

# CURRENTS



Newsletter of the Kenai Watershed Forum

Winter 2007



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## Assessing Flood Damage from a Kayak

by Pete Sprague

This January, the Kenai River experienced its largest winter flood in many years. A few days after the peak of the flood, Robert Ruffner asked me if I'd be interested in kayaking the river with him. We both were interested in surveying the damage; he would view it through the eyes of a trained observer, while I would just look in awe at the aftermath of what had happened the week before.

Saturday, February 3 dawned clear and cold, and we were off. The plan was to put in at Swiftwater Park in Soldotna, and take out at Slikok Creek near Kenai Peninsula College. We drove a couple of miles upriver to put in at the Agrium boat ramp. This way we had the opportunity to view even more of the damage. We paddled for approximately three hours, and covered about seven river miles.

Floating the river gave us a unique perspective on what damage might have been done. It was an incredible trip. The sky was electric blue above the brilliant white ice. In some places we felt like we were traveling through a tunnel, with the ice jams on both sides of the river towering ten to twenty feet over our heads. Many of the walkways that were at or below flood level were still encased in ice, and probably will be until well after breakup. Those that we could see had become twisted metal and splintered wood. Trees and vegetation were bent, broken, and twisted as well. We were able to talk with some property owners



Above: Pete scaling down ice build-up to access the Kenai River.



Left: Robert and Pete prepare to depart.

**WORKING TOGETHER  
FOR  
HEALTHY WATERSHEDS  
ON THE  
KENAI PENINSULA.**

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## *KWF on the road to Seward*

KWF will be reaching out to the folks in Seward this coming April. In recent years, KWF has worked on several large projects in the Seward area, including wetland mapping, digital elevation data, fish passage and culverts, in addition to organizing and presenting a floodplain workshop in Seward. KWF projects in the Seward area continue. Robert and Stephanie along with Howard Ferren, a new KWF board member from Seward, are looking forward to discussing current projects and learning more about the eastern Kenai Peninsula from area leaders.

**April 5th • 7:00 PM • Public Meeting • Rea Building**

**April 6th • Noon • Seward Chamber of Commerce • Yoly's Bistro**

All members and supporters are welcome to attend any or all of the meetings during our two day visit to Seward. Please give us a call if you would like more information.

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## *Host families needed*

KWF will once again host several interns/volunteers this summer. One will be with us the entire month of July and the other from May through August. We are looking for housing for these two folks. Both will be offered transportation as well as a living stipend.

If you are interested, have any questions, or would like to talk to past host families about their experiences, please give us a call at 260-5449. Volunteers and interns have proven to be a great asset to us in the summers and by offering your home, you are doing us and the community a great service.

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## *Caring for the Kenai*

Caring for the Kenai (CFK) is an environmental contest that challenges local high school students to tackle a local environmental or natural disaster preparedness issue. This contest has been around for over 17 years and has touched generations of students on the Kenai Peninsula. The title sponsors are Agrium and Chevron.



Beginning in 2003, Kenai Watershed Forum became the Contest Administrator and began managing all financial aspects of the contest. Since then, our involvement has expanded and we now help with CFK website development and management, the judging process, marketing, and the Semi-Finalist Awards Program, among other things. We believe it is a worthwhile educational tool and fits into our mission well. We are working hard to bring our expertise to the contest with the hopes of continuing to raise the quality of entries.

This year's contest is in the judging phase - the nearly 440 entries have been narrowed down to 12 finalists. The top 12 contestants will present their projects at the Oral Presentation on April 19 at the Kenai Little Theatre.

We encourage you to view the CFK website at [www.caringforthekenai.com](http://www.caringforthekenai.com).

## KWF takes on new Directors

KWF Board of Directors met for their annual board retreat in March. Several issues took center stage, including KWF bylaws review, financial standing, and community relations. KWF's bylaws haven't seen a major revision since the formation of the organization. Much of the discussion around the bylaws focused on revising them so that they more adequately fit our size, scope, and needs. KWF has built a solid financial foundation, but once again it is time to catch up with the growth of the organization. The board consensus was that there should be movement towards capitalizing more on cash flow and assets.



KWF would also like to introduce you to four new directors: Jim Butler, Howard Ferren, Jessica Moore, and Kristy McCullough. Each brings a unique perspective and individual set of experiences. We are all excited to have them join us and already they have proved to be a tremendous asset to this organization. Welcome!

### Jessica Moore

Jessica was born and raised in the Soldotna area and later graduated from the University of Montana, with a major in broadfield science secondary education and with a minor in music. In 1997, Jessica received a BA in biology with an environmental emphasis. From there she returned to Alaska and worked in the schools, but ultimately left the state again to seek full-time teaching employment.

