



CURRENTS



Citizens Working Together For Community Vitality In A Healthy Watershed

Newsletter of the Kenai Watershed Forum

Fall, 1998

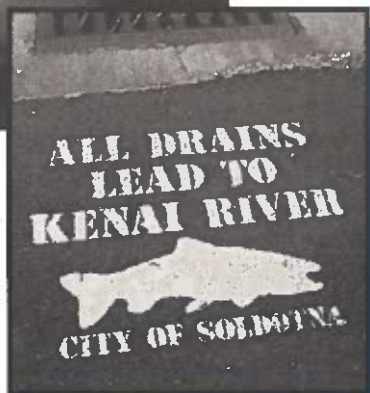
PICTURE OF HEALTH

Stencils Keep Pollutants out of Kenai River



Above: Kids from the Boys and Girls Club painted stencils on roughly 25 storm drains in Soldotna this summer.

Right: Fish stencils send a message that we all play a role in protecting the health of the Kenai River.



Storm drains in Soldotna are running a little cleaner, thanks to the Kenai Watershed Forum.

With the help of the City of Soldotna and the Boys and Girls Club, KWF painted fish stencils on approximately 25 storm drains in Soldotna this summer. The message is simple: What goes down this drain flows directly into the Kenai River.

Unlike wastewater that goes into Soldotna's sewer system and gets cleaned at the city's treatment plant, most water that enters storm drains runs unfiltered into the Kenai River. Which means that leaking car fluids, excess fertilizers, weed killers, and a whole host of other toxins end up poisoning the water.

Stenciling storm drains has worked successfully in other communities. Using those programs as models, KWF is trying the idea here as part of our ongoing efforts to educate the public about its role in keeping the Kenai's water clean.

Roughly 10 kids from the Boys and Girls Club helped paint the stencils.

KWF hopes to expand the program next year.

Worst Offenders

- **Leaking Cars:** By far the biggest source of storm-drain pollutants. And it's not just oil. Anti-freeze and other fluids are nasty poisons. Keep cars well maintained and fix leaks immediately.
- **Household Products:** If you wash paintbrushes or other items in your driveway, the runoff is going right to the river. Solvents are particularly bad. Save these products for hazardous waste collection days.
- **Lawn Care:** Chemicals that kill insects and weeds kill fish, too. Fertilizers can cause abnormal levels of nutrients in the river. Use these products judiciously.

THINK BEFORE YOU THROW

Improper disposal of hazardous waste such as motor oil, pesticides, paints and other chemicals can contaminate water supplies and threaten the health of people. Hazardous waste should not be dumped down storm drains nor kitchen drains.

To encourage proper disposal of these wastes, the Kenai Peninsula Borough runs a hazardous waste disposal program. Private households can use the program for free. Upcoming disposal days at the Soldotna Landfill are Sept. 19 and Nov. 14. For more information, call 262-9423.

I've Come to Eat Your Flies

Kenai's Bats Feast on Insects, Not Blood

They're the stuff of legend. Blood suckers. Night fliers. Halloween haunters.

Bats! And they're here on the Kenai Peninsula. Not to worry. Unlike the notorious vampire variety, the bats that inhabit the Kenai Peninsula are not out for blood. In fact, these winged mammals do their part in keeping summer bugs at bay, using their sonar system to track down and consume as many as 1,000 insects in one night.

The little brown bat, as they are officially known, is much more common in this area than many may think. By day, they hide away in tree trunks, caves and attics. But come sundown, bats are commonly found wherever insects are plentiful. Latenight anglers often see these furry fliers munching on bugs swarming over the river.

Kenai's bats do sometimes pose problems to people. Because bats like to roost in walls, chimneys or attics, they can be a noisy annoyance to homeowners. If they are not evicted, they can fill up walls with guano, creating an expensive cleanup.

Experts say the best way to get rid of bats is to fill the holes, which can be as small as a quarter, where they are entering the house.



Flying Factoids

NAME: Little brown bat

WEIGHT: One-third of an ounce

DIET: Flying insects

HABITAT: Roost in trees, caves, chimneys and attics.

FUN FACT #1: Use a sonar system to catch their prey.

FUN FACT #2: Some bats live as long as 20 years.

