

CURRENTS



Newsletter of the Kenai Watershed Forum

Fall 2008



KWF in our Schools

Here in Alaska, we are blessed with a wealth of natural resources from oil to salmon, from lumber to gold. Often, different groups of users have different ideas of what should be done with those resources. Many Alaskans stood proudly chanting “drill baby drill” as we watched our governor on a national stage calling for the development of Alaska’s oil fields, while many Alaskans proudly display their “No Pebble Mine” stickers on their cars, trucks, bikes, and mandolin cases. The views on how to make the best use of these resources are about as varied as the resources themselves

The Kenai Watershed Forum is dedicated to protecting the many wonderful resources on the Kenai Peninsula and helping with responsible development and use of them. The Kenai Watershed Forum is also working on developing the most important resource in all of Alaska:

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A new home for KWF

Early this fall, KWF signed a 30-year lease with the City of Soldotna to occupy a building. The building is one of the first permanent structures built in Soldotna. It has a unique history tied to the homesteaders and the early highway crews. It is a 2300 sq. ft. house that was built in the early 1950s and is located in Soldotna Creek Park at the confluence of Soldotna Creek and the Kenai River, a perfect location for KWF!

The house needs a major renovation in order to provide sufficient office space for our staff and board, a laboratory, and the latest technology needed to enhance our efforts. KWF will begin a large Capital Campaign in early 2009 for these renovations. We hope to move in towards the end of 2009.

Many thanks to all the folks that worked hard on this agreement, including the City of Soldotna and the Soldotna City Council members. We appreciate your support and dedication to healthy watersheds.

Above Right: Photograph of current condition of the home.
Below Right: Conceptual drawing of the exterior renovations.



Working together
for
healthy watersheds
on the
Kenai Peninsula.

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BIG PFD NEWS!

For the first time ever, and for a limited time, you can donate a portion of your dividend to the Kenai Watershed Forum !

The newly established Permanent Fund Dividend Contribution Program allows Alaska residents to donate to non-profit groups, educational institutions, and other similar organizations. The program will “sunset” after three years, and KWF is one of 337 organizations qualified to receive dividend funds!

Online applicants for the 2009 PFD can simply “check off” Kenai Watershed Forum and select the amount they would like to donate, starting with a \$25 minimum. This is the perfect way to support KWF, without taking a hit to your monthly budget!

Read All About It!



The Redoubt Reporter is a new community newspaper for the Central Kenai Peninsula, published weekly in Soldotna. It is distributed Wednesdays to more than 50 locations in Soldotna, Kenai, Nikiski, Sterling and Kasilof.

KWF publishes a guest editorial once a month. Last month we highlighted our Reed Canary grass project and this month we are focusing on our education program.

We encourage you to pick up a copy of the Redoubt Reporter or read its articles online at <http://redoubtreporter.blogspot.com/>.

good cheer • holiday cookies • warm apple cider • great company



Holiday Open House

Wednesday, December 10 • 4:00-7:00pm

The KWF Board of Directors would like to invite you to join us for a casual celebration of past accomplishments and exciting projects ahead in the New Year. Please stop by and enjoy a cookie and cider with us, there will be plenty of goodies. Board members and staff will be on hand if you are interested in hearing about upcoming projects. This is open to all and we look forward to seeing you.

Happy Holidays

WINTER SPEAKER SERIES at the Kenai River Center

Welcome to the **Kenai River Center Winter Speaker Series**, sponsored by the *Kenai River Center* and the *Kenai Watershed Forum*. This series of monthly evening talks brings scientists, storytellers, historians and other experts to the Kenai River Center for events designed to entertain as well as educate. Presentations focus on the natural and cultural history of our Kenai Peninsula. All of the programs are free and open to the public, and refreshments are provided. Come to the Kenai River Center for an evening of enjoyment and learning!

Although our schedule is set for 2008-2009, we always welcome suggestions for topics and/or speakers for future speaker events. If you have a particular local interest you'd like to learn more about, know of a local cultural or natural history expert whom you think people would enjoy hearing from, or have a topic of your own to share, contact Jan at 714-2481 or jyaeger@borough.kenai.ak.us.

