

Stream Watch 2023 Season Summary



Volunteers Making a Difference Since 1994



Volunteers/Staff at Tern Lake Clean-up/Informational Event (Drzazgowski, 2023)

Introduction

Stream Watch is a national award-winning volunteer program promoting river stewardship on the Kenai Peninsula. A group of enthusiastic citizens founded Stream Watch in 1994 in order to share river protection information with visitors on the Russian and Kenai Rivers. Over 29 years, the program has grown to additional sites on the Russian, Kenai, and Kasilof Rivers.

Today Stream Watch volunteers assist land management agencies with stewardship of important recreational sites and help ensure the health of the region's watersheds. Stream Watch volunteers remove riverside litter; install habitat protection fencing; complete fish habitat restoration projects; and share critical information with the general public on river stewardship, agency regulations, and bear safety during the summer season (June-September).

In the past 29 years, Stream Watch volunteers dedicated 27,651 hours of time within the program, provided peer-to-peer education to 80,764 individuals, picked up 43,519 pounds of trash, and recycled 1,271 pounds of fishing line. Alongside these successes the program helped revegetate miles of riverbank by installing habitat fencing and by encouraging visitors to use boardwalks and designated river access points.

Volunteers can participate in Stream Watch either as a trained "Ambassador" committing to at least 24 hours of service each season, or through participation in a "Stewardship Day" where individuals, groups, or businesses help with a one-day, river protection project.

- Northern Peninsula Program
 - Kenai-Russian River Confluence (including Angler Trail & Falls Trail), Kenai-Russian River Ferry
- Central Peninsula Program
 - Bings Landing, Moose Range Meadows (East & West), Centennial Park, N. Kenai Beach, and the Kasilof River Special Use Area
- Southern Peninsula Program
 - Clam Gulch, Deep Creek, Ninilchik, and Anchor Point
- Ambassador Volunteer Season:
 - Northern Peninsula Program: June 1—September 14
 - Central Peninsula Program: June 1 – September 11
 - Southern Peninsula Program: July 1 – September 11



Ambassadors Lynda Nugent and Skye High clean fishing line for recycling and outreach for Stream Watch at the Russian River Campground. (Goss, 2023)

Season Recap

Stream Watch experienced another successful season in 2023. The number of ambassadors stayed steady compared to the previous season with a total of 63. 47 of those ambassadors were returning volunteers and 16 were new volunteers this season. Over 120 individuals joined the program on Stewardship Days including trained and untrained volunteers. The Stream Watch program set all-time records for total volunteer hours (2,418), travel mileage (17,588), and public contacts (9,117), as seen below in Table 1.

Table 1: 2013-2023 Stream Watch Program Statistics

Year	2023	2022	2021	2020	2019	2018	2017	2016	2015	2014	2013
Volunteer Hours	2418	1894	2263	862	1557	1896	1504	1282	1492	1217	1497
Public Contacts	9117	3476	5759	2256	4031	2616	3962	2870	4618	3195	4150
Trash (lbs.)	4487	2654	2925	4590	4258	6921	3110	2413	1808	1446	2953
Fishing Line (lbs.)	131	254	138	99	127	124	81	75	148	97	-
Cigarette Butts	5006	6957	6789	3072	5549	3485	2257	-	-	-	-

Table 2: Site Specific Data from the 2023 Season

Site	Travel Mileage	Hours	Number of Contacts	Pounds of Trash	Pounds of Line	Cigarette Butts
Northern Peninsula						
Russian River Campground	10893	768.7	6210	157.9	21.61	701
Russian River Ferry	2270	210.6	1451	347.9	52.35	658
Central Peninsula						
Bings Landing	399	70	106	126.6	12.54	703
Centennial Park	463	78	179	79.8	25.67	552
Moose Range Meadows	194	29	36	59.7	9.20	218
Kasilof	2437.5	163.75	504	740.3	2.20	1590
Kenai Mouth	294	67.5	540	8	0	0
Southern Peninsula						
Deep Creek	20	7	0	853	2.00	0
Anchor River	235	18	26	10.5	1.30	26
Ninilchik	198	13	28	3	0.30	8
Other	184	127	27	52.2	3.40	141
Orientations	-	330	-	-	-	-
Stewardship Days	3355.5	531.5	10	2047.8	0.25	409
Totals:	20943	2414	9117	4487	131	5006

