



Wrangell Institute for Science and Environment

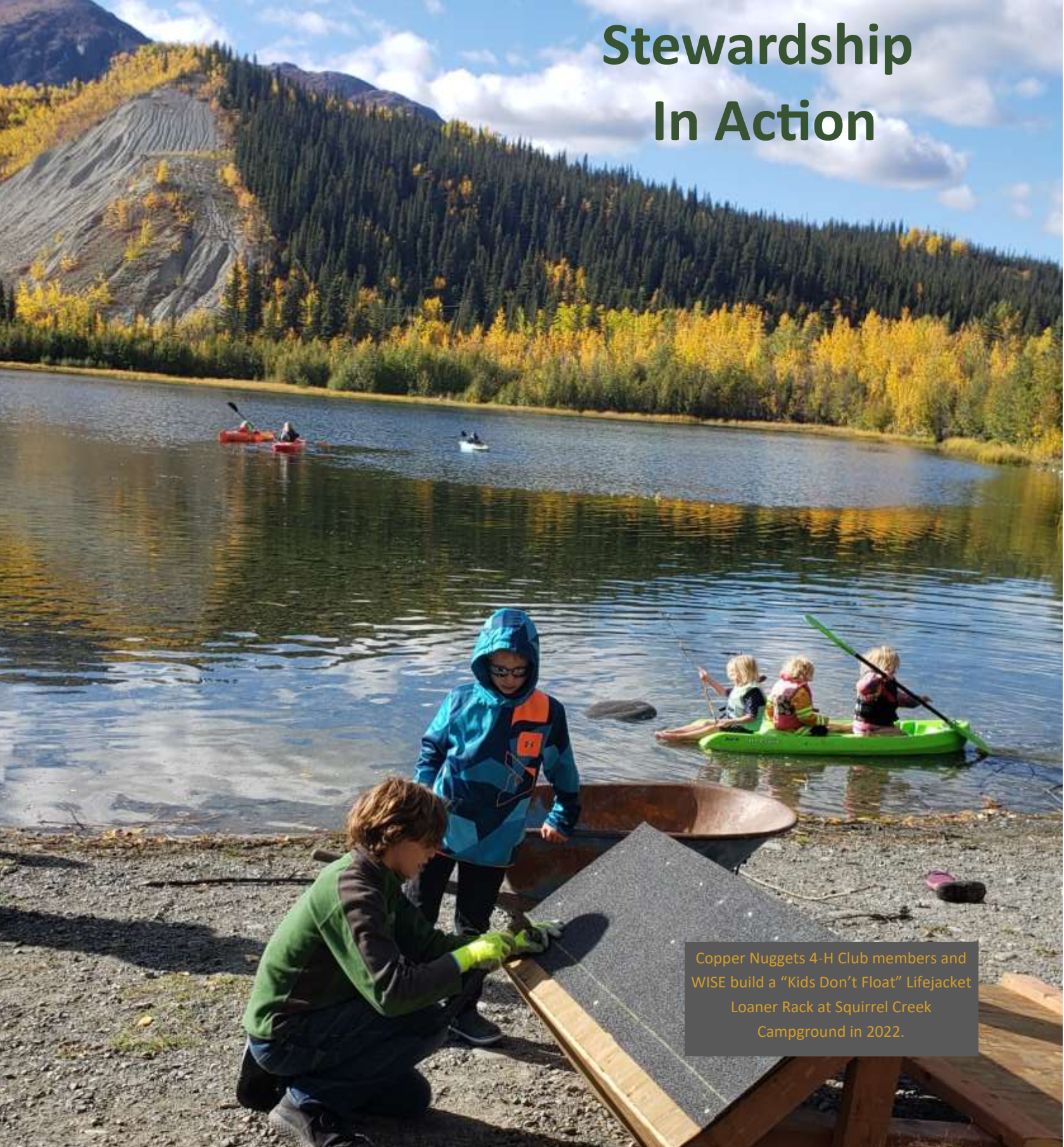
**WISE** | **LEARN. GROW.**  
**GET OUTSIDE.**



[www.wise-edu.org](http://www.wise-edu.org)

Volume 22 Winter 2024/2025

# Stewardship In Action



Copper Nuggets 4-H Club members and WISE build a “Kids Don’t Float” Lifejacket Loaner Rack at Squirrel Creek Campground in 2022.