Calendar of Events

Sept. 19 - Hazardous Waste disposal day at Soldotna Landfill

Sept. 25 and 26 - Water Quality Training

Sept. 26 - Funny River Community Meeting

Sept. 30 - David Wartinbee's Principles of Stream Ecology II class begins

Oct. 4 - The Nature Conservancy's Anniversary party (call Michelle Brown at 262-6377)

Oct. 5 - KWF Board Meeting

Nov. 6 - KWF Slide Show

Nov. 7 - Brown Bear Festival at Skyview H.S. (call George Matz at 345-3139)

Nov. 11 - Public meeting to discuss Water Quality framework (call Robert at 260-5449)

Nov. 14 - Hazardous Waste Disposal Day at Soldotna Landfill

How are we doing?

The Kenai Watershed Forum is interested in hearing from you. Write, call, fax, e-mail or stop by sometime. We're located on the second floor of the Blazy Mall in Soldotna

ADDRESS: P.O. Box 2937, Soldotna, AK 99669

PHONE NUMBER: 260-5449

FAX NUMBER: 260-5412

E-MAIL: robert@kenaiwatershed.org

WEB PAGE: <http://www.kenaiwatershed.org>

The Kenai Watershed Forum is a citizens' non-profit organization dedicated to working together for community vitality in a healthy watershed. Your tax-deductible contribution is very welcome!

GOING AGAINST. . .

Kasilof man turns wastewood into quality flooring, paneling

When Leif Dragseth started refinishing his house a few years ago, he discovered a wood-lovers dream.

Hidden in the beetle-kill spruce logs, Leif found wood stained with the colors of the rainbow. Mostly blues and reds, but split enough logs open, and the Kasilof man swears you will see the whole spectrum

Much of the color comes from molds, which attack the wood once the beetle is done, according to Leif. Whatever the cause, Leif saw potential. Instead of turning the dead spruce trees into chips or rough-cut lumber, he decided to highlight the wood's swirling colors and turn the logs into flooring, paneling and molding.

Local birch also produces exotic patterns, giving Leif a hardwood product to complement the spruce.

So Leif sold his Harley Davidson motorcycle, bought a planer and started Kasilof Forest Furnishings. But turning an idea into a profit wasn't as simple as he thought.

"I've made every kind of mistake you can think of," Leif said.



ABOVE AND LEFT: Leif Dragseth mills, dries and planes spruce and birch into flooring and paneling. While some consider those trees trash, Leif has found a "rainbow of colors" in the wood and believes there is a market for his product.

"Now I'm ready for this thing to pay off."

Most of the wood Leif runs through his mill and planer is considered trash to others. He uses scraps that lumber mills throw away. He gets his birch from property that is being cleared. And if he needs spruce logs, there is no shortage of property owners who want the dying trees removed from their land.

Leif still lives from job to job, trying to find enough business to keep busy. He now has a kiln to dry his wood, which makes his product more valuable. And instead of trying to compete with larger businesses, Leif has decided to focus on customers who want a high-end product.

"There are people who are willing to pay for quality. There are people who want Alaskan wood in their house. And I'm the person to talk to."

If you want more information about Leif's products, he can be reached at 283-2617.

...THE GRAIN

KWF CELEBRATES ONE

WHAT IS KWF?

The Kenai Watershed Forum is a non-profit, citizens' group with the mission of working together for community vitality in a healthy watershed. We started organizing in the spring of 1996. Funding became available in July of 1997, at which time our Project Coordinator, Robert Ruffner, was hired and projects really started rolling! A volunteer Board of Directors and many other volunteers have helped accomplish all of these great community efforts.

Board of Directors

Catherine Cassidy
Peggy Mullen
Brenda Stoops
Charles Quarre
Pam Russell
Benjamin Jackinsky
Sanne Berrig
Ken Marlow
David Wartinbee

With so many river-oriented groups around, we're often asked what makes us different? We are different! In the past year we have demonstrated that we can carry out our mission of bringing together those special interest groups that are often at odds with one another — often to the detriment of one of our most precious natural resources, the Kenai River and its watershed. We are the only non-governmental group without a "special interest agenda". We work solely for the benefit of the river and the people of the various communities who enjoy it.

We strongly believe that this organization is working in the best interest of citizens who live here by taking a balanced approach to economics, social needs, and environmental concerns when dealing with issues that affect our land and water.



YEAR IN

WATER QUALITY MONITORING - KWF volunteers are working with Fish and Game to keep the Kenai's water clean. By measuring such things as pH levels and collecting bugs, scientists can spot problems before it's too late.