Table 2 shows the distribution of Stream Watch activities across all program sites. The Northern Peninsula program consists of the Russian River Ferry and Russian River Campground, where Stream Watch originated in 1994. More than half of the season's ambassador hours were spent in the Northern Peninsula sites. The Russian River Campground saw the highest number of volunteer hours, public contacts, and volunteer travel mileage of any Stream Watch site. Of the Central Peninsula sites, Kasilof received the most volunteer attention due to a mix of ambassador patrols and dipnet booth shifts. On the Southern Peninsula, the Anchor River site received the majority of volunteer time, followed closely by Ninilchik. Of regular sites, the most trash was removed from Deep Creek, all due to one volunteer who cleaned up debris from a shed that had fallen off the bluff. The Kasilof River Special Use Area actually saw the majority of trash collected, but most of this trash resulted from the Trashercise Tuesday events during the dipnet fishery and was noted under "Stewardship Days".

In Table 2, “Other,” is considered volunteer time such as data entry, cleaning fishing line at home, assisting with grant writing, and other tasks that are not included on the Stream Watch data sheets. “Orientation” is a tally of the time spent by volunteers doing the online or in-person orientation, which was automatically considered six hours upon completion. “Stewardship Days” refer to discrete work days with volunteers such as habitat fencing, beach cleanups, or outreach days. Stewardship Days are a great way to achieve significant conservation impacts in a short period of time.



Gene Horning is both the program’s oldest and most active volunteer. At 89, Gene worked 169 hours with Stream Watch this season. (Goss, 2023)

Program Administration

Stream Watch is jointly administered by Chugach National Forest and Kenai Watershed Forum. To fulfill its mission, Stream Watch operates cooperatively with the following land management agencies:

- US Forest Service, Chugach National Forest (Russian River Recreation Site)
- US Fish and Wildlife Service, Kenai National Wildlife Refuge (Kenai-Russian River Ferry, Moose Range Meadows)
- Alaska Department of Natural Resources, Alaska State Parks (Bings Landing, Kasilof River Recreation Area, Anchor River, Deep Creek, and Ninilchik Recreation Sites) & Division of Mining Land and Water (Kasilof River Special Use Area)
- City of Soldotna (Centennial Park)
- City of Kenai (Kenai Beach)

Stream Watch activities are primarily conducted by volunteers. The Chugach National Forest and the Kenai Watershed Forum hired the following staff to facilitate volunteer activities:

- Volunteer Coordinator, Brandon Drzazgowski (Kenai Watershed Forum)
- Volunteer Coordinator, Amanda Goss (Chugach National Forest)
- Intern, Finn Newman (Kenai Watershed Forum)
- Intern, Matthew Maguire (Kenai Watershed Forum)



Stream Watch volunteers, staff, and partners installing fencing at Moose Range Meadows. (Maguire, 2023)

Program Funders

Funding from a variety of agencies and organizations makes Stream Watch possible. Funding or in-kind match for the 2023 season was provided by the following entities: Alaska Conservation Foundation; Alaska Department of Natural Resources—Alaska State Parks and Department of Mining, Land and Water; Alaska Sustainable Salmon Fund; Alaska Recreational Management; Chugach National Forest; City of Soldotna; City of Kenai; Exxon Valdez Oil Spill Trustee Council; Kenai National Wildlife Refuge; Kenai Peninsula Fish Habitat Partnership; Kenai Watershed Forum; National Forest Foundation; Sovereign Nation of the Kenaitze ; and private donations.

Funder	In-kind	Cash
AKDNR: Division of Mining Land and Water	X	X
Alaska Conservation Foundation		X
Alaska Recreation Management	X	
Alaska State Parks	X	
Alaska Sustainable Salmon Fund		X
Chugach National Forest	X	X
City of Kenai	X	
City of Soldotna	X	
Exxon Valdez Oil Spill Trustee Council		X
Kenai National Wildlife Refuge	X	
Kenai Peninsula Fish Habitat Partnership		X
Kenai Watershed Forum	X	X
National Forest Foundation		X
Sovereign Nation of the Kenaitze	X	



Enduring Service Award Received in 2022. (Oliynyk, 2022)

Stream Watch Outreach and Volunteer Recruitment

The number of ambassadors stayed steady compared to the previous season with a total of 63. 47 of those ambassadors were returning volunteers and 16 were new volunteers this season.