# Welcome!

Welcome Friends!

Time flies and we've already had twenty two years of growing wise stewards. Throughout this newsletter we celebrate stewardship in action in many forms from participants to teachers.



*Janelle enjoys the role of Spring in a skit at the Changing Seasons program.*

WISE uses the word stewardship a lot but what does it mean? Merriam-Webster dictionary describes it as the 'careful and responsible management of something entrusted to one's care'. That 'something' for WISE is our mother earth.

WISE programs are filled with responsible care through contact with the environment. Those that go through our programs are given time to secure a sense of place in their minds – the cornerstone of wrapping oneself in the stewardship ethic. That sense of place flows into each person when they are allowed quiet time to sit on a bluff overlooking a river valley or lay on the slope of a mountain, or sit on the mossy ground in the boreal forest. During this silent time their senses of seeing, listening, touching, tasting, smelling and the sixth sense of intuitive knowing gets engrained in their hearts and lasts a lifetime.

Responsible care also comes in the form of discovery and awe when something gives one that 'Ah Hah' moment like one young person reflected in an essay: "Now it was finally time to dissect the fish. We learned a lot about it. It was very cool to be able to learn about these amazing creatures. One really cool thing I learned about them is the otolith. It's a bone inside their ear that determines how old the fish is! I started to draw the beautiful view I had of the lake and mountains. I drew a canoe to remind me of the

amazing canoe ride earlier that day. And a family of loons to remind me of all the times we were in awe when we saw a loon with or without their babies."

Leadership and working as a team are qualities that are woven throughout programs, like the Copper River Stewardship Program, and give participants the skills that are necessary to delivering responsible management. It takes a team to row a boat - avoiding obstacles, steering in the right direction, resting in the eddies contemplating the next wise move, being thoughtful of what is downstream. These skills segue throughout life making for informed decisions with positive impacts.

So I invite you to take your time with a cup of tea and as you absorb each article imagine yourself immersed in the experience of the person or event and the guiding light of the stewardship ethic in action.

*Janelle Eklund*

*WISE Board Director*

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# 2024 Program Highlights

**Winter Fun Day** was held at Wrangell-St. Elias National Park Visitor Center in Early January. Cold-weather fun included skiing, snowshoeing, crafts, and good food.

**Audubon Christmas Bird Count** in December brought the rare treat of huge flocks of White Winged Crossbills.

**In-Class Science Lessons** took us from Slana to Valdez, providing hands-on learning for over 300 students.

**Camp Chosen Frozen** was held at Tex Smith Lake for Glennallen Middle School students, and at Mentasta Lake. We enjoyed ice fishing, skiing, and checking on macroinvertebrate life beneath the ice.

A new **Outdoor Gear Swap** in March raised funds for our scholarship program, and gave Copper Basin residents a chance to buy and sell used outdoor gear, from skis to kayaks.

**Family Ice Fishing Day** at Silver Lake was a beautiful day to enjoy spring weather with families and friends from all over the Copper River Basin.

The **Science Lecture Series** included talks on Arctic Grayling, Mercury in Lakes, and a Spring Science weekend on the Nabesna Road, featured in an article on page 9.

**We are ALL Teachers** gatherings in the winter and spring provided opportunities for partner staff and volunteers to hone their environmental education skills.

We travelled to the **Yakutat Tern Festival** in early June, providing creative place-based projects for participants of all ages.



Ben fills his water bottle with pure meltwater from Matanuska Glacier.

At the first ever **Copper Basin Environmental Fair** in April we helped create a collaborative mural with heartfelt contributions from area residents. See more on Page 7

**Earth Discovery Day** in early May gave 4<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> grade students a chance to learn outdoors, with 12 learning stations taught by agency staff and wonderful WISE volunteers.



At Chosen Frozen, the Ojibway game of "Snow Snakes" provided a fascinating challenge.

**Outdoor Leadership Week** with the YCC crew from Wrangell St. Elias National Park and Ahtna Interns included a real life survival scenario, hiking to the top of Willow Mountain on a wet and foggy day.

**Copper River Stewardship Program** took high school students from the Copper Basin and Cordova on a 9-day adventure exploring the roles of tributaries. Photos and poems on the back cover!