Shaping the Kenai Landscape • Dr. Dick Reger **Tuesday, Nov. 11, 2008 • 7 pm**

Landscapes tell stories, and Dick Reger can teach us how to read them. We'll learn what formed the hills and valleys we see on the Western Kenai and why we have the plant communities we do. You may learn to look at your home in a whole new way.

Dr. Dick Reger grew up in Soldotna and has spent almost 30 years studying the glacial and post-glacial history of the Kenai Peninsula. He has a PhD in geology from Arizona State University and is retired from the Alaska Division of Geological & Geophysical Surveys.



Winter Skies • Kathy East **Tuesday, Dec. 9, 2008 • 7 pm**

There's a lot to see when the sky grows dark, and short days mean more time for star-gazing. Learn about winter constellations, the science behind the northern lights and galaxies far (and not so far) away.

Kathy East is Assistant Lead Flight Director at Kenai's Challenger Learning Center and a former high school physics teacher. She has a particular interest in archaeo-astronomy, the study of how past cultures understood and used astronomy.

Historical Cabins in the Kenai National Wildlife Refuge • Gary Titus

Tuesday, Jan. 12, 2009 • 7 pm

Before the Kenai National Wildlife Refuge was the Kenai Moose Range, it was home to a variety of folks who chose to make a home in the wilderness. Their

presence and their stories can be remembered through the cabins that still remain.

Gary Titus is a Wilderness Ranger and Historian for Kenai National Wildlife Refuge. He is also the co-author of Alaska's No. 1 Guide: The History and Journals of Andrew Berg.

The Alaska Oceans Film Festival **Friday, Feb. 6, 2009 • 7 pm**

The Alaska Oceans Film Festival celebrates Alaska's ocean bounty. The event features short films on saltwater adventure, coastal cultures and marine science from Alaska and around the world. The festival travels across Alaska and provides a great taste of 'all things ocean' for folks of all ages.

The Alaska Oceans Film Festival is brought to us by the Alaska Center for the Environment Oceans Program.

Sockeye Salmon Ecology • Dr. Carol Ann Woody **Tuesday, Mar. 10, 2009 • 7 pm**

Sockeye salmon have a fascinating life cycle, and also form a crucial part of the ecology of the Kenai Peninsula. Come learn more about just how complex and fascinating the salmon story really is.

Dr. Carol Ann Woody has a PhD in fisheries science from the University of Washington and has studied salmon in Southcentral Alaska since 1991. She is past president of the Alaska Chapter of the American Fisheries Society.



Reed Canary Grass Attack

Why Attack?

Reed canary grass is a non-native species that was intentionally planted on the Kenai Peninsula to control erosion. Unfortunately, the grass grows so well, even in the middle of rivers and streams, that it can cause the channel to narrow or dam up completely. When this occurs in salmon streams, loss of fish habitat can occur, along with the creation of barriers to spawning and migration.

The Plan of Attack...

Since the reed canary grass that KWF is going after is located near salmon streams, spraying herbicide is not our first choice for getting rid of the grass. Instead, black tarps will cover the grass to block out sunlight for several summers. In cases where the grass is growing in the channel of the river, the plant will be repeatedly mowed down below the water level in an effort to drown it.



Did We Win?

While the grass is not yet waving a white flag, KWF made significant progress this summer at Jim's Landing, Beaver Creek, and Bing's Landing. Still, there are over 250 known infestations of reed canary grass on the Kenai Peninsula. Most of them are less than an acre, making this an ideal time for control measures. If all goes well, next year's battlegrounds will include Boat Launch Road and Slikok Creek.



Left: Stephanie and Jan install typar around a tree at Beaver Creek

Middle: Cross Country Running team from Soldotna High School eradicates at Beaver Creek

Right: Bethany installs protective fencing around the project at Bing's Landing



Project Supporters

Alaska Dept. of Fish and Game • Kenai Peninsula Borough • UAF Cooperative Extension Service • U.S. Forest Service • U.S. Environmental Protection Agency • U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service • National Park Service • Homer Soil and Water Conservation District • Soldotna High School's Cross Country Running Team

Read, Research and Discover!

