Research Project

We continue to assist with this important research project to understand our local hydrology, and give students a chance to experience field research.

National Public Lands Day

This year we converged on the Paxson Lake Campground to help with projects and celebrate good stewardship of our Public Lands.

Outdoor Wilderness Leadership Skills (OWLS)

See Page 5 for a report on the first year of this new program.

Geology Camp

For the third year we worked with Wrangell Mountains Center to take a group of teens backpacking near Kennecott with a local geologist. Deep snows kept us away from our intended destination of Bonanza Mine, but we had an amazing learning experience, and plenty of fun.

HAARP Open House We are proud to partner with University of Alaska Fairbanks to show off the world-class research facility in our backyard

Changing Seasons Program This fall event brings 2nd and 3rd graders outdoors to explore the world as the seasons change in autumn.

WISE also assists with partner programs throughout the year. For details see the 2018 Annual Report at www.wise-edu.org.



Saylehr dissects an owl pellet at Wings over the Wrangells

Mission Statement

WISE provides science and environmental education, supports scientific research, and shares the natural wonders of Alaska's Copper River Valley.

Core Values

Stewardship - Grassroots Involvement - Partnerships
Integrity - Sense of Place - Mentorship

Environmental Education and Stewardship Intern

“Highly Enthusiastic Personality” is not in the job description for our summer interns, but it might as well be. Every one of our interns has been a very bright spark, and Matthew Roman is no exception. Matt is a student at Columbia University, and was excited to escape New York City for a few months in the Alaskan wilderness.

Although his head touched the ceiling when he stood up straight, Matt happily settled into the little cabin behind our office and staff quarters. He drew on his experiences as a boy scout and college expedition leader to jump right in to WISE programs. Weather riffing about the water cycle or teaching knot tying skills, Matt’s engaging personality made every lesson an adventure. He made friends easily with folks of all ages and backgrounds, and never met a dog he didn’t bond with immediately.

Although his college major is Astrophysics, Matt is a renaissance man with a multitude of interests and dreams, including running for president someday.



Matt channels his inner macroinvertebrate at Aquatic Ecology Camp.



Matt teaches knot tying on a hike on the Liberty Falls Trail.

Where are they now? News of former WISE Staff

Matt Morse, 2013-2014 Americorps VISTA volunteer, recently accepted a job as programmer/analyst with Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation, Division of Spill Prevention and Response. He and his wife 2010-2014 Tour Guide **Cara Morse** live in Juneau.

Lyda Rossi, 2014-2015 Americorps VISTA volunteer, has spent several fun years in Anchorage, and is excited to be moving on to her next adventure: medical school! She has chosen a program in Central Washington that focuses on rural medicine, and hopes to return to practice in Alaska.

Jamie Dawson, 2015-2016 Americorps VISTA volunteer, recently moved to Bend, OR to continue Oregon Wild's work to designate a National Recreation Area in central Oregon's Ochoco Mountains. She is working to empower rural communities as they fight for conservation values on public lands, and to educate the many new Oregon transplants about why we need protected lands and waters.

Tim Daly, 2017 Summer Program Specialist, is currently working in the Santa Cruz Mountains for Exploring New Horizons, an outdoor school for 5th and 6th graders, teaching local ecology. Tim spent last summer as an interpreter with California State Parks at Portola Redwoods State Park in the Santa Cruz Mountains.

Thomas Matia, 2017 Summer Intern, is working in international conservation nonprofits in Central America as a fundraiser and program developer.

Mikaela Dalton, 2017-2018 Americorps Resilient Alaska Youth Volunteer, is furthering her work in experiential education with an Americorps teaching fellowship at Chewonki School in Maine.

“The past few months have been much more than some internship I can sum up on a resume....Life is just different out here, the sense of community is one of the strongest I’ve ever felt...We all may have a clear idea of the beauty of the natural world, what I’ve come to realize is that it can really change the way we think and feel. It can make us more aware, more connected with ourselves and others, and on the whole more complete.” Matt Roman, August 2018

A Classroom with a View

On a mossy hillside on the south side of the Mentasta Mountains, class is convened. There are no desks or textbooks, and it is hard to tell who is the teacher and who is the student, but there is no doubt about the lesson. We are crouched over maps, peering closely at the swing of the needle of our compasses, trying to wrap our brains around declination, degrees, and direction of travel. We learn to match the symbols on the map to what we see around us, and how to chart a course through unfamiliar ground.