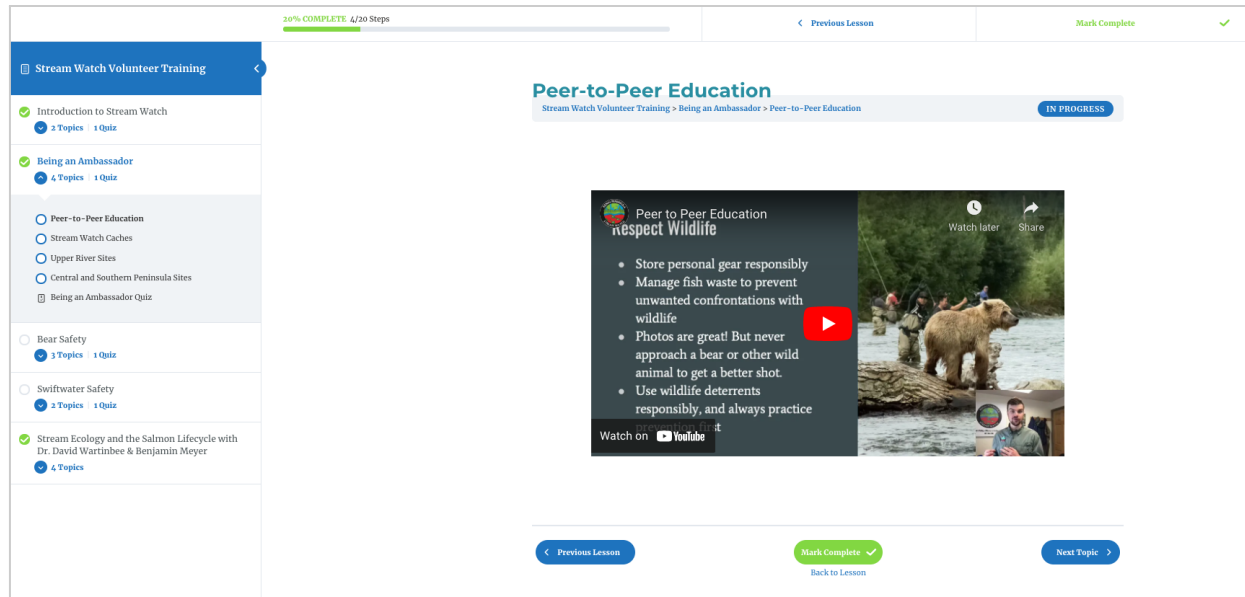
Recruitment for the 2023 season was performed through a variety of methods including an ad in the Cooper Landing Visitor Guide, information booths at events and project sites, word of mouth by staff and volunteers during regular patrols, and through information provided on the Kenai Watershed Forum website. Most volunteers joined the program due to interactions with current volunteers at project areas, or by submitting a volunteer form on kenaiwatershed.org. Stream Watch volunteers were also provided with a variety of uniform items all containing the Stream watch logo to ensure that the program is being represented by volunteers during stewardship efforts regardless of weather.

Ambassador Training/Orientation

One in-person orientation was held at the Cooper Landing School on June 3rd. It was well attended, with 28 ambassadors present. The online orientation stayed available this season as well and was a valuable tool for volunteers that were unable to attend in-person orientation. Online orientation also allowed for consistent volunteer recruitment throughout the entire season compared to previous seasons where recruitment slowed dramatically after in-person orientations were concluded. The coordinators are working to develop a condensed version of the online orientation as an option for returning volunteers.



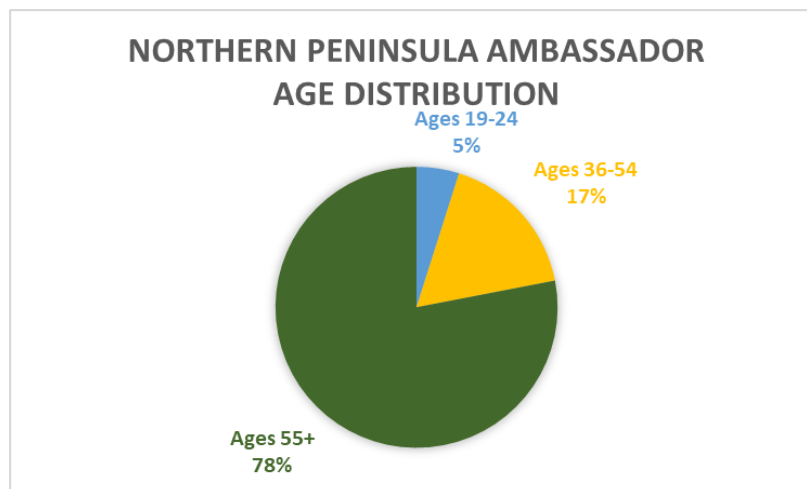
In-Person Orientation held at the Cooper Landing School. (Goss, 2023)

