

CURRENTS

Newsletter of the Kenai Watershed Forum

Summer 1998

WATER WATCHING

KWF teams with Fish and Game to monitor Kenai water quality

Water quality will be monitored on the Kenai River and four of its tributaries this summer thanks to a partnership between the Kenai Watershed Forum and Alaska Department of Fish and Game.

Sixteen KWF volunteers will help Fish and Game scientists collect insects and record information such as water temperature and pH levels in Soldotna Creek, Slikok Creek, Beaver Creek and the East Fork of the Moose River from May through October. Another 20 volunteers will help record year-round information such as water temperature and pH levels in Soldotna Creek, Slikok Creek, Beaver Creek and the Kenai River.

The program is being paid for by a \$12,000 grant KWF received from the Environmental Protection Agency and the Department of Environmental Conservation.



Volunteers and Fish and Game biologists examine insects netted from the river bottom

"You can get a lot more work done with citizen volunteers," said Ginny Litchfield, the Fish and Game biologist overseeing the program.

Biologists started watching water quality in the Kenai River in 1989. Insects such as caddis flies, stone flies and chironomids that live in stream bottoms are highly sensitive to changes in water quality -

much like the proverbial canary in the coal mine. A drop in the number of those insects could be a signal that the Kenai River is taking a turn for the worse.

The Cook Inlet Keeper program is also monitoring water quality in Cook Inlet.

Urbanization, loss of wetlands and storm drain runoff are all possible sources of Kenai River pollution.

From The Chair

Summer Greetings!

This is the season that we reap the full economic and recreational benefit of our productive watershed. As you greet old friends returning for the summer, wait in lines of visitor traffic and see guide boats and fish totes traveling on the highways, think about the natural resources which are providing this bounty to our communities. Remember that it is not the visitors, or the fishermen or even the salmon that are the bottom line of this seasonal economy, it is the healthy ecosystem.

Water quality monitoring is an important factor in making sure our system stays healthy and some exciting things have been going on in that area. Grant money from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency allowed us to expand the volunteer water quality monitoring program for the Kenai River and tributaries. Twenty-two new people were trained this spring for chemical testing and/or aquatic insect monitoring. Another twenty-five river-front land owners were trained in monitoring bank erosion. Representatives from organizations, city, borough, state and federal agencies, and interested members of the public met extensively over the winter to develop a water quality monitoring plan for the Kenai River watershed to provide coordination of data collection and analysis. This impressive effort was hosted by the Nature Conservancy of Alaska.

If you have time and inclination to help people enjoy the river in a responsible way there are two volunteer stream watch programs on the river. The City of Soldotna sponsors one at their facilities, call 262-9107. The Chugach National Forest sponsors a program at the Russian River, call 224-3374. Participants in the programs hang out and prove helpful advice and stewardship information to anglers.

If you would like to improve your own understanding of watershed stewardship, look for the booklet *Living and Playing in the Kenai River Watershed* which will be available in June. This was a collaborative project by several local organizations and has basic information as well as references to other resources. Copies will be available at the Kenai River Center and the Watershed Forum, among other places.

Enjoy the season!

Catherine Cassidy, Chair of the Kenai Watershed Forum

Welcome to the Board

KWF welcomes three new members — David Wartinbee, Pam Russell and Sanne Berrig — to its Board of Directors.

Dr. David Wartinbee is one of the newest faculty members at Kenai Peninsula College. He has 20 years experience as a stream ecologist. In his spare time he also picked up a law degree.

Pam Russell works seasonally for Alaska Fish and Game in the summer and is working toward a degree in Natural Sciences through UAA.

Sanne Berrig a long time Kenai Peninsula resident recently completed her bachelors degree from Alaska Pacific University. She has been instrumental in organizing ReGroup.

Unfortunately, the board has also lost a member. **Bob Correia** has resigned because of other commitments. Thanks for all the work you've done, Bob.