Looking confidently towards their futures, the OWLS team enjoys the view.

local professionals for job shadowing days. Josie Beauchamp teamed up with Alaska Department of Fish and Game Wildlife Biologist and WISE board member Heidi Hatcher for a wild tramp through the

This classroom was one of many for our new Outdoor Wilderness Leadership Skills (OWLS) program, and we were excited to welcome our first cohort this summer. This program gives teens a start on skills they will need for careers in the outdoors. The OWLS completed two expeditions, and also worked independently pursuing their own interests. For a summer of hard work and occasionally uncomfortable adventures, they earned a half a High School credit, and new confidence in living and working outdoors.

For the first OWLS expedition in early June, we backpacked to the Caribou Creek Cabin off the Nabesna Road in Wrangell-St. Elias National Park. Spring leaves were just starting to appear at that high elevation, and our challenges included creek crossings with thick shelves of rotting ice blocking our way. Pitching our tents on a nearby knoll and using the cabin as a basecamp, we spent four days exploring the nearby area and digging into lessons covering a wide range of outdoor skills. Some were immediate and practical, such as cooking, water purification, and knots. Others were more theoretical, such as leadership styles, risk management, and our personal relationships with the land around us. This trip also served as staff orientation and crash course in Alaska for Matt Roman, our newly arrived intern.

Back home, the OWLS students started working on their final “test,” an expedition they planned themselves. They chose to canoe in the upper Tangle Lakes area, and dug into the logistics of meal planning, route finding, and equipment lists. This task was complicated by the fact that their homes were many miles apart, so communication was a challenge. Meanwhile, the OWLS joined



Matt Roman and Isaiah Amberg enjoy a rainy day of canoeing on Tangle Lakes.

wilderness looking for lost caribou collars using a radio tracker. Isaiah Amberg spent a day with an Alaska Department of Natural Resources Fire Crew, working in the warehouse and patrolling in the engine.

Josie also put her skills to the test by taking a leadership role on our Geology Camp. She showed up a whole day early to tackle packing food, sorting equipment, and many of the other chores that precede a big group trip. As we explored Kennicott and backpacked to a glacial lake, she was on hand to help lead activities, facilitate meals, and keep an



Josie Beauchamp and Heidi Hatcher use radio telemetry to track down caribou.

eye on safety.

We are already looking forward to taking this program to full scale, recruiting a bigger cohort and refining the format and lessons. The program was designed and led in 2018 by our Americorps volunteer, Mikaela Dalton, who has now moved on, so it will be challenging to put it on without her. It is so inspiring to see these young people step forward as leaders, confidently charting their own courses through the wilderness.

Robin Mayo

Getting Our Hands Dirty

On a cool afternoon in August, a noisy group is exploring the Tolsona Mud Volcanoes west of Glennallen. When we first arrived we talked a little about the geological phenomenon, but it is clear the kids are more interested in experiencing things firsthand. In other words, they are playing in the mud. Painting their arms and faces, smearing, sculpting, rolling, sliding, and flinging, they are one with the mud. And indeed, why not? This is no everyday surface mud, it is “straight from the center of the earth” mud, fantastically smooth and pure. A hungry teen takes a quick break to eat lunch, leaving a muddy bite mark on his sandwich.

As we hike back to our vehicles, the mud begins to dry and itch, and the bog smells of sulfur and compost. We jump on tussocks, balance on logs, and laugh when we go over the tops of our boots. Why try to keep your feet dry when you are covered in mud from head to toe?

At the creek, we wade in to rinse off, hollering when the cold water hits us. We discover that just to rinse is not enough, the tenacious clay needs to be scrubbed off. And we scrub, because we know that we can't get back in the van until the mud is washed down Tolsona Creek. Then finally we are back in Big Red, the trusty WISE van, sitting on garbage bags to protect the seats and enjoying the warm blast of the heater.

Sensory experiences like this are the heart of many WISE programs. At Aquatic Camp, we delve into the mucky bottom of Silver Lake, discovering robust and diverse life, the macroinvertebrates that are the foundation of the aquatic food chain. At Camp Chosen Frozen, we pile up snow and hollow out Quinzees, survival shelters that take advantage of the insulating properties of the snow. Hiking in a Quaking Aspen forest, we might stop to paint our faces with the yeasty white powder that grows on the south sides of the trees. On Copper River Stewardship Program, we spend a day wearing chest waders, immersed in the wet world of the Copper River Delta.

“Passion does not arrive on videotape or on a CD; passion is personal. Passion is lifted from the earth itself by the muddy hands of the young, it travels along grass-stained sleeves to the heart.”

- Richard Louv, Last Child in the Woods: Saving Our Children from Nature Deficit Disorder, 2005



A hands on moment at Tolsona Mud Volcanos

We work with all of our senses, noticing the nuances. By providing experiences instead of doling out facts, we seek to inspire curiosity, wonder, and respect. Hands on education also accommodates a wide variety of learning styles, and is a great equalizer when a group has widely divergent knowledge or skills. Amidst the mess and laughter, walls are breaking down and indelible memories are being made. Facts and figures can be googled, but there is only one way

to truly get a feel for the world—by getting your hands dirty.