Jessica taught middle school science in Central Oregon. While teaching, she was instrumental in the local "Fish Fest", which is very similar to our Kenai River Festival. In addition to starting a student greenhouse for propagating willows, Jessica worked with her students on riparian restoration projects on local ranches in cooperation with the Crooked River Ecosystem Education Council and with much help from Oregon Fish and Game.

Then, five years ago Jessica returned to the Soldotna/Kenai area and became a full-time mom. She has elected not to return to the work force and now is the mother of two. Jessica says, "I have missed interacting with students and contributing to environmental issues. I am extremely happy to be aboard the Kenai Watershed Forum as I see it as something that both enables me to contribute to our community and also gives me opportunity to implement my skills & interests."

### Howard Ferren

Howard currently resides in Seward and serves as the Assistant Director for Research Operations at the Alaska SeaLife Center (ASLC). Howard also serves as Principal Investigator and Co-Investigator on salmon and herring restoration grant awards received by ASLC through the Southeast Sustainable Salmon Fund and EVOS Trustee Council.

Howard moved to Alaska in 1974 to attend graduate school at the Institute of Marine Science, UAF, and resided in Fairbanks for 15 years before moving to Cordova where he served Prince William Sound Aquaculture Corporation as Planner to the Regional Planning Team for Salmon Enhancement, and

later as VP Administration and Interim CEO. In 1997 he and his wife Dyan moved to Oregon and later, South Carolina, serving two different businesses shouldering Chief Operating Officer and President responsibilities. Missing the snow and adventures of the Far North, he and his wife returned to Alaska in 2002. Leveraging his responsibilities as PI on salmon enhancement and restoration grants, coupled with the ASLC mission, Howard believes he can contribute to the Kenai Watershed Forum and help represent KWF to residents of eastern Kenai Peninsula.

### Kristy McCullough

Kristy moved to Anchorage after obtaining a chemistry degree from Louisiana State in 1997 - she was out to see the world and never looked back. Her first few years in Alaska were spent in Environmental and Production Labs in both Anchorage and Prudhoe Bay, where she learned the procedures behind numerous environmental sampling and analysis techniques. Kristy was a member of the Anchorage Waterways Council, and when she moved to Soldotna with her husband in 2002, she joined the Kenai Watershed Forum and began helping with monthly monitoring of the Killey River.

Presently Kristy is head of the Environmental department at Agrium. In addition she and her husband operate a small lodge on the river where he's our fishing guide. As a new board member, Kristy says, "I'm still trying to learn HOW I can be the most help. I'm a scientist to the very core, so I'd love to help KWF perform studies on observable effects to the Kenai Peninsula from controllable sources. It's important to show communities how they can individually make a difference in directing the change happening in their environment."

### Jim Butler

Jim is an attorney with the firm Butler & Baldwin in Kenai. Jim has served on many boards including the Kenai City Council. In addition to his law practice, Jim commercial fishes in the summer with his family. Jim is looking forward to serving on the KWF board.



and residents who were out trying to determine how much damage they had suffered.

There were some encouraging signs, at least to my untrained eye. Only one short section of bank was denuded of vegetation. We saw only two pieces of debris in the river (one just upriver from the bridge, and one just upriver of the sonar location at Slikok). There was some irony at that site as well: the sign on the small structure there reads THIS ELEVATED LIGHT PENETRATING WALKWAY IS INTENDED TO PREVENT DAMAGE TO STREAMBANK VEGETATION. The vegetation was in good shape while the walkway was unrecognizable.

The City of Soldotna and the Kenai Peninsula Borough have issued disaster declarations. Private property owners and public entities have spent millions of dollars to provide access to the Kenai River, as well as to protect habitat. Rebuilding and restoration need to be done, but we need to keep one crucial concept in mind. Flood events have happened before, regardless of the season of the year. They will happen again. All of us will need to keep this in mind as we strive to preserve and protect the Kenai River for future generations.



Top photo: Billie Shackleton's Gulls Landing B&B suffered major damage to the walkway on the river bank.

Middle photo : Bank erosion just below Gulls Landing B&B.

Bottom photo: Pete Sprague near Swiftwater Park.

Background photo: Robert in kayak below Swiftwater Park.