**WISE/BLM Summer Hikes** included a suspension bridge on the way to Gulkana Glacier, Aquatic Ecology Days, and many other adventures.

**Geology Camp** had to be shortened to

one day because of staffing challenges, but we made the most of it with a hike on the Matanuska Glacier.

**Archaeology Camp** was a brand new program this year. We travelled to the Tangle Lakes Archaeological District on the Denali Highway. Check out the article on page 4!

**Copper Country Discovery Tour** gave over 400 visitors to the Copper River Basin a chance to explore the Boreal Forest with a local naturalist, and earned revenue to support WISE programs year round.

**Nic'anilen Na'**, our 60 acre property at Lower Tonsina, was the site for an Aquatic Ecology Day in July.

**Changing Seasons** in September welcomed autumn by firing up the WISE Time Machine to learn about the why the seasons change, and how the natural world adapts.



Kenny Lake Elementary students enjoy a hike to the bluff on a foggy fall day

## 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

## Archaeology Camp

By Bryan Marquardt, BLM Glennallen Field Office

Archaeology. The word brings to mind epic adventures in ancient jungle ruins with jeweled and gilded, thousand-year-old treasures. Nine students between the ages of 10 and 14 in the Glennallen Field Office's (GFO) and Wrangell Institute for Science and Environment (WISE) archaeology camp learned, however, that archaeology isn't anything like what you've seen in the movies. It's so much cooler in real life, especially while eating blueberries.

The group spent three days in the Tangle Lakes Archaeological District, where there is evidence of human use dating back at least 11,500 years. Participants learned about careers in archaeology, ancient tools, glacial geology, and got a glimpse of how people once lived on this landscape.

The camp started off by playing a trading card game designed by BLM Alaska's Campbell Creek Science Center. Participants were divided into groups that each had to gather specific resources by trading with their neighbors. Fun quickly led to chaos, when the groups realized they would have to make trades with other groups to get what resources they needed to survive. Once the participants realized the scale of trade routes, they were thoroughly impressed. They learned of archaeological evidence in northwest Alaska of beads from Venice, Italy being traded about 50 years before Columbus sailed the ocean blue.

The next day started off with a hike where John Jangala, GFO archaeologist, showed the participants flakes where ancient hunters flint knapped new arrow heads and atlatl dart tips while they waited for caribou to move through. Students were taught how to document an archaeological site and report when they suspect they have found cultural resources and that disturbing the resource in any way, can reduce an archaeologist's ability to learn more about that resource and how it was used. That afternoon, there was an opportunity to get hands on practice with an Atlatl. What is an Atlatl? It's a spear

launching tool which helps significantly improve the range and power instead of throwing a spear by hand. Extra range and power means more food.

On the final day, people got to experience some hands-on archaeology. They painted pots, smashed them, and then had to reassemble them by hand. There was much frustration, some sadness when one participant's gluing failed, and an impressive amount of determination. One member even refused dessert until her pot was assembled. In between waiting for the pots to dry there was an opportunity to learn how to safely flint knap or make arrow heads and spear tips out of rocks. It's a difficult process that takes years to master, but once you're good at it, you can produce something small in 10-15 minutes. Despite the rain and the cold, everyone had an enjoyable time at Archaeology camp. Several participants wanted to learn more, with one saying they wanted to be a geologist by the end, another an archaeologist.



Re-assembling shards of clay pots challenged the aspiring archaeologists



BLM Archaeologist, John Jangala, leads youth to sites within the Tangle Lakes Archaeological District

## WISE Alumni— Into the Future...

By Jan Miller, WISE

How do we measure program success? Look at where our past participants are now!



Jamie gives a presentation as part of her job as Conservation Director for Greater Hells Canyon Council in Eastern Oregon.

**Jamie Dawson:** Jamie served with WISE in 2015-2016 as an Americorp VISTA Volunteer. Jamie states; "WISE took my career in a totally different direction – I had mostly worked for federal agencies (Bureau of Land Management and the National Park Service) before WISE. Since my time at WISE, I have spent the last 8 years working for non-profit organizations and am now the Conservation Director at a small conservation non-profit.

My work at WISE set me up well for my career. As an Americorp VISTA I was specifically supposed to be focusing on capacity building work. Getting to do some education was a cherry on top (most of my previous skills were as a Park Ranger and educator) but that work was not always the main focus. I gained valuable skills in grant writing and reporting, working with budgets, connecting with donors and partners, and learned how to think more broadly about managing programs and organizations.