Robin Mayo



Geology Camp participants pore over a map of Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve before setting out to explore the mountains.

Copper River Stewardship Program Final Projects



Oil Painting by Lindsey Gordon

"Two days before the program I was called to see if I wanted to go and I said YES...I encourage you to do fun things like this because you'll learn a lot in the wilderness. You might also meet some nice and funny people."
Warren Brower

Water

I grant life,
And allow death,
I am either not wanted,
Or suddenly needed,
I go around in cycles,
Ever-going and non-stopping,
In different forms,
I stay the same,
You can find me everywhere you go,
For 70% of you is me,
Hidden around the world or obviously placed,
You see me every day,
In several ways,
I am forever and always there,
For I am Water.
Josie Beauchamp

Movement. It is everywhere, steady or irregular, fast or slow, big or small. Everything moves, especially in Alaska. On the Stewardship Program the other students and I learned about the different types of movement in Alaska, from the flower seeds floating in the wind to the glaciers grinding across the land.

We started the trip by talking about all the different ways plants can reproduce in Alaska. We talked about the Aspen trees that grow saplings from pre-existing roots, forming a single forest interconnected under the ground, one living organism bigger than you can imagine. The dandelions, and how they use their lightweight structure to float their seeds on the wind and spread like wildfire. The cattails and how they have evolved to have lightweight floating roots that float down the river until they find a suitable place to root down and start to spread.

We then talked about the silt moving along the river beds and the glaciers bringing more and more silt as they recede and melt away leaving rocks and silt to be taken by the land and shipped away. The silt from cliff sides and new river paths carries along over thousands of years worth of geological history eventually ending up in the mud flats near the ocean, and along the rivers close to the coast because of the tidal influence.

The native people and animals of Alaska move more than almost any other place in the world, the salmon spawn and make a long treacherous journey to the ocean to grow, then return to their original spawning location to spawn the future generation, after they spawn they give their bodies to the earth and die where they were born. While other animals follow the fish, the caribou and moose populations only move based on the climate and breeding and rutting grounds. The native people have to adapt to where the fish and other animals go to survive in this harsh climate, they would have fish camps to move to for fishing season, and hunting camps and log cabins for the winter to get sheep and caribou etc.
Cozmo Harder



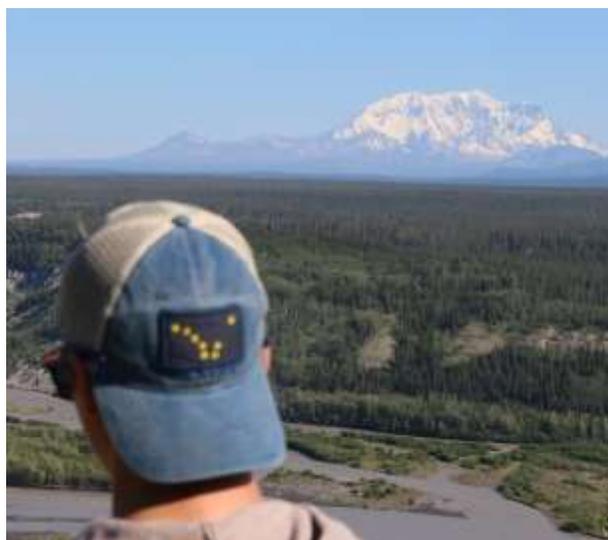
"We had a very long journey back because we had to go upstream. Even though the tide was coming in, it was too hard for us to paddle our canoes against. We walked all of our canoes on the bank for about 6 miles. It was raining the whole time so we were all wet."
Taylor Dolge

Nic'anilen na'

In October, WISE became the proud owner of 40 acres in the lower Tonsina area, which we are calling Nic'anilen na' meaning "current flows out from shore creek" in the Ahtna Language. We worked with the land donors and Great Land Trust to protect the property with a conservation easement, which ensures it will remain wild forever.

The property includes spruce and cottonwood forest, beaver ponds, and a salmon spawning stream. At this time, the former owners are still enjoying the property, and when they are no longer using it WISE will begin to be more active. The Conservation Easement allows only minimal improvements to enhance the educational value, such as trails, boardwalks, and interpretive signs. A small corner of the property allows more extensive development, and we hope to someday construct facilities such as pavilion, tent platforms, and outhouses. The WISE board is working on a strategic plan to make the best use of this amazing gift.

Nic'anilen na' is a haven for wildlife including waterfowl, beavers, moose, and salmon, and we hope it will also become an integral part of our education programs.