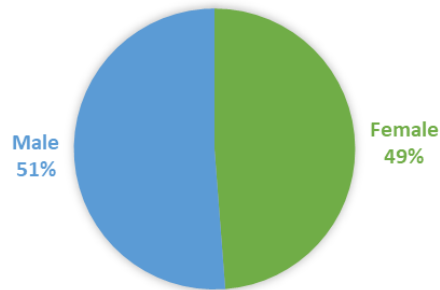
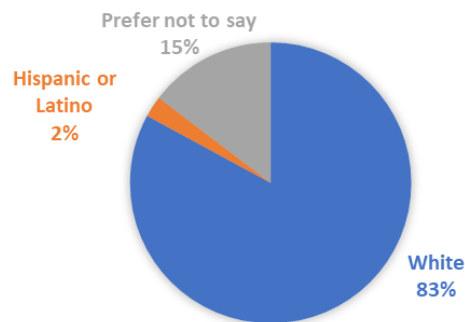


Screenshot from the online volunteer orientation created in the spring of 2021

Ambassador Demographics

Demographic information was collected from Stream Watch ambassadors as part of the Forest Service volunteer agreement paperwork. As a result, demographic information was only available for volunteers who worked in the Northern Peninsula program. As seen in the charts below, most ambassadors are older than 55, the majority are white, and there is an equal split of male and female ambassadors. One of the goals of the Stream Watch program going forward is to diversify volunteer participation across all demographic categories. Stewardship Day participants are typically younger and more diverse than ambassadors, but their information is not captured in the demographic data. The coordinators are developing a form that asks for demographic information from all Stream Watch participants. They also plan to focus ambassador recruitment on younger age groups, particularly ages 16-18 and ages 25-35.



**NORTHERN PENINSULA AMBASSADOR
GENDER DISTRIBUTION****NORTHERN PENINSULA AMBASSADOR
RACE & ETHNICITY DISTRIBUTION****Habitat Restoration**

In the spring of 2023, the Kenai Watershed Forum was awarded funding by the Alaska Sustainable Salmon Fund to perform a habitat restoration project on the Mullen Conservation Easement, located in Soldotna. The two year project consists of installing duckbill anchors into the riverbed along the Kenai River which are then used to cable spruce tree tops along the bank. The project also plans to install new informational signage to inform visitors of easement regulations, and revegetate the eroded gravel slope above the riverbank.

During the 2023 season, spruce tree tops were collected and cabled along the streambank in a shingled fashion in order to slow erosion and collect sediment flowing down river. Collected sediment helps rebuild areas of the bank that have seen damage. This work took a total of two days with help from 7

KWF staff and 5 volunteers. Collection of trees to be used for revegetation also began in the 2023 season. Trees were stored in grow bags to keep root systems safe before planting.

Looking forward to spring of 2024, the Kenai Watershed Forum plans to gather volunteers to assist in the revegetation of the gravel high-bank located on the property. KWF plans to utilize native species including willow, alder, and aspen to revegetate the bank in hopes that root systems will hold loose soil in place and deter recreational users from walking on the eroded area. KWF also plans to produce and install signs that accurately portray land use for the property. Finally, Stream Watch plans to install habitat fencing along the upper and lower portions of the property in order to deter river users from trampling sensitive vegetation and causing further erosion.