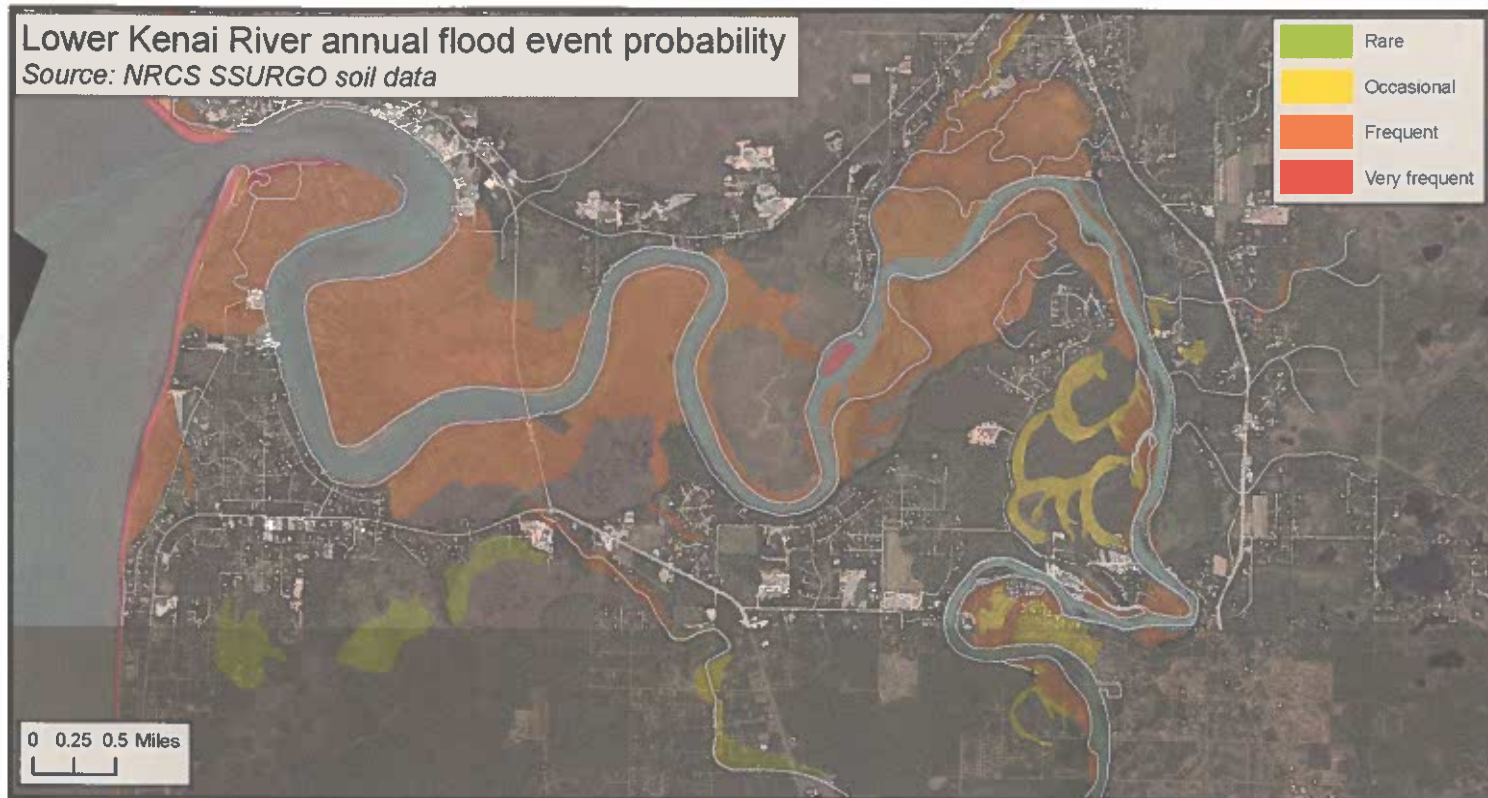
Map at right: Produced by Stephanie Sims - KWF GIS specialist.



**Kenai Peninsula Borough is estimating flood damages to property to be nearly \$6 million.**

## Lower Kenai River annual flood event probability

Source: NRCS SSURGO soil data



### What Caused this Flooding Event?

The Skilak Glacier Dammed Lake is located in the Harding Ice Field above the Skilak River. This lake is smaller than the Snow Glacier dammed lake, and releases typically cause a 1-4 foot rise in the Kenai River below Skilak Lake. The lake began releasing around the 16th of January 2007 and the Kenai River at Skilak Lake rose about 3.8 feet since the 18th. The Kenai River below Skilak Lake experienced a broad crest on the 27th. The rise in water levels caused the ice cover to break up and form ice jams and localized flooding in the Soldotna vicinity. Rapid water level increases and moving ice caused significant property damage. The lake typically releases in the late fall every two years. It was due for its current release. This information was taken from the Kenai River Center's website. You can access this and more information about this flooding event at <http://www.borough.kenai.ak.us/KenaiRiverCenter/>.