After my year at WISE, I landed a job as Membership Manager for Oregon's largest statewide conservation organization doing all of their donor and outreach management. My current position as Conservation Director for Greater Hells Canyon Council definitely builds on the skills I learned at WISE, especially working with many types of people in rural communities around science and natural resources."



In 2014, Amanda canoed on Alaganik Slough as a participant in Copper River Stewardship Program

**Amanda Friendshuh:** Amanda participated in WISE throughout her school years at Kenny Lake. After graduation she was hired by Bureau of Land Management as a youth coordinator, assisting WISE at educational events. Amanda is now a teacher working in Anchor Point. She says that, "In the close-knit Copper Valley, WISE is an integral part of the

community. This program provides meaningful ways for participants to learn about the amazing natural world around them. As a teacher, I am inspired by the hands-on experiences that WISE helps to make possible. " During the summer Amanda works for BLM as a youth program Park Ranger. In regards to WISE's mission Amanda says, " As a teacher, I am very passionate about students. I know that students learn best through hands-on and meaningful experiences that relate directly to their day-to-day lives. WISE makes it possible for multiple agencies to work together to better their communities and educate the new generation of environmental stewards."

**Trevor Grams:** "My first interaction with WISE was as a junior ranger in elementary school and attending programs held at the Kenny Lake school. What laid the foundation for my interest in salmon was the Copper River Stewardship program. I am now the Officer in Charge (Captain) of the 72' R/V Gloria Michelle. The vessel is owned by the Northeast Fisheries Science Center and conducts a variety of work for the Center, State of Massachusetts, and Woods Hole Oceanographic Institute. Projects include a 20 day biannual bottom trawl survey of Massachusetts State waters, mapping abundance and location of North Atlantic Right Whale prey using plankton nets and acoustics, and supporting unmanned systems missions. WISE does an exceptional job at using the unique landscape and geography of the Copper Basin as a classroom." Trevor remembers an experience on Copper River Stewardship Program: "Touring the sonar station at the Million Dollar Bridge and learning about how the acoustic technology was being used to count fish and produce meaningful data to manage the commercial fishery in near real time is one of the most useful applications of acoustics I have ever seen."



Photo courtesy of NOAA /Trevor Grams

## Thank You Jolene!

Jolene Nashlund joined the WISE staff in 2016 as a Naturalist Tour Guide, sharing her deep knowledge and endless enthusiasm with guests from around the world. In her 8 years at WISE she has also served as Development Director, Program Staff, and Interim Executive Director. This summer Jolene left us to put her talents to work at an essential local nonprofit, Copper River Emergency Medical Services, with the challenge of providing ambulance and emergency medical services for the area.

As well as taking charge of grants and development, leading the Copper Country Discovery Tour, and helping develop many new programs during her time at WISE, Jolene also brought a unique perspective as a homeschooling Mom who grew up in Kenny Lake. Her endless energy and can-do attitude were a lifeline through many adventures. We miss her greatly in the office but still enjoy seeing Jolene and her family at programs and community events.

*"The need for environmental education is vital in our rapidly changing world and having been a part of WISE and sharing with others the importance of stewardship and sustainability was something that I was and still am very passionate about. I stand by WISE's mission and I truly believe immersing our youth in the natural world is the best way to foster a sense of place and help them develop a stewardship ethic for the earth. Being part of the WISE team and working with an amazing group of people towards a shared cause has been rewarding beyond measure. I believe my experience with WISE helped prepare me as I transitioned into my new position as the Copper River EMS Administrator. It has been a change in landscape to be sure, but I have another team of absolutely wonderful and selfless individuals that I get to be part of and together we help make a difference in the lives of the people who live and play in the beautiful Copper River Basin. And, even though my journey has taken me down another path that I am equally passionate about, I'll always be WISE girl at heart!"* Jolene Nashlund



*Jolene shares her rock collection at a Geology program in 2022.*

## Summer Intern

Our summer had a somewhat rocky start, with several staff changes right at the beginning of our busy tour and program season.

Minnesota college student Cecilia Dusek was able to accept a last minute offer to come for the summer, and quickly leapt into action. As well as serving as Program Assistant, Cecilia worked hard to quickly learn to be a guide for the Copper Country Discovery

Tour.