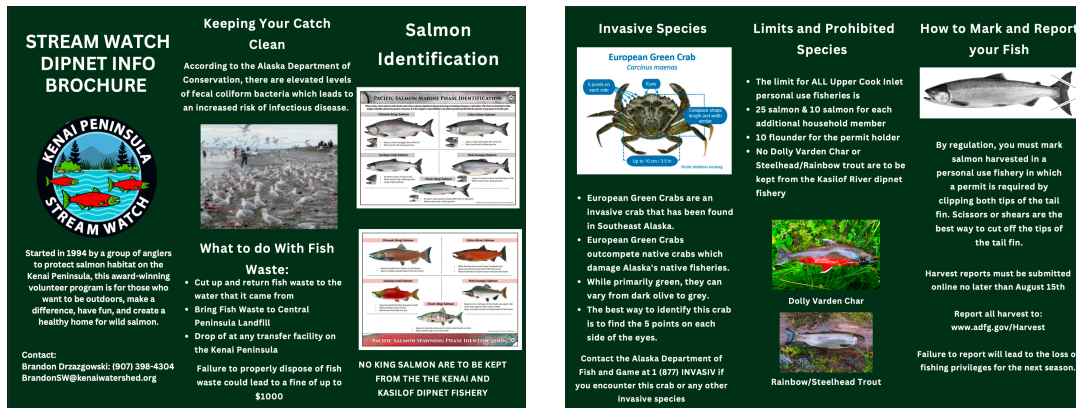
Staff and Volunteer installing duckbill anchor and cable (Drzazgowski, 2023)

Kenai/Kasilof Dipnet Booth

The Kenai dipnet booth is a volunteer-staffed informational table located at the entrance to Kenai Beach off of South Spruce St. in Kenai, Alaska and the entrance of the Kasilof River Special Use Area off of Kasilof Beach Stub. The booth is facilitated by Kenai Watershed Forum's Stream Watch program with support from Alaska Department of Fish & Game, Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation, Alaska Department of Natural Resources and the City of Kenai. The booth started in 2018 in order to inform the public about public health threats posed by bacteria problems produced by fish and seagull waste on the beach. The booth's focus has shifted slightly to provide valuable information on regulations, emergency orders, fish identification, health concerns, invasive species, and other work being

done by Stream Watch and KWF. Kenai Watershed Forum staff and Stream Watch volunteers are the primary personnel present at the booth.

The dipnet booth was on site at Kenai Beach for 22 days (from July 10 until July 31). During those 22 days, 13 dipnet shifts were performed either by Stream Watch volunteers or KWF staff. The Kasilof Dipnet Booth, however, was in operation for 44 days (June 25th until August 7th). Of those 44 days, 18 dipnet shifts were performed by Stream Watch volunteers or KWF Staff. Operation of the booth was generally scheduled around high tide, however, volunteers were encouraged to perform shifts whenever they were able. Operations at both sites grew by 5 shifts from the previous season (3 at Kenai & 2 at Kasilof). This rise in attendance can be attributed to the new “Stream Watch Dipnet Info Brochures”. Volunteers reported that dipnet shifts were less desirable due to its immobile nature. Dipnet Info Brochures condensed all the information provided at the dipnet booth into a single paper and allowed volunteers to patrol the beaches, pick up litter, and provide information to beach users all at the same time. After the creation of the Dipnet Info Brochures, more consistent staffing was seen at both locations. Brochures showed great potential in encouraging more volunteers to sign up for dipnet shifts and will be revised for the 2024 season.



New brochure created for dipnet information distribution.

Marine Debris Cleanups

Stream Watch has been attending to coastal issues with increasing effort over the past six years. The most notable marine debris cleanup event facilitated by the program is the Trashercise Tuesday cleanup series at Kasilof Beach. Trashercise Tuesday is a series of marine cleanups hosted every Tuesday of the dipnet season from 5pm to 7pm at Kasilof Beach. Trashercise Tuesday focuses on gathering volunteers to remove large amounts of litter left behind by the dipnet fishery. After the 5 weekly cleanups, 1,184.5lbs. of trash were removed from the beach and 98 volunteer hours were recorded during Trashercise Tuesday events alone.

Stream Watch also collaborated with various organizations and volunteer groups in an effort to have a larger impact on marine ecosystems. Groups that Stream Watch paired with for marine debris cleanups include CompassionThruFishing, Marathon Petroleum, Church of Latter-Day Saints, and groups of individuals from the general public.

Individual efforts were also seen by volunteers performing patrols in marine ecosystems. Most volunteers that enjoy marine patrols frequented the North and South Kasilof Beaches. Volunteer impact on marine ecosystems were also seen through special trips. One volunteer noted a shed that had fallen off a bluff located near Clam Gulch. Multiple trips were taken by this volunteer until the entire she was removed totaling over 400lbs!



