

With creativity and resilience, we managed to have a successful year of environmental education in 2020. Although there were many challenges, there were also unique opportunities to think outside the box, reconsider how we do things, and take advantage of serendipitous opportunities.

Programs

Copper River Basin Symposium

In February, WISE helped host the first Copper River Basin Symposium, which brought together researchers, managers, and stakeholders sharing the theme of Tradition, Science, and Stewardship. The two day long symposium included 30 presentations, a poster session, keynote speeches, and chances for informal discussions. Students from Copper River Stewardship Program gave a presentation on their experiences and the importance of engaging youth.



Copper River Stewardship Program students present at the first Copper River Basin Symposium

Salmon Tanks in the Schools

We are assisting Copper River Watershed Project with their salmon hatching program. When CRWP staff were unable to travel in May, WISE went to 4 area schools to take the salmon fry from the tanks and release them in lakes. Although most of the students were unable to attend due to remote learning, we met with a few homeschool students and assisted the teachers in documenting the release.



Getting ready to transport salmon fry from a classroom tank to the lake where they will

Earth Discovery Day

We pivoted Earth Discovery Day to a virtual program, joining local students for 4 days of “Zoom” meetings. We joined 4th, 5th and 6th grade classes. Presenters showed great ingenuity in adapting their presentations, including dissecting salmon, showing how to measure a standing tree, oil spill education, and visiting hawks and owls in their mews at the bird rehabilitation center.

Summer Hikes and Programs

For summer programs, we pivoted to a “by request” schedule. Families and small groups requested hikes and activities. We did nine of these activities in June and July, including outdoor preparedness, boreal forest, and Tolsona mud volcanoes. This model also made it possible to try new activities, like a hike to the Slide Mountain fossil beds with a local who knew the way. This was a great way to add new hikes to our repertoire.

Copper River Stewardship Program

With our usual 10 day trip with students from several different communities out of the question, the CRSP partners chose a format with virtual meetings for the entire group, and smaller local pods for fieldwork activities. Applicants were assured that they would still have the option of joining the full program as soon as possible. About half our applicants decided to attend, with 4 in the Copper Basin and 2 in Cordova. We held Zoom meetings at the beginning and end for learning and team building activities. The groups met locally to conduct surveys for juvenile trout, learn to evaluate culverts, and other activities.



Simulating an oil spill at his kitchen table, a student participates in virtual Earth Discovery Day.

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Aquatic Ecology Day

Three families joined us at Silver Lake for a fun day of Aquatic Ecology activities, including setting traps for juvenile fish, learning about the water cycle, and dredging for macroinvertebrates. This activity highlighted one of the “silver linings” of our pandemic adaptations. The group had a far wider age range than our usual Aquatic Ecology Camp attendees. It was delightful to see the older kids who were familiar with the activities mentor their younger friends and siblings.

Kids Don’t Float

We learned of a partially completed Kids Don’t Float lifejacket kiosk project in memory of a local homesteader, and decided to it was a great project for the summer intern. He learned about everything from how wide is a highway right-of-way, to how to drill plexiglass without cracking it! The kiosk was installed at Pippin Lake, mile 80 Richardson Highway. The lifejackets got a lot of use from swimmers and boaters, a few disappeared but some new ones got added as well. Unfortunately the season ended with vandalism to our kiosk, so it was taken down and will be set up again in the spring.

Changing Seasons Program

We were delighted to be able to offer a “mostly normal” Changing Seasons program for the 2nd and 3rd graders in September. The presenters were innovative in adapting lessons, and once again we discovered new ways of doing things that we may continue. As well as school visits to Glennallen and Kenny Lake, we sent out about 40 packets of activities to students who couldn’t attend. BLM staff helped in planning, and Kenny Steck was a presenter for the Web of Life station.

Kotsina River Cleanup

We got the unique opportunity to help clean up a notorious local eyesore when a contractor offered to donate the equipment and labor to remove abandoned vehicles from the Kotsina River floodplain. We teamed up with Copper River Watershed Project and other partners, and succeeded in removing about 100 cubic yards of debris, as well as hosting a volunteer event to clean up the entire area. This was another of those “silver lining” moments, we had the time and flexibility this year to step up to this kind of opportunity. BLM was instrumental in helping organize the volunteer day, and several GFO staff members.

Virtual Adventures

We teamed up with BLM and Wrangell-St. Elias National Park to host three “Virtual Adventures” this summer led by GFO Summer Ranger Amanda Friendshuh. Participants learned about the Alyeska Pipeline, visited local farms, and took a trip to McCarthy and Kennicott. As well as outreach opportunities, these were amazing learning experiences for all of the partners, pushing us out of our comfort zones to learn skills that have become essential.



Aquatic Ecology Day Camp at Silver Lake was wet and muddy fun.



WISE Intern Moses Korth built this “Kid’s Don’t Float Lifejacket loaner station at Pippin Lake.