As with all WISE interns, much of her most essential work was done behind the scenes. Cecilia maintained equipment, planned menus, and managed logistics for programs. A quick learner and natural organizer, Cecilia's efforts kept everything running smoothly, and her laughter and high spirits brightened every day.

*"Growing up in Washington DC only to move to another large city, Minneapolis, I had pretty much only stereotypes to go off of when it came to small towns. Working for WISE threw those assumptions right out the window. Working for WISE, I learned what it was like to live in a welcoming area, where everyone knows everyone else, and you look out for your neighbor regardless of who*



*Cecilia enjoys a day on Matanuska Glacier.*

*they are or what they believe. I learned that some of the most challenging experiences can be the most rewarding. Finally, I learned if you ever get the chance to visit the Copper Basin you should take it in a heartbeat. For the people, for the sights, for the experiences, and most of all because it'll be a time you will never forget."* Cecilia Dusek

# Programs

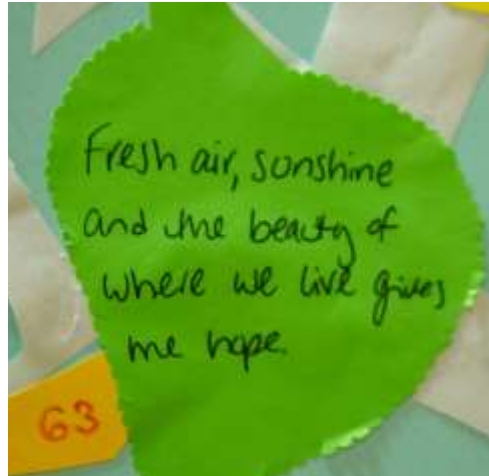


Andrew Gallt designed the official logo

Led by the Environmental Team at Copper River Native Association (CRNA), the Copper River Basin held our first Environmental Fair on Earth Day, April 22. It was a unique chance to celebrate the beautiful place we live, and learn about efforts to protect and enhance our environment.

WISE joined several other agencies on the art committee, tasked with using local talent to design a logo for the event, and produce a collaborative art project.

Along with colleagues from the National Park Service, Bureau of Land Management, and CRNA, we visited classrooms inviting students to draw a logo on the theme "Copper Basin Cares." We received dozens of wonderful entries, and it was an agonizing decision to choose just one winner. High School student Andrew Gallt's design with a hiker and dog in a mountain landscape was chosen as the official logo, and we also produced stickers of several additional favorite designs to celebrate our youth artists.



One of over 300 leaves on the mural expresses gratitude and hope.

At the fair, participants were asked to decorate an aspen leaf cutout sharing what they care about in the Copper River Basin, what inspires them, and what gives them hope. All the leaves were attached to an eight by twelve foot mural with Aspen Trees symbolizing the interconnected, interdependent communities and

ecosystems of the Copper River Basin.

By the end of the day, the mural was a vibrant collage of over 300 leaves, including everything from toddler scribbles, lovely sketches, and heartfelt words of love and celebration.

*Robin Mayo*



Artwork by Nehemiah Merrick and Timothy Lorenz



Park Ranger Diane Ellsworth helps students find their leaves on the Copper Basin Cares mural at the Environmental Fair.

## Partner Focus



COPPER RIVER  
NATIVE ASSOCIATION

As well as providing health care, counseling, a food bank, and a myriad of other services, Copper River Native Association is a nationwide leader in environmental services, including a staff member devoted to climate change resilience. CRNA staff often join us to educate youth at events like Changing Seasons and Earth Discovery Day.

## WISE ED Wins Award

On October 3, 2024 WISE Executive Director Robin Mayo was honored at the Alaska Conservation Foundation (ACF) Achievement Awards ceremony with the Jerry S. Dixon Award for Excellence in Environmental Education. She follows in the footsteps of her parents, Larry and Gail Mayo, who received the ACF Celia Hunter award for Outstanding Volunteer Contributions twenty-one years ago.