Staff and volunteers after Trashercise Tuesday at Kasilof Beach. (Unknown, 2023)

New Stewardship Events

The 2023 season saw the creation of new volunteer events in an attempt to add diversity to the program and appeal to volunteers' other points of interest. In the early season, Stream Watch partnered with Backcountry Hunters and Anglers (BHA) and their Armed Forces initiative chapter to finish installing the Russian River habitat fencing before the sockeye opener. 17 volunteers put in a huge effort to install fencing along the upper section of river from access points 27 to 32. The group camped at the Russian River Campground pavilion for the weekend of June 9-11th and many stayed to fish on opening day. This event was critical to complete the fence installation before the opener this year, given the compressed time frame due to the campground road construction project. BHA is interested in making this an annual event and would like to add a secondary stewardship day later in the season as well.

Stream Watch also organized a group line cleaning event held at the Russian River Ferry. This event consisted of a group of volunteers, stationed under a 10x10 pop-up tent at the Russian River Ferry, clipping tackle off of used fishing line collected by the program. Beyond cleaning line, volunteers performed outreach with members of the public to inform them of the effect fishing line can have on aquatic ecosystems, the importance of riparian vegetation, and the program as a whole. This event helped to introduce volunteers to others they haven't met before and to make quick progress on work that would regularly take single volunteers a large amount of time. Five volunteers attended the event and provided positive feedback. Due to positive feedback and high amounts of public interaction at a time of year when tourism is low, this event will most likely recur the following season when sockeye fishing is at its peak.

Another new stewardship event in the 2023 season was the Tern Lake Floating Clean-up. Stream Watch paired with ADFG for a single day event centered around outreach for ADFG's stream gauge program and removing litter found in Tern Lake. ADFG contact, Leah Ellis, provided volunteers with an informational conversation about the stream gauge located at the Tern lake Day Use Area and how it was used to track water level throughout the year. After the conclusion of this conversation, volunteers boarded kayaks and canoes and floated around Tern Lake for salmon viewing and litter removal. The 8 volunteers in attendance were extremely pleased with the event and inquired if another event like this would arise in future seasons.

Finally, a group of 6 volunteers joined staff at the Moose Range Meadows supply cache to perform maintenance on the supply cache and the area surrounding it. Plant life in the area had become overgrown and started to encroach on the cache in this location. Volunteers helped to cut back tree branches, remove weeds growing in the path to the cache, and dispose of unneeded materials in the area. This event helped keep supplies easily accessible to volunteers and improve the aesthetic value of the area around the cache. This may not be needed as an annual event, due to slow growth of plant life. However, the diversity of the work performed was well received by volunteers present, and helped to give insights on other forms of work volunteers show interest in.

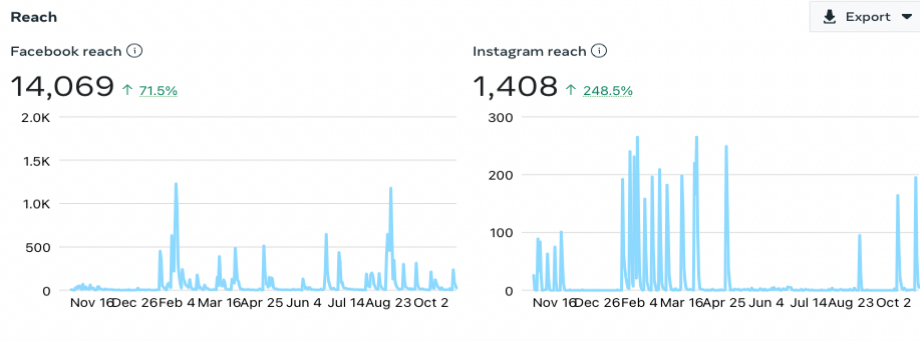
Overall, Stream Watch added variety to the program over the 2023 season through the facilitation of new stewardship events provided for volunteers. Volunteers expressed that although regular volunteer activities were still enjoyable, new stewardship activities allowed for expansion of the program into new areas of interest. Stream Watch hopes to continue adding new stewardship days in future seasons that help to further the Stream Watch mission and provide volunteers with an enjoyable time.