KWF PARTY - So many people wanted to come to this winter event that we had to have two parties instead of just one. Roughly 80 people attended and told us their ideas on the direction KWF should head.

NEWSLETTER - One of the main goals of KWF is to provide opportunities for people to learn about the Kenai Watershed. Our newsletter is a key way we are doing that. In our four publications, you will find stories that make the tie between economics, ecology and quality of living.

1-YEAR ANNIVERSARY

CHARTER MEMBERSHIP DRIVE

The Kenai Watershed Forum is very excited to be kicking off our CHARTER MEMBERSHIP DRIVE in this issue of *Currents*.

We have just begun to realize our goals of identifying common ground on issues. By working to bring everyone with an interest together, we have accomplished those projects listed below and look forward to more success. To continue this type of work, we need your help! We have been fortunate in our first year to have the assistance of federal and state funding to accomplish our work, but it is rapidly coming to an end. Without your support, KWF will not have the financial base to continue at the same pace. Please take the time to fill out the enclosed envelope and return your tax deductible donation to KWF.

Individual and Family Membership Levels

Chinook \$ 50

Sockeye \$ 25

Smolt \$ 5

River Steward \$ 100

Benefactor \$ 500

Your membership gives you a role in shaping the future of the Kenai watershed. You will also enjoy our newsletters, invitations to special events and the listing of your name in our publications.

Thank you for your support!

REVIEW

KENAI RIVER FESTIVAL - The River Fest was a huge hit again this summer, with KWF acting as host.

STORM DRAIN STENCILS - In cooperation with the City of Soldotna and the Boys and Girls Club, KWF helped paint Soldotna's storm drains with fish stencils. The message: What flows in here, flows into the river.

PUBLIC FORUMS - As part of KWF's mission to educate and promote community discussion, we have hosted several public forums this year. Most recently, KWF is helping Funny River residents meet and plan their community's future.





A view of Skilak Glacier looking down from the Harding Ice Field.

Kenai's glaciers in retreat

Like most glaciers around the world, the glaciers that feed the Kenai River are melting faster than they are growing. Glaciers retreat for one of two reasons:

- 1) Lower precipitation
- 2) Higher temperatures.

Simply put, glaciers retreat when more snow melts in the summer than falls in the winter. The Kenai Peninsula glaciers have been in retreat since the 1800s.

Glaciers perform much like rivers, flowing downhill and eroding mountains as they go. When a river flows down steep terrain, it forms rapids or waterfalls. When glaciers go down steep terrain, the ice opens up and crevasses form.

?DID YOU KNOW?

Ice in the Kenai Peninsula glaciers can be thousands of years old. A snowflake that falls onto the Harding Ice Field this winter may not melt into the Kenai River until the year 4,000!

HOW THE KENAI GETS ITS COLOR

Ever wonder how the Kenai River gets its enchanting turquoise color?

Glaciers supply the majority of the water running into the river. With that glacial water comes tons of sediment that the ice has scraped from the mountains. When the water flows into Kenai Lake and Skilak Lake, the large sediments settle to the bottom.

That leaves only the finest flakes, known as flour, to float into the river. It just so happens that this glacial flour reflects blue-green light. So when it hits our eyes, it looks turquoise.

IN THE NEWS

Land goes on auction block

Despite protests from scientists and local residents, the Kenai Peninsula Borough Assembly has decided to sell 10 acres of land in the mountains above Cooper Landing. Scientists with the Alaska Department of Fish and Game said the land is important to sheep and bears in the area. Cooper Landing's Advisory Planning Commission voted against the sale on grounds that it goes against their recently approved community plan.

Final fish counts

Here are this season's final salmon counts matched with escapement goals. All counts are approximate, according to the Alaska Department of Fish and Game.

	<u>GOAL</u>	<u>COUNT</u>
Kings		
Early Run	9,000-	7,000-9,000
Late Run	22,300	26,000
Kenai Reds	550,000-850,00	767,558
Russian Reds		
Early Run	16,000	34,584
Late Run	>30,000	112,000

WISH LIST

- * Double-Sided Copy Machine
- * Office Desk
- * Coat Rack

VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

- * Data Entry
- * Filing
- * Water Quality Monitors

New Booklet Provides Info, Insight Into Kenai Watershed



"Living and playing in the Kenai Watershed" has more than 85 photos, maps, pictures and drawings, including these illustrations by Bunny Swan Gease.