Robin was born and raised in Fairbanks. She says in her years growing up she helped harvest food, firewood and family adventures taught her about trees, mountains, birds, and all things outdoors. While adventuring, sleeping in a homemade 2-person tent with the family of five seemed normal to her. But, she says, not everyone gets these experiences. Robin is passionate when she says: “This is why environmental education is so important, to be sure every child gets a chance to learn to love the natural world, and have adventures which are inspiring, challenging, often uncomfortable, and potentially life changing. For me the essence of this work is the little things, the small chances we all get to teach, uplift, and inspire. The most rewarding moments in my job are days like when I got to go berry picking with 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> graders from Kenny Lake School. We compared the purple stains on our knees, made faces when sampling soapberries, and made sure to leave some for the voles and gray jays. That’s what it’s all about.”

Robin came to WISE in 2012 as an AmeriCorps Vista volunteer. In 2013 she graduated to Executive Director and throughout the years has become well known and respected throughout Alaska as a leader in environmental education. She is passionate about her job and with that passion has grown many WISE programs and partnerships. As she works and interacts with participants stewardship ideals are imprinted, making for a better world. Robin gives her all and then some. The WISE Board is very proud and fortunate to have her as our leader. Congratulations Robin!



Photo courtesy of Alaska Conservation Foundation  
Young Kim/Akeela Space

## WISE Board of Directors

**Gay Wellman, Chair**  
**Margie Steigerwald, Vice Chair**  
**Felicia Riedel, Secretary**  
**Paul Boos, Treasurer**  
**Janelle Eklund**  
**Dave Wellman**  
**Sarah Galt Linnell**  
**Cassidy Austin-Merlino**  
**Cheryl Bowers**

The Board of Directors is WISE’s governing body, tasked with oversight of finances, programs, and strategic planning. Board discussions help bring clarity to steering this ship amidst the many changes in the modern world.

With a wide variety of professional and personal backgrounds, each board member has a unique perspective. Several are founders who have been with WISE since the very beginning, and one was not yet born when WISE was started. What they all share is a dedication to place-based science and environmental education, and a belief that each person can make the world a better place.

As well as participating in meetings, WISE board members are some of our most dedicated volunteers. They are teachers, organizers, envelope stuffers, muffin bakers, snow plowers, and eager advocates in the community.

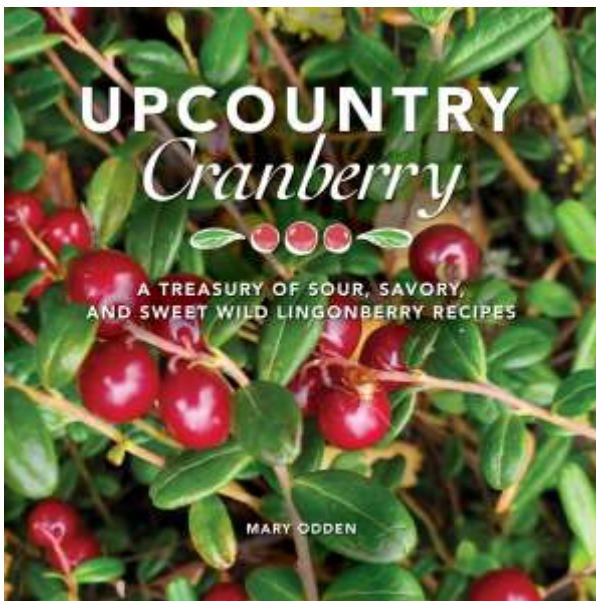
*“We believe that education, community-building, and stewardship are key to making wise decisions towards a healthy, sustainable future.”*

*“We Believe Statement created by Cassidy Austin-Merlino and Janelle Eklund, October 2024*



## Pick, Bake, Donate!

WISE friend Mary Odden and her daughter Kari have created a beautiful, mouth watering book called “Upcountry Cranberry,” and are donating a portion of sales to WISE. “Upcountry Cranberry” is much more than a recipe book, it includes beautiful photographs, and berry picking wisdom such as how to clean berries using the wind, and medicinal properties. Learn more and order your copy at [www.maryodden.com](http://www.maryodden.com).