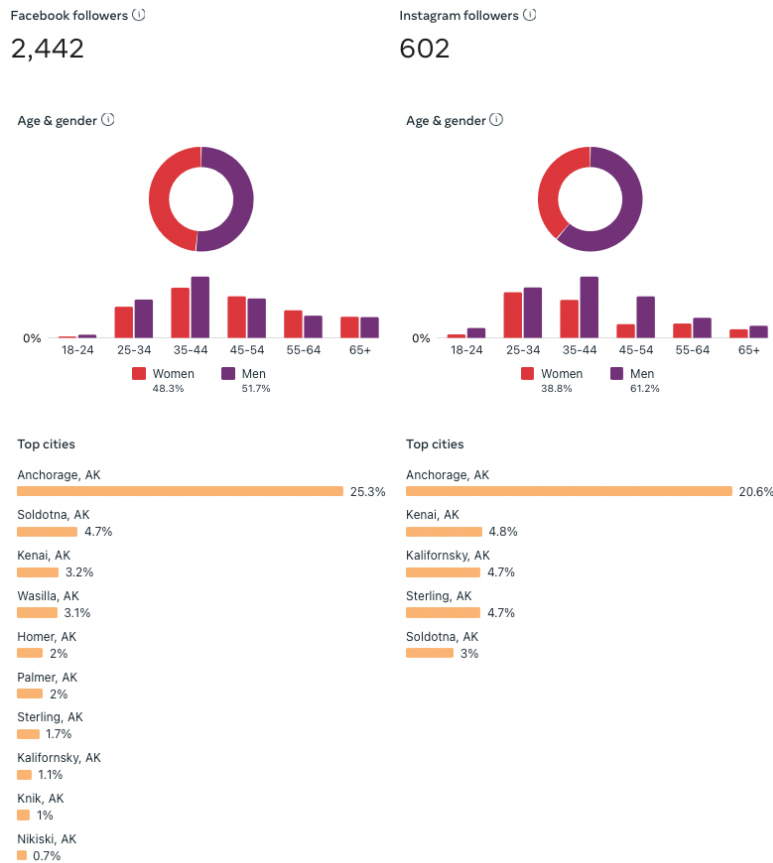
Staff and volunteers at a group line cleaning day at the Russian River Ferry. (Drzazgowski, 2023)

Digital Outreach

Stream Watch uses social media platforms Facebook and Instagram and Mailchimp as primary communications channels. Statistics from the Facebook and Instagram pages are shared below:



Depiction of Facebook/Instagram profiles reached by program social media from Oct. 27th, 2022 to Oct. 26th, 2023.



Demographic data of those viewing program social media platforms from Oct. 27th, 2023 to Oct. 26th, 2023.

Events

Below is a list of events hosted by the program in 2023. The many stewardship events the program hosted complemented Ambassador efforts and increased program impact. The list below includes all stewardship opportunities provided to Stream Watch volunteers hosted by parent organizations and those hosted by program partners.

Date	Time	Name of Event	Host	Location	Classification
5/18	10am-4pm	Russian River Fencing	USFS	Russian River Campground	Stewardship Day
5/23	1pm-5pm	Mullen Streambank Restoration Project	KWF	KWF Office/Mullen Conservation Easement	Stewardship Day
5/24	9am-5pm	Mullen Streambank Restoration Project	KWF	KWF Office/Mullen Conservation Easement	Stewardship Day
5/26	10am-5pm	Halibut Tournament/Clean Up	CompassionThruFishing	Ninilchik Area	Paired Stewardship Day
5/27	10am-5pm	Halibut Tournament/Clean Up	CompassionThruFishing	Ninilchik Area	Paired Stewardship Day
5/28	10am-6pm	Halibut Tournament/Clean Up	CompassionThruFishing	Ninilchik Area	Stewardship Day
6/1	10am-4pm	Russian/Kenai River Fencing	USFS/USFWS	Russian River Ferry	Stewardship Day
6/3	10am-4pm	In-person Volunteer Orientation	KWF/USFS	Cooper Landing Community School	Orientation
6/9	9-1pm	Kenai River Festival Set-Up	KWF	Soldotna Creek Park	Stewardship Day
6/10	9am-3pm	Russian River Fencing	USFS	Russian River Campground	Stewardship Day
6/10	3pm-7pm	Stream Watch Booth @ Kenai River Festival	KWF	Soldotna Creek Park	Stewardship Day/Informational Booth
6/11	11am-8pm	Stream Watch Booth @ Kenai River Festival	KWF	Soldotna Creek Park	Stewardship Day/Informational Booth
6/12	9-1pm	Kenai River Festival Tear Down	KWF	Soldotna Creek Park	Stewardship Day
6/14	10am-4pm	Moose Range Meadows Fencing	KWF/UFWS	Moose Range Meadows	Stewardship Day
6/16	12pm-3pm	Whittier Slug-Out Event	KWF	Whittier	Invasive Species Stewardship Day
6/20	1pm-5pm	Tsalteshi Trail Orange Hawkweed Survey	KWF	Tsalteshi Trails	Invasive Species Stewardship Day
6/21	10am-2pm	Marathon Beach Clean-up	KWF	Kenai Beach	Stewardship Day