An RV Chassis is extracted from the Kotsina River at our fall cleanup with Copper River Watershed Project and Cruz Construction.

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Discovery Packs

To help support families learning at home, we created Discovery Packs with books and materials on science and nature topics. They are available to check out at 3 local libraries: Kenny Lake, Valdez, and Glennallen. When this stage of the project is complete there will be a total of 24 packs, and we hope to continue and grow the Discovery Pack project in the future.

Science Lecture Series

The Science Lecture Series positively thrived on the pandemic! We worked with partner Prince William Sound College to implement lectures on the virtual platform Zoom. This also enabled us to feature lecturers from varied locations without dealing with travel. We had a 2-lecture series on Archaeology in Wrangell-St. Elias National Park, and also talks on caribou, bird migration, and several other topics.

Winter Fun Day

Continuing with our philosophy of “something is better than nothing,” and “high aspirations, low expectations,” we worked with partners for a virtual winter fun day during Christmas Break. Participants who signed up ahead of time were mailed a box with materials for spruce cone elves, ice sculptures, a pine cone bird feeder, and “snowman soup.” We then held a videoconference call with instructions for each project, and a lesson on identifying winter birds at the feeder. We then encouraged everyone to get outside and ski, snowshoed, sled, or play!

Looking Ahead

It was a year of learning and adapting, but we also were able to go ahead with many long-term projects, such as planning for our Nic’anilen na’ property and developing curriculum and work plans for WISE programs. We hope that 2021 allows us to return to more normal operations, but no matter what, 2020 has helped us learn and grow.

Warm thanks to all of our supporters, partners, and program participants. Special thanks go to WISE Board of Directors and staff for their exceptional work and support, and our partners at US Bureau of Land Management Glennallen Field Office, Wrangell-St. Elias National Park, Prince William Sound College, and Copper River Watershed for being willing to think outside the box.

Respectfully Submitted,



Executive Director



These distinctive teal backpacks hold collections of books, tools, and materials for science and nature exploration.



Tiny spruce cone elves took over the WISE office for several weeks as we prepared for our virtual Winter Fund Day.

Education Partners

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



Claw marks on an aspen tree hint at a long-ago story.



Fragments of Robin's egg found near a trail spark curiosity and wonder.

Government and Tribal Partners

Ahtna Intertribal Resource Commission
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

Nonprofit Partners

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



*Social Distancing can still be fun!
Families enjoy a hike on Glennallen's
Aspen Trail*

**Photo Credits: Janelle Eklund, Paul Boos, Robin Mayo,
Jolene Nashlund, Amanda Friendshuh.**

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INCOME Jan 1, 2020-Dec 31, 2020

Earned Income	
Tour Sales	(\$652)
Program Fees	\$242
Rent	\$7,661
Merchandise	\$634
Nonprofit and Foundation	\$14,366
Government	\$40,800
Corporate	\$2,260
Membership and Donors	\$18,156
Misc. Income	\$5,548
Total	\$89,015

Balance in Bruce James Memorial Scholarship Fund	\$3,034
Balance in WISE Reserve Fund	\$17,146

EXPENSES

Payroll incl. Taxes and Insurance	\$57,707
Supplies and Equipment	\$6,589
Insurance (except workers comp)	\$4,697
Travel	\$434
Stipends, Honorariums	\$659
Professional Fees and Contracts	\$4902
Vehicle Fuel and Maintenance	\$950
Staff Training	\$1,496
Advertising, Printing, and Postage	\$1,233
Facility Rental	\$250
Office Maintenance and Utilities	\$10,959
Dues, Subscriptions, and Licenses	\$286
Pass through to other nonprofits	\$1000
Refunds	\$500
Total	\$91,662



We ARE the light at the end of the tunnel! Copper River Stewardship Program participants complete a survey of a highway culvert as part of their study of the northernmost Rainbow Trout habitat.



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2020 Funders

US Bureau of Land Management Glennallen Field Office

Cooperative Agreement L19AC00212

Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve

Cooperative Agreement

Alaska Conservation Foundation

Studebaker Family Environmental Education Fund

Copper Valley Electric Association Community Foundation

In-Class Science Grant

Copper Valley Telecom

In-Class Science Grant

Alyeska Pipeline Service Company

Lecture Series Funding

State of Alaska Community Assistance Program

Alaska Community Foundation

Juneau Community Foundation

Kate Svitek Memorial Foundation

SBA Paycheck Protection Program

Amazon Smile

Fred Meyer Community Rewards

And 90+ Individual and Family Donors

Earned Income from:

Merchandise Sales

Program Fees

Rent of WISE facilities

In-Kind Donors

Apocalypse Design

Beryl Wardlaw and Victor Bailey

Copper River Record

Ruth McHenry and Cliff Eames

Janelle Eklund and Paul Boos