Calendar of Events

June 13-14 - Kenai River Festival

July 1-3 - Kenai River Classic

July/August - Funny River Bridge Environmental Impact Statement due

Sept. 7 - Next KWF meeting

October/November - U.S. Forest Service begins public meetings on draft of new Chugach Forest management plan

November - Cooper Landing Advisory Planning Commission revisits residential development issues

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.

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



Seeds of Summer

Left: Dick Baldwin sifts through seeds he sells to gardeners, landscapers and foresters. Below: Baldwin packages and sells dozens of wildflower seeds, including the wild rose.

Dick Baldwin finds money grows on trees, flowers, shrubs and grasses

For more than 50 years, Soldotna's Dick Baldwin has been making a name for himself as the person to call when there's a question about Alaska's native plants.

Whether it's the U.S. Navy revegetating an Aleutian Island or Kenai River landowners rehabilitating their river banks, Dick Baldwin's phone rings.

Together with his two sons, Baldwin grows and collects seeds from native plants in central Alaska, then packages the seeds to sell to cold-climate gardeners, landscapers and foresters.

The Alaska Department of Transportation, with thousands of miles of roadside to plant, is one of his biggest customers. But Baldwin ships seeds as far away as Iceland, where the government is revegetating land overgrazed by sheep.

Many local gardeners know Baldwin's packets of Alaska wildflower seeds that are stocked at roughly 100 nurser-

ies and garden stores in Alaska. From columbine to fireweed to poppies, Baldwin has scoured central Alaska's hillsides, forests, swamps and riverbanks in search of seeds.

"If they want it, we'll go get it," says Baldwin.

Until 10 years ago, all the seeds that Baldwin sold were collected from the wild.

He still gathers some seeds that way, but he now has a large greenhouse and 40 acres of planted fields that he uses to grow the flowers, grasses and shrubs that produce the seeds he needs.

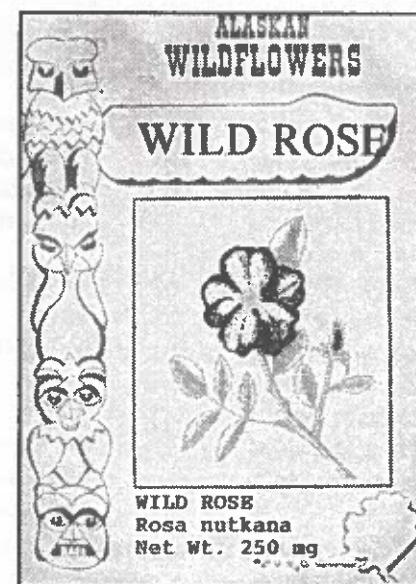
This year, wetland plants are in demand because of

state remediation projects. So one-half of Baldwin's fields are planted with cattail, bullrush and other wetland plants. This year, he is also building an artificial swamp to aid production.

Baldwin recently wrote and printed a book on growing native plants. The book is available at greenhouses in Soldotna and Anchorage, among other locations.

In addition to producing flower and grass seeds, Baldwin also sells seeds

from bushes and trees, using a large vacuum to suck the seeds off branches.



PARTY TIME

Everybody loves a party. When KWF decided to have a bash, so many people responded to our invitations that we had to have two.

In all, roughly 80 people attended the winter get-togethers. Party-goers included members of the Kenai Peninsula Borough Assembly and Soldotna City Council, local business owners, Kenai River landowners, conservationists, educators, sportfishers, commercial fishers and representatives of government agencies.



Above, partygoers David Rhodes and Dave Allen enjoy the buffet. Left, Tom Hodel and Mike Howard write their thoughts about KWF.

In The News

Funny River bridge EIS due this summer

The Environmental Impact Statement for the Funny River bridge should be complete this summer, according to Phil North of the Environmental Protection Agency.

While the impacts of the bridge on the river will be minimal, there is concern that the increased traffic to the Funny River area could harm the river, aquatic resources and local wildlife.

These "secondary impacts" will be addressed in the EIS and will have to be resolved before state and federal agencies allow the bridge to be built.

The first draft of the new Chugach National Forest management plan should be complete in October or November.

