

# *Happy Holidays from the Kenai Watershed Forum*

As another year comes to a close, we reflect on the incredible support our community has provided to protect and preserve the Kenai Peninsula's natural resources. Your commitment makes it possible for the Kenai Watershed Forum to continue critical conservation work, educate our youth, and maintain the health of our rivers, wetlands, and wildlife.

This year, thanks to donors like you, we've:

- Collected 3,420 lb of trash
- Educated 852 students about the importance of watershed health through KWF summer camp, engaging field trips, and in-class lessons.
- Monitored water quality across 22 sites through our spring and summer Agency Baseline, ensuring a healthier future for the Kenai River and its surrounding ecosystems.
- Continued the mapping of anadromous waterways, which brings our total to 22.4 stream miles and 173 lake acres nominated

But there's still so much to do. Challenges like climate change, invasive species, and increasing development pressure threaten our watershed. With your help, we can expand our programs, respond to these challenges, and continue safeguarding the Kenai Peninsula for future generations.

We would be so grateful if you considered making an end-of-year donation to the Kenai Watershed Forum. The generosity of donors like you have always been the foundation of our success, and with your support, we'll continue to make a meaningful impact in 2025 and beyond.

Thank you for being a vital part of our community and for believing in the work we do together.



Sara Aamodt  
Development Coordinator

## *Our staff reflects on their favorite project of 2024*



If I had a nickel every time someone told me, “I’m sure glad Kenai Watershed Forum is around to do [insert activity here],” we’d be rich! In my fourth year working with KWF, I’ve reflected on what it means to have a local, grassroots, middle-ground nonprofit like KWF working in our community. It’s an uncommon and special position that we occupy; focused on the general good of the Kenai River watershed rather than any one particular group of people or species. It’s a position that allows us to approach any challenging or contentious issue open to all ideas for the best solution. Our existence is a testament to how much the local community values the rivers and lakes of our backyard and all that they sustain. It’s not a given that something like KWF will pop up in every corner of Alaska, and it’s even less common that it would last for over 27 years. As you reflect on where to dedicate your precious time and resources this next year, I hope you’ll join me in appreciating what it means to know that KWF is doing the work that you – the community – have asked for over the years. Threading the needle of contentious management topics, leading enthusiastic volunteers with rakes and shovels, and monitoring the pulse of the incredible waters of our community, KWF is filling a vital role noticeably absent in many other places. It remains my privilege to work with all of you who help make our work possible. Whether it’s calling or stopping by the office just to chat or ask a question, or volunteering with one of our projects or events, I look forward to hearing from you. – **Benjamin M.**

My favorite project that I was able to work on during 2024 was the variety of outreach booths Stream Watch was able to host at various locations throughout the summer. We would load up our booth with educational materials, trivia, and hands-on activities to make engaging with the program as fun as possible. Through these outreach events, we were able to meet so many people with different backgrounds, experiences, ages, and interests.

Talking to people always brings me joy. Whether it is teaching them something new or connecting with someone about a place they love, I can always find inspiration when interacting with those who love the Kenai Peninsula as much as I do. It was also fun to see how different Stream Watch ambassadors presented information at the booth. Hearing volunteers present during outreach events helped to show how much they really care about the program and what we do. I would see their eyes light up and an exciting tone would enter their voice as they talked about their memories with Stream Watch. –

**Brandon D.**



My favorite part of 2024 was all of our amazing summer education programs, old and new. I spend most of my summer leading summer camps designed for ages 6-12. These camps get young people outside and give them new experiences in this wonderful place they call home. Campers hike, observe wildlife, create art, and form lifelong friendships. Many of our campers come back year after year to spend time with us outdoors. In 2024 we also saw the implementation of our new program for 13-18 year olds called Jr. Stream Watch. This program gives young people volunteer experience in conservation, preparing them for careers in natural resources. Our Jr. Stream Watch Technician, Alexis, went above and beyond recruiting teen volunteers and giving them outstanding summer volunteer experiences. 2024 was a great year of getting youth outside! – **Katey S.**



My favorite project of 2024 was surveying the Cooper Landing Bypass project area for high-priority invasive species. The project spans a beautiful stretch of the peninsula, and it feels like history-in-the-making to walk (and re-walk) this route before it becomes a functional highway. We also had a brilliant group of interns this year, who brought fresh wonder and enthusiasm to those long survey days! -Bonnie B.



Many of my favorite activities with the Kenai Watershed Forum entail being outside with you, our community. As you can imagine as the Grants & Accounting Manager, my usual tasks do not usually include either of these, especially being outside. Perhaps it was the beautiful summer we had on the Peninsula, the encouragement of my colleagues, and/or the contagious excitement of our brilliant seasonal interns, I was able to ditch the office for a couple of days to mingle with everyone in the sunshine. I experienced how challenging and rewarding it can be to get our youth outside to plant trees, run around, get dirty, and explore. (High Fives to all the teachers, current and retired!) I joined the team for a few Wednesdays in Park to share our mission and programs with you, our summer residents, and visitors. And, to celebrate the end of the field season, I stood in Soldotna Creek on our first snow day to monitor and record the streamflow data, one of our many activities that address water management and the protection of fish habitat.

So, when I think of some of my favorite things this holiday season - amongst the warm woolen mittens, crisp apple strudels, and silver white winters that melt into springs - I will think of the warm-ish days of summer on the Peninsula and being outside with all of you. Thank you for your support! -Candace N.



After two and a half years at the Kenai Watershed Forum, I remain deeply grateful for the opportunities to connect with community members across the Kenai Peninsula. As Development Coordinator, I have the privilege of organizing KWF's community events, which allows me to do what I love most—engage with members of my community. One of my favorite projects is our annual fall Fireside Chats at Kenai River Brewing Co. There's something special about seeing the community gather as fall transitions into winter, engaging in meaningful conversations and learning about various topics. Fireside Chats is a time for curiosity and connection and I look forward to it every year. -Sara A.



While all of KWF's projects are important for protecting our watershed in their own way, there is one (for me) that stands out among them all: salmon habitat mapping! What can be better than hiking out to those unassuming corners of our community, finding a slow-flowing swampy marsh, plopping down a salmon egg-baited minnow trap, and hauling out a tiny coho salmon or two? Why, bringing along some youngsters to join in the fun of course! Not only are we helping identify previously undocumented salmon habitat, but we are teaching kids along the way; and maybe, just as importantly, bringing a smile of joy and excitement to their face! In fact, the kids are almost as excited as I am when we catch some fish! -Trent D.