Want to learn more about the geology of the Kenai River watershed? Looking for a list of birds in the area? Ever wondered where the Dolly Varden got its name?

"Living and Playing in the Kenai Watershed," a new publication produced by the Kenai Watershed Forum and others, answers those questions and a whole lot more.

This 36-page booklet was funded by a grant from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency through The Nature Conservancy of Alaska. It is a concise, easy-to-read reference packed with information about the Kenai River and the plants, animals and people it supports.



"This booklet is designed to help residents and visitors navigate the watershed by providing basic information and an overview of the resource," KWF Chair Catherine Cassidy writes in the overview. "It is also a guide to better understanding the river system so that we can continue to enjoy it without causing damage."

If you would like a free copy, the booklet can be found at the Soldotna Visitors Center, the Kenai River Center and the KWF office.

From Corvettes to Healthy Rivers, David Wartinbee Does It All

When David Wartinbee sets a goal, it's a done deal. Witness his list of accomplishments.

Paramedic - 17 years. Doctorate degree in Stream Ecology. Retired from the Pennsylvania school system after teaching 25 years. Law degree. Ski patrol - 30 years. Professional photographer.

So when David and his wife, Kathleen, decided in 1987 that they would live in Alaska in 10 years, there was no doubt. And sure enough, in 1997 David retired from teaching at a Pennsylvania university and landed a job at Kenai Peninsula College in Alaska.

"Everything just fell into place," says David, who has recently joined KWF's Board of Directors.

David first came to Alaska in 1977. Over the next 20 years, he and Kathleen spent 12 summers here, traveling around the state in a camper.

While living in Pennsylvania, David joined a community fight against building a solid waste incinerator in their town. He got frustrated that his expertise as a stream ecologist didn't seem to make a difference. So he went to law school. After finishing his degree, he helped the citizens file a lawsuit to stop the incinerator. "Eventually, that's what won it," he says.

At KPC this semester, David is teaching Anatomy and Physiology, Fundamental Biology and Principles of Stream Ecology II.

One more thing about David - he's somewhat of a Corvette aficionado. He decided to sell his babies before moving to Alaska, but still loves to talk cars.



Principles of Stream Ecology II

The study of stream productivity and land components of stream-side ecology with an emphasis on local rivers.

Sept. 30 - Oct. 28

Wednesdays 7-9:45 p.m.

* KWF is offering scholarships *

KWF HELPS FUNNY RIVER PLAN ITS FUTURE



Roughly 70 people recently showed up at a meeting to help Funny River kickstart a plan for the future. KWF organized the event, which is hopefully just one of six more to come. Residents from both Funny River and Sterling attended the meeting. KWF hopes to sponsor more of these types of events.

"We don't want to dictate outcomes," says KWF Project Coordinator Robert Ruffner. "We just want to provide opportunities for people to come together and discuss and create solutions."

The bridge across the Kenai River between Sterling and Funny River was one topic at the meeting. But most Funny River residents said their top priority is getting Funny River Road paved. That is now scheduled to happen next summer. The next community meeting is tentatively set for Sept. 26.

KWF PUSH MOVES SALT PILE

When KWF volunteers checked the water quality in Soldotna Creek this summer, they discovered some disturbing data. Below the Department of Transportation's salt pile, conductivity readings were high in the salmon stream.

The abnormal conductivity meant salt from the pile was likely leaching into the creek. Salmon are sensitive to water quality, and a high salt content could impact spawning and rearing.

It was no real surprise to find out the salt was getting into the creek. Trees near the DOT pile had died recently, suggesting salt was in the soil.

DOT moved the salt pile to the site above Soldotna Creek just a few years ago after pressure to remove it from its previous home on the banks of the Kenai River.

With the new data, KWF wrote to Governor Tony Knowles, asking for the pile to be removed. The governor responded, and shortly thereafter the salt was removed.

A recent report backs up KWF's claims that salt was reaching the creek. The report recommends the contaminated soil at the site be removed. DOT officials say they will comply and remove the soil this fall.

HIDDEN CREEK CULTURAL SITE PROTECTED



Working with the Kenaitzes and the Kenai National Wildlife Refuge, KWF is helping preserve important cultural features near the mouth of Hidden Creek. The site was historically used by the Kenaitzes as fishing grounds. Today, anglers, campers and school groups frequent the area. To help keep people out of the most sensitive areas, designated campsites are being built and interpretive signs installed.

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