At that time, the public will have a chance to meet with the U.S. Forest Service and comment on the proposal, according to the U.S.F.S. Planner Gary Lehnhausen.

Based on previous public comment, the Forest Service has identified 23 uses for the Chugach Forest. Between now and the fall, planners will work to better define those uses and sketch out ways to manage the forest for a variety of interests.

A proposal to allow houses in the mountains above Cooper Landing may be shelved because of poor soils in the area.

Recent tests show the ground under the proposed Sunrise Subdivision cannot handle the water and septic needs of a residential development, according to Dan Conetta, Land Management Technician with the Kenai Peninsula Borough.

The Cooper Landing Advisory Planning Commission will take up the issue again in November.

Rivers make KWF's coordinator run

Robert Ruffner is a pretty simple guy.

"The two main things my life revolve around are kayaking and geology," says Ruffner, who has served as the Kenai Watershed Forum's project coordinator since August.

"If you know that I kayak and like geology, you know 90 percent of who I am."

Robert's list of interests may be short, but his knowledge of rivers - through years of studying them in a boat and a classroom - is extensive.

Robert has a Master of Science degree in geology with a minor in civil engineering from the University of Minnesota. He has studied rivers in Irian Jaya and Minnesota, researching how tailings from mining operations affect downstream communities and ecosystems.

Robert's



kayaking achievements include running the Colorado River at flood stage. In Alaska, he has run Ingram Creek and Sixmile Creek, among many others.



During Robert's tenure with KWF, he has helped organize several informational forums, hosted two community parties, set up the office's computer system and developed a KWF internet homepage.

His big project this summer is coordinating volunteers to help the Alaska Department of Fish and Game monitor water quality in Kenai River tributaries.

In addition to working for KWF, Robert teaches part-time at Kenai Peninsula College. Last semester he taught environmental geology and in the fall will teach an historical geology class.

Robert moved to the Soldotna area 18 months ago from Minnesota. His wife, Tara, works as a pharmacist at Soldotna Professional Pharmacy.

New 'Science Newsletter' devoted to Kenai Peninsula

Anyone with an interest in the Kenai Peninsula and science will love the new "Cook Inlet and Kenai Peninsula Science Newsletter."

Created by Shana Loshbaugh, the quarterly newsletter covers a wide range of local scientific studies and endeavors. The publication plans to include news about discoveries and projects, bibliographies, and a calendar of upcoming conferences, meetings and events. A few of the topics in the first

issue, which is 28 pages long, include:

- a round-up of Cook Inlet watershed studies;
- how to use inter-library loan effectively;
- and, where to get more information about birds and birding on the Kenai.

The first issue is free. Subsequent issues will be \$5 each. For more information, contact Shana Loshbaugh at 262-3126 or e-mail mutski@alaska.net.

FORGET ME

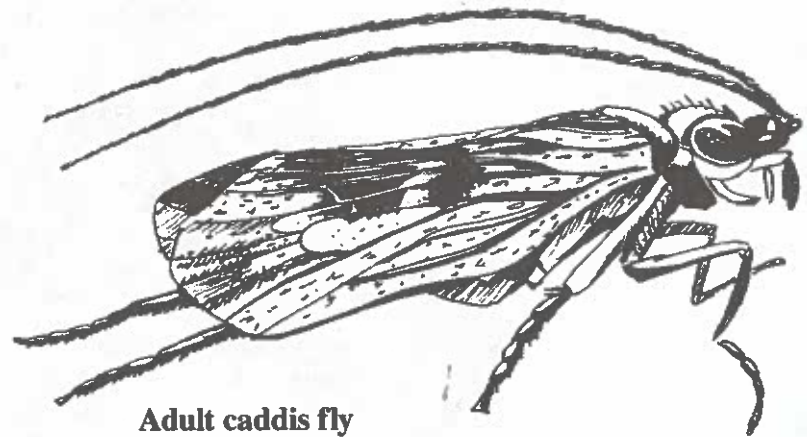
Bottom-dwelling Caddis fly builds underwater home

Look at the underside of a stone in the Kenai River. There's a good chance you'll discover the home of a caddis fly.