KWF is updating and re-publishing several popular publications!

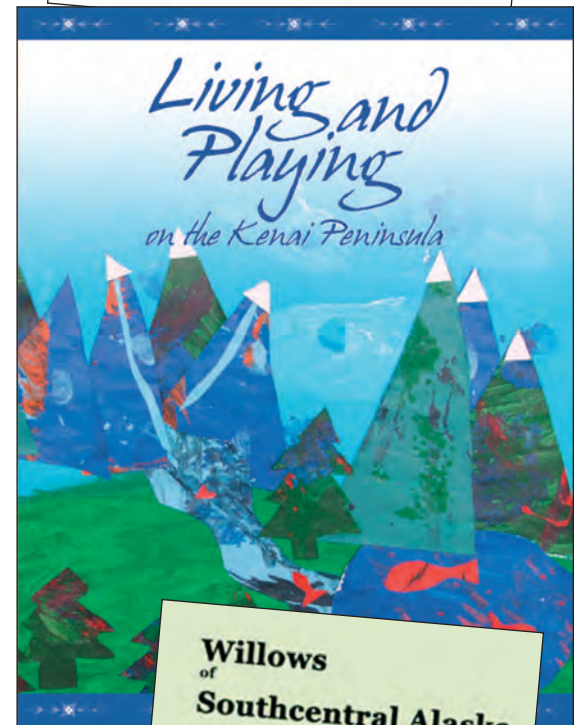
Birders and casual wildlife observers across the peninsula will appreciate “Flying Wild”. This bird checklist not only lists all birds found on the Kenai Peninsula, but also tells the frequency with which each species is sighted. Additionally, the pamphlet tells of several birding “hotspots” and birding protocols. This tri-fold expanded pamphlet has a new cover design, and is the perfect size for your car’s glove box, backpack or even a fanny pack!

“Living and Playing on the Kenai Peninsula” was very popular years ago when first published by KWF. It has been dusted off, polished up, and is ready to be re-released to children across the peninsula! This softbound light-weight book addresses school-age children on the history, culture and environmental aspects of living and playing in the bountiful area we call home.

Our most popular publication to date, Insects of south-central Alaska, is headed back for the printing of the second edition! This amazing insect guide, written by Dominique Collet, was originally published, in part, with grant funding from the US Fish and Wildlife Service and the US Forest Service. It features over 700 photographs of insects, the majority from Mr. Collet’s private collection of over 20,000 specimens! Although the book can be used as a field guide for scientists and researchers, outdoor enthusiasts and children find it equally appealing. Last summer, Title Wave Books in Anchorage featured the guide on their home page, and claimed it’s “the best insect guide we’ve ever seen!” This is not hard to believe since this insect guide is truly one of a kind. To quote Dr. Ed Holsten in his forward to the book, “There are ... no books on the common insects of Alaska, let alone those of south-central Alaska.”

Also by Dominique Collet and headed for a second edition printing is Willows of Southcentral Alaska. This field guide to “all things willow” is complete with watercolor illustrations by Mr. Collet. It is a unique “must have” publication for field scientists, master gardeners and lovers of the outdoors!

Finally, from a more scientific angle, Wetland Sedges of Alaska is also entering a second printing phase. This guide, focused on Alaska’s most common wetlands plant was originally published in 2003. Wetlands cover over 43% of Alaska acreage, making wetland studies prime research material for watershed scientists.

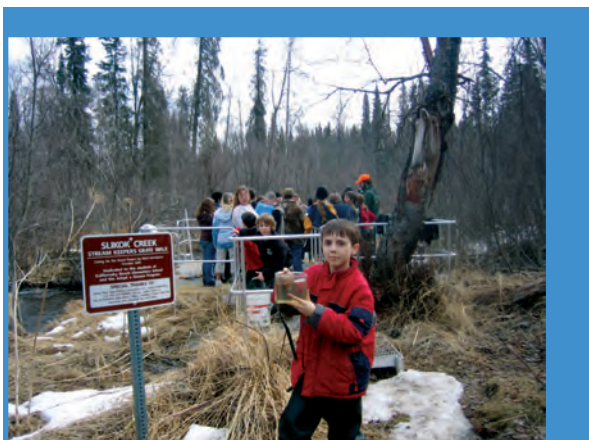


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Alaska's youth.