Mount Blackburn and the Copper River are an inspiring backdrop for a writing exercise during Copper River Stewardship Program
BLM photo

Pop-Up Natural Playgrounds

Creative, freeform outdoor play is one of the most important ingredients for a great childhood, and it is being lost in our technology-centered world. WISE is planning to create a collection of materials for pop-up natural playgrounds which will be set up at schools and events in the Copper River Valley.

This style of playground does not include any of the structures traditionally found at parks and schools. Instead, it is stocked with logs, sticks, rope, straw, burlap, and other materials to encourage kids to create, build and play without instruction or input from adults. We will be recruiting and training volunteers to set up, supervise, and clean up the playgrounds, and be looking for opportunities to set it up where youth congregate in the Copper River Valley.

As we develop this project, we will be holding a crowdfunding campaign to raise needed cash, and also be looking for donations of the equipment and materials we need. The "kit" will live and travel in WISE's utility trailer, ready for adventure.

Copper Basin Science Symposium

WISE is in the midst of conversations on the possibilities for co-hosting a Copper Basin Science Symposium in the winter of 2019-20.

This would be a joint project with WISE,

nonprofit partners Wrangell Mountains Center and Copper River Watershed Project, Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve, and other area stakeholders. The goals would be to bring researchers together to network, identify data gaps, and look for regional trends. We plan to incorporate Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) into the mix of information presented at the symposium. Because of available funding and their integral importance in our ecosystem, salmon will be a focus, but we also hope to have representatives from a broad spectrum of disciplines.

Through our Science Lecture Series, we have learned that Copper Basin residents are avid lifelong learners who take a keen interest in scientific research in our area. We look forward to making this symposium available for residents and visitors. The format will include short reviews of projects, keynote speakers, poster sessions, and informal times for participants to visit. Our hope is that it will be a force in encouraging cooperation between researchers, agencies, and the public in collecting the data we need to understand this dynamic place.



Thompson Pass Rock Cairn. BLM Photo

Education Partners

Copper River School District
 Prince William Sound College
 University of Alaska Fairbanks
 Valdez City Schools
 Campbell Creek Science Center



*Don't walk behind me,
 I may not lead.
 Don't walk in front of me;
 I may not follow.
 Just walk beside me
 And be my friend.
 Albert Camus*

Government and Tribal Partners

Alaska Department of Fish and Game
 Copper River Native Association
 Mount Sanford Tribal Consortium
 Native Village of Gakona
 Native Village of Gulkana
 Native Village of Kluti-Kaah
 US Bureau of Land Management
 US Forest Service Cordova Ranger District
 Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve

Bon Voyage Robben!

We have had the pleasure of sharing adventures with Robben Taylor for many years, as a WISE program participant, BLM Intern, WISE employee, and most recently BLM Glennallen Field Office Partner and Outreach Coordinator. We will miss her as she heads out to see more of the world!



Nonprofit Partners

Alaska WildBird Rehabilitation
 Ahtna Heritage Foundation
 Copper River Watershed Project
 Copper Country Alliance
 The Foraker Group
 Greater Copper Valley Chamber of Commerce
 Kenny Lake Community League
 Kenny Lake Public Library
 Prince William Sound Science Center
 Prince William Sound Regional Citizens Advisory Council
 Project Healing Waters Alaska
 RurAL CAP
 Wrangell Mountains Center
 Willow Creek Water Consortium
 Wellwood Conservancy



Partner Focus:

Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve

We think having the nation's largest National Park for our backyard is a BIG deal! Park personnel were instrumental in the founding of WISE, and the park is still one of our essential partners. The Visitor Center is a perfect venue for Earth Discovery Day, lectures, and Winter Fun Day. We work with Education Specialist Russell Scribner on Camp Chosen Frozen, Copper River Stewardship Program, Changing Seasons, and many other programs.

2018 Funders



**State of Alaska
Community Assistance Program
Copper River School District
Fred Meyer Community Rewards
Amazon Smile
Gulkana Village Council**

For more details on WISE revenues and expenses, please request our 2018 Annual Report, or see it at www.wise-edu.org

WISE Donors

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Meg Jensen and Mike McQueen
Ruth McHenry and Cliff Eames
Robin Mayo
Gail Mayo



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\$100 to \$499
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Copper River Princess Wilderness Lodge
Alaska Geographic
WISE Board of Directors and Advisory Board
Ruth McHenry & Cliff Eames
All WISE Volunteers

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A photograph of children playing in mud. The image is faded and serves as a background for the text. It shows several children, some wearing waders, standing in a muddy area. One child in the foreground is wearing a striped tank top and blue pants, while another child to the right is wearing a grey t-shirt and dark pants, both covered in mud.

**Play is the highest
form of research**

Albert Einstein