Using a glue-like substance, the caddis fly cements together tiny pieces of sand, leaves, twigs or gravel to construct a chimney-like tube that it attaches to the bottoms of rocks and calls home.

While living under water, the caddis fly looks much like a caterpillar. Later, it will change from this larval-state and emerge from the water with wings and the ability to fly.

The caddis fly, along with many other underwater insects, make up an important part of the diet of rainbow trout, Dolly Varden and juvenile salmon.



Adult caddis fly

CADDIS FLY FACTS

Three Life Stages

Larval - Looks like caterpillar. Lives underwater.

Pupa - Molting stage as it changes to an adult.

Adult - Grows wings and emerges from the water.

Predators - Rainbow trout, Dolly Varden and juvenile salmon include caddis flies in their diet.

Point of Interest - Builds a tubular home out of bits of sand and vegetation found on the river bottom.

KWF Happenings

Committee Meetings

Although KWF will not have a general meeting until September, our three committees will be active through the summer. If you're interested in getting involved with one of these committees, please contact the chair.

Finance/Fundraising - Catherine Cassidy: 262-6189

Public Outreach - Brenda Stoops: 776-3689

Board Development - Charles Quarre: 262-2115

Storm drain stencils

Look for stencil drawings of fish on storm drain covers in Soldotna and Kenai later this summer. KWF is working with the cities of Soldotna and Kenai on the proposed public education project. The message: What flows into the storm drain goes directly to the Kenai River.

NOT

Despite crowds, Russian River is a jewel

Avoiding summer crowds

The Russian River is notorious for crowds and combat fishing. The key to avoiding the congestion is staying away when the red salmon are in. Here's a summer guide to the Russian River for those who are interested in something other than fishing.

Fishing is closed on the Russian River until June 15 to allow rainbow trout to spawn.

Visitors to the Russian River during this time could find themselves walking the banks without seeing another soul.

If you want to avoid crowds, stay away from the Russian during this time. If you don't mind the people, though, this is a great time to see salmon jumping the falls. You may even see a bear or two.

A great time to take photos of the Russian River in its fall colors. Sockeye salmon are in their spawning colors and can be seen at the falls.

Trout dig river's habitat

As many as 600 rainbow trout use the Russian River as spawning grounds in May and early June.

Excellent spawning habitat lures these fish out of the mainstem of the Kenai River and into this small, clearwater tributary.

The Russian hasn't always been home to spawning rainbows.

Few used the river to lay their eggs 15 years ago - when anglers were allowed to fish during the spring. When the anglers left, the spawning fish came back.



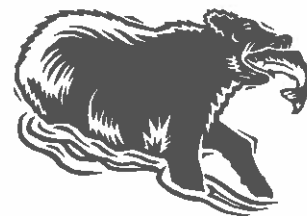
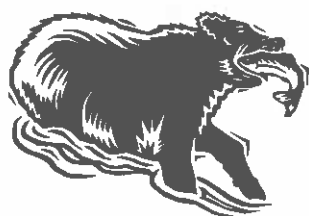
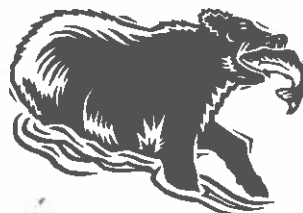
Russian Rainbow Fact Sheet

Spawning season - May 1 through June 15; peaks last week of May.

Numbers - From 400 to 600 spawn at a time.

Spawning Habitat - In gravel bottoms, often in riffles. Most spawn in the lower mile.

Size - Many are over 20 inches. The biggest weigh 6 pounds or more.



Kenai River Festival Returns



The 8th Annual Kenai River Festival will be held on June 13 and June 14 in Kenai. Like last year, the Festival will be located in the grassy field between Arby's and the Kenai Senior Center.



The Festival features fun activities for children, good food, entertainment, and information about the Kenai River. Make plans to attend.



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