*“My daughter Kari Odden and I created our cookbook as a love letter to the lingonberry and all the places it grows. We donate to WISE because WISE does a marvelous job of providing education about wild lands and healthy human relationships with land for all users, including berry pickers. They are our natural partners.”*

Mary Odden



Participants measure ice depth at the Nabesna Road Spring Science Weekend in March



## Spring Science at Wrangell Mountains Wilderness Lodge

*By Victoria Rego*

The Rego family’s Spring science event at their lodge in Nabesna began as a collaboration with WISE and was inspired by renowned ornithologist Dr. Carol McIntyre. For nearly 40 years, Dr. McIntyre has studied golden eagles in Denali and Wrangell St. Elias national parks, and is now using the lodge as her field research base each March-April while studying one of the largest eagle migrations in the world.

As longtime WISE supporters, we saw an opportunity to connect the community with incredible science in their own backyard, fostering a deeper appreciation for local ecology while raising support for WISE’s important outreach.

The first event in 2023 included Dr. McIntyre’s raptor talk and field session, followed by a fundraiser lunch social at the lodge, drawing about 30 participants. This year’s event grew, beginning with hands-on ice sampling at Twin Lake with geophysicist Dr. Helena Buurman, followed by another excellent interactive field session with Dr. McIntyre, an outdoor lunch, and an evening of dinner and fireside chats on regional wildlife and volcanoes with Drs. Kyle Cutting and Buurman. Sunday wrapped up with a breakfast visit by local elder Calvin Justin, who shared his experiences from years living and working in the country.

With around 35 participants, the event not only provided a chance to witness numerous raptors overhead while experiencing the stunning Nabesna landscape but also reinforced the importance of understanding the unique ecology of the area. By blending science, community, and the outdoors, Wrangell Mountains Wilderness Lodge and WISE have set a meaningful tradition that fosters awareness and stewardship of the region’s natural and cultural heritage.

# Partners

## Education Partners

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

*"Individually we are one drop, but together we are an ocean." —*

*Ryunosuke Satoro*



## Government and Tribal Partners

Ahtna Intertribal Resource Commission  
Alaska Department of Fish and Game  
Copper River Native Association  
Chitina Village Council  
Gakona Village Council  
Gulkana Village Council  
Native Village of Kluti-Kaah  
Native Village of Tazlina  
US Bureau of Land Management  
Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve

## Nonprofit Partners

Copper River Watershed Project  
Copper Country Alliance  
Copper Valley Community Library  
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  
Valdez Consortium Library  
Wrangell Mountains Center  
Willow Creek Water Consortium  
Wellwood Conservancy

*"We decided to become sustaining donors to WISE for several simple reasons. First, we like what WISE does. Second, we appreciate how effectively WISE does what it does. Third, we know first-hand how much people enjoy engaging in WISE's programs. And, finally, it feels good to help WISE meet its mission!"*



*Carol McIntyre*

*Dr. Carol McIntyre, National Park Service Wildlife Biologist, shares her knowledge of migrating raptors at the Nabesna Road Spring Science Weekend.*

# Thank You!

## 2024 Funders

## Thank You Generous Donors!



Alaska  
Conservation  
Foundation



**Ahtna, Inc**  
**Alaska Glacial Essentials**  
**Altman, Rogers, & Company**  
**Copper River Native Association**  
**Copper River School District**  
**Swisher Scholarship Fund**  
**Copper Valley Subway**  
**Copper Valley IGA**  
**State of Alaska Community**  
**Assistance Program**  
**Fred Meyer Community Rewards**  
**Wrangell Mountains Wilderness Lodge**

For more details on WISE revenues and expenses, please request our 2024 Annual Report, or see it at [www.wise-edu.org](http://www.wise-edu.org)

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### Additional thanks to :

Paul Boos  
 Janelle Eklund  
 Copper River Record  
 WISE Volunteers  
 Victor Bailey  
 Bud Jackman

### Ways to Support WISE

Online at [www.wise-edu.org](http://www.wise-edu.org)

Mail a check

Pick.Click.Give if you live in Alaska

Fred Meyer Community Rewards

Purchase cards or books

Ask us about Legacy Giving

Volunteer at a program

A few pages from Sylvia Nelson's  
Copper River Stewardship Program  
Final Project



Successful Searching  
Warm, Protected Eggs In Nests  
Beating Hearts Inside



Slippery Mud Slopes  
Sliding Into Freezing Water  
Laughing In The Sand



Pulling Not-So-Sweet  
White Sweetclover, Taking Over  
Destroying The Soil



Strong Pipeline Protects  
Rushing Crude Oil, Alaska's  
Main Industry