Beyond Ecophobia, author David Sobel suggests, "If we want children to flourish, to become truly empowered, then let us allow them to love the earth before we ask them to save it."

Watershed Forum is working on a monthly basis with eleven classes in six different schools through its Adopt-A-Stream program. These students are learning about water quality and watersheds in the classroom and in the field, traveling to streams for monthly water quality monitoring. By providing hands-on, field



based science opportunities, students are not only given the chance to explore their environment, but also to practice

scientific procedure and application. Other classes have been involved in KWF educational programming on the subjects of watersheds, ecology, cold weather safety, and wetlands.

While the lessons taught by Kenai Watershed Forum staff strive to increase students' awareness of their surroundings, the goal of the lessons isn't to turn everyone into 'tree-hugging dirt worshippers'. Instead, the educational programming is designed to offer a chance for students to increase their knowledge of what it takes to keep our watersheds healthy and to foster an appreciation for their environment. In his book *Beyond Ecophobia*, author David Sobel suggests, "If we want children to flourish, to become truly empowered, then let us allow them to love the earth before we ask them to save it." That is what the Kenai Watershed Forum strives to do, not only in the classrooms, but in the community as well: to create an appreciation for the wonderful place in which we live, and to encourage exploration that leads to a better understanding of who we are and how we fit into the plan for our environment's future.



WELCOME, Michelle Martin!

Michelle is a relative newcomer to Alaska, having grown up in New Hampshire. She moved to Kenai from Pittsburgh, PA in March 2008 to live with her fiancé. Michelle's background is primarily in horticulture. She graduated with a BS in horticulture from Utah State University in 2001. She went into her experience at Utah State with a lot of hands-on plant knowledge, but was introduced to the science and ecology behind the plants during her time there, and found herself leaning much more toward the science end of horticulture than the design end. In addition to several gardening jobs, she's worked at both Chicago Botanic Garden and Phipps Conservatory & Botanical Gardens as a plant recorder—a person who keeps track of the plant collections and makes sure

things are properly identified and labeled. She's also done graduate work at the University of New Hampshire focusing on infestations of hayfields by smooth bedstraw, a European invasive. She's anxious to begin working on invasive species issues here at KWF.

Michelle has also worked quite a bit in education and has enjoyed going to some of the local schools with Dan. She's worked in the past as a substitute teacher, a teacher's aide, an SAT and GRE prep teacher, a private tutor, a botanical garden docent trainer, and a university lab instructor. She enjoys helping other people learn and discover new things and is excited about the opportunities this job will give her to do that!