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6/22	12pm-2pm	Native Plant Walk	USFS	Russian River Angler Trail	Informational Event
6/23	10am-2:30pm	Seward Community Weed Pull	KWF	Seward	Invasive Species Stewardship Day
6/28	11am-4pm	Church LDS Beach Clean-Up	KWF	South Cohoe Beach	Stewardship Day
7/3	10am-2pm	Apogee Adventure Visit	KWF	Russian River Campground	Stewardship Day
7/11	5pm-7pm	Trashercise Tuesday	KWF	Kasilof Beach	Stewardship Day
7/18	5pm-7pm	Trashercise Tuesday	KWF	Kasilof Beach	Stewardship Day
7/20	10am-2pm	Apogee Adventure Visit	KWF	Russian River Campground	Stewardship Day
7/21	10am-2pm	Crooked Creek State Park Clean-up	KWF	Crooked Creek Recreation Site	Stewardship Day
7/25	5pm-7pm	Trashercise Tuesday	KWF	Kasilof Beach	Stewardship Day
7/27	10am-3pm	Reed Canary Grass Seed Head Clipping	KWF	Russian River Campground	Invasive Species Stewardship Day
7/28	10am-3pm	Reed Canary Grass Seed Head Clipping	KWF	Russian River Campground	Invasive Species Stewardship Day
8/1	5pm-7pm	Trashercise Tuesday	KWF	Kasilof Beach	Stewardship Day
8/6	10am-2pm	Apogee Adventure Visit	KWF	Russian River Campground	Stewardship Day
8/8	5pm-7pm	Trashercise Tuesday	KWF	Kasilof Beach	Stewardship Day
8/24	8am-3pm	Russian/Kenai River Fencing Removal	USFS/USFWS	Russian River Ferry	Stewardship Day
8/25	1pm-5pm	Moose Range Meadows Cache Maintenance	KWF	Moose Range Meadows	Stewardship Day
8/29	12pm-4pm	Group Line Cleaning Day	KWF/USFS	Russian River Ferry	Stewardship Day
9/9	8am-5pm	Kenai River Clean-Up	Alaska Fly Fishers	Russian River Ferry	Paired Stewardship Day
9/10	12pm-4pm	Stream Watch Appreciation Event	KWF/USFS	Cooper Landing Community Center	Appreciation Event
9/11	10am-4pm	Moose Range Meadows Fencing Removal	KWF/FWS	Moose Range Meadows	Stewardship Day
9/14	11am-3pm	Tern Lake Floating Clean-Up	KWF	Tern Lake	Stewardship Day



Staff and a Marathon Petroleum volunteer group after a beach clean-up on South Kenai Beach (Drzazgowski, 2023)

Conclusion

The 2023 Stream Watch Season was hugely successful. The program set all-time records for total volunteer hours, travel mileage and public contacts. The Northern Peninsula program saw renewed interest from ambassadors, with volunteer hours almost doubling compared to 2022. The Central Peninsula program installed two new caches at the Kasilof River, began a habitat restoration project along Soldotna Creek, and engaged new partners for Stewardship Days. The Southern Peninsula program expanded as well with a new partner and five regular volunteers.

Looking forward, 2024 is the 30th anniversary of the Stream Watch program. Administrators and partners will work together to fundraise and plan an event to celebrate the successes of the program, thank volunteers for their service, and build commitment for continued stewardship. The program will continue to support land management agencies and conservation activities which benefit the great salmon rivers of the Kenai Peninsula.