Summer in Review by KWF Interns,

Bill Garthwaite and Maia Matarrese

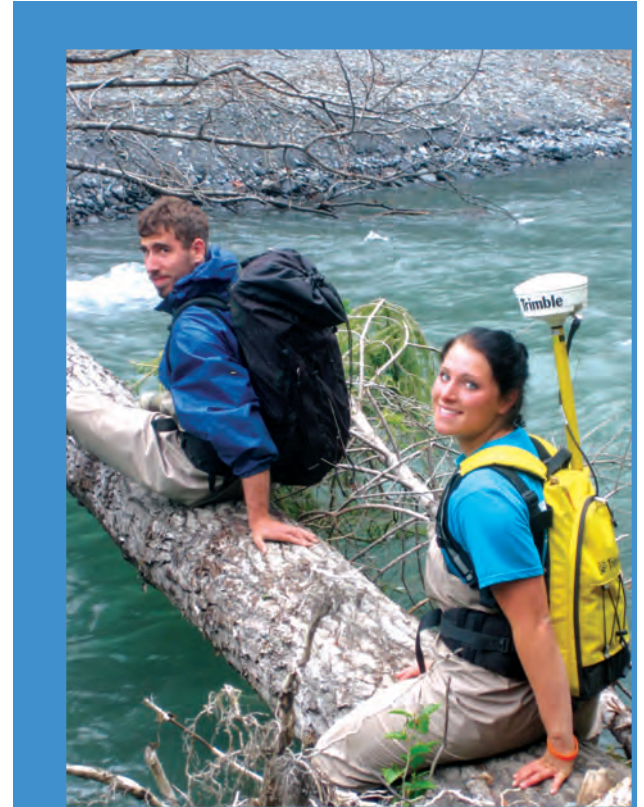
Bill Garthwaite

I spent this summer working for the most part on three major projects: the Kenai Storm water Project, the Kenai River Turbidity Study, and the Reed Canary Grass Eradication Project. For the Kenai Storm water Project I helped analyze the data that came back from hydrolabs that were deployed to study turbidity and conductivity in streams in and around Kenai during the winter and spring of 2008. For the Kenai River Turbidity Study, I helped out on both the project field work and data analysis. The field work entailed going out on the river a few times a week to take data and samples at a few different river transects, looking at water turbidity and conductivity. Data analysis entailed looking at patterns in transect and hydrolab data, as well as initial relationships between boat traffic and turbidity. A component that may become more important in the future of this study is the use of a camera to better link time-series boat counts to time-series data from our hydrolabs deployed over long time periods at our buoys. The second half of the summer was largely spent on the Reed Canary Grass Eradication Project under the direction of project manager Jennifer McCord. This project is directed at testing new techniques to remove an invasive weed that has the potential to choke out valuable salmon habitat. The goal is to kill the grass without using herbicides near streams or wetlands. We focused on three sites: Beaver Creek near the Spur Highway, Bing's Landing in Sterling, and Jim's Landing above Skilak Lake. This year is the first year of vegetation control and removal, and sets the stage for what will be a several year project. One very useful thing to come out of initial surveying for this project is the awareness that Reed Canary Grass is much more established around the peninsula than was previously thought.

Maia Matarrese

My summer experience with the Kenai Watershed Forum has been an informative one. In May we started out with the temperature logger project. Calibrating the temperature loggers was tedious but tested my memory of what we used to do in chemistry labs. Deploying the temperature loggers was interesting and enjoyable as well. We went to streams that I had never heard of or seen before. Next, I was given the chance to put my feet in the water and learn how to measure flow in Soldotna, Slikok and Beaver Creeks. I was also taught how to read the gauges in those select streams. Soon the easy, less strenuous jobs were over and the Reed Canary project began. We spent hours tarping at Bings Landing and Beaver Creek; everyday we made new Reed Canary Grass discoveries. I felt like giving up and just spraying the grass, but once we finished the tarping, I was pleased that we had completed a physically challenging, environmentally safe experiment to eradicate such an invasive specie. Throughout the summer, we tested the turbidity of the Kenai River. This was the best part of Reed Canary Grass days because it was much less painful!

Overall my experience with the Kenai Watershed Forum has been great and memorable. I am appreciative of the opportunity to intern with KWF. The group of people working with the Watershed are enthusiastic, fun, comical and very knowledgeable. I appreciate the hard work they are doing year round to keep the habitat and environment of the Kenai Watershed a healthy one. Keep it up!



Bill and Maia staying dry on Primrose Creek near Seward.

KWF Membership

As of 11/18/08

Thank You! The following people have recently contributed to the Kenai Watershed Forum.

\$500

Shana and Doug Loshbaugh

Kelly Electric
Kenai Vision Center

Evelyn Clough
Gail Moore
Dave Athons
Lou's Kenai River B&B Cabins

\$250

William J. Nelson & Associates

\$50 Chinook
Janice Rodes
Phil and Amanda North
Glenda and John Landua
Ken Lancaster and Mavis Blazy
Mike and Judy Blair

Additional Contributions
Cheri Edwards

\$200

Marge Mullen

Chuck and Betty Obendorf
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Tustumena Elementary PTO

Building Fund Contributions
David & Kathy Wartinbee
Howard & Dyan Ferren
Ken & Judy Marlow
Kristy & Evertt McCullough
Jessica & Jeff Moore
Leslie & John Morton

\$100 River Steward

Catherine Cassidy and Erik Huebsch
Peter Micciche
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