# KWF Education

## ACF Education Grant

KWF thanks the **Alaska Conservation Foundation (ACF)** for their grant support of our Education staff's new projects to help coordinate, improve, and increase conservation education on the Kenai Peninsula. These new KWF projects include: coordination of the new Kenai Peninsula Ecological and Cultural Educators group, teacher/youth leader education needs assessment survey, River Education Week, teacher training workshop and new watershed curriculum development.



KWF Education staff pilot new hands-on watershed education curriculum activities.



The new 20 agency-member Kenai Peninsula Ecological and Cultural Educators group (KPECE) meet at the Kenai River Center.



Alaska Conservation Foundation

## Upcoming Education Events

Volunteers are always welcome! Please contact Shelly at 260-5449 or [shelly@kenaiwatershed.org](mailto:shelly@kenaiwatershed.org) or Dan at 260-4882, ext. 230 for more information and event times & places.

|                    |                                                                                                                |
|--------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| April 16th         | Crooked Creek Restoration and Education Project Presentation with Tustumena Elementary 6th Grade Streamkeepers |
| April 17th         | Adopt-A-Stream Trip: Slikok Creek with K-Beach Elementary 5th Grade Streamkeepers                              |
| April 18th         | Adopt-A-Stream Trip: Crooked Creek with Tustumena Elementary Streamkeepers                                     |
| April 25th         | Adopt-A-Stream Trip: No Name Creek with Kaleidoscope Elementary 3rd and 4th Grade Streamkeepers                |
| April 27th-May 5th | Kenai Peninsula Ecological and Cultural Educators (KPECE) "River Education Week"                               |
| May 3rd            | KWF and K-Beach Elementary's Wetland Study and Clean-Up, Kenai                                                 |
| May 4th            | KWF and Kaleidoscope Elementary's Cr  ek and River Clean-Up, Kenai                                             |
| May 18th           | KWF and Tustumena Elementary's Crooked Creek Clean-up and Adopt-A-Stream Sign Installation Ceremony in Kasilof |
| May 30-31st        | KWF and Kenai Peninsula Ecological and Cultural Education Teacher Training Workshop, Kenai River Watershed.    |
| June 2nd           | Project WET, water education workshop, contact Sue True, KSWCD 283-8732 Ext.108                                |

# Crooked Creek Restoration and Education Project

As an extension of the Adopt-A-Stream program with Kelly Balise's Tustumena Elementary 6th Graders, KWF is working with a partnership of local students, teachers, parents, local community volunteers, and natural resource organization and agency personnel to begin the 2-year Crooked Creek Restoration and Education Project. Partners will work to stabilize the stream bank, create a study area for Adopt-A-Stream students, build habitat protection and handicap accessible viewing and fishing platforms and install walkways and educational signs. These partners will work to restore this critical habitat and create a model conservation, education, and fishing area for youth, local residents, and visitors.

With over 61 miles of riparian habitat, Crooked Creek is one of the longest anadromous streams on the Kenai Peninsula and is home to strong runs of chinook and coho salmon and steelhead. This section of Crooked Creek is a very popular community use area because it is one of the few public access areas for spawning chinook salmon viewing on the Kenai Peninsula. Local community members and visitors are seen in significant numbers in this area every year. After August 1st, it is also a heavily used fishing area. As a result, the stream bank has and continues to show a significant impact. This impact has been dramatically increased by the failure of a culvert road crossing during the flood of 2002, which caused a small viewing platform and stream stabilization structures to be lost.

Tustumena Elementary students, teachers and parents are currently involved in project planning--such as photographing public use and impacts to the creek, designing educational signs, and researching platforms, walkways, and habitat

restoration techniques. KWF will coordinate a "Stream Team" of youth, parents, community members and resource professionals to complete a creek clean-up, stream bank restoration projects, educational sign installation and study and viewing platform construction on the banks of Crooked Creek.

Funding for the 2-year Crooked Creek project has been secured from ConocoPhillips Alaska and the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation More Fish Fund. Additional funding is required for the construction of a foot/ATV bridge.

Many thanks to ConocoPhillips for their support of the Crooked Creek Restoration and Education Project and the Adopt-A-Stream Program. Here, Ava Buffington and Catherine Wolk of the 6th grade class at Tustumena Elementary are accepting a check from Lindsey Clark of ConocoPhillips AK.

  
**ConocoPhillips**



Restoration site - washout area and bank trampling from viewing and fishing. September 2006



6th grade teacher Kelly Balise leads a student site assessment on Crooked Creek to prepare for their habitat protection platform and educational sign projects.



Above: Students working on site assessment documentation and creek mapping.

Right: Students conducting their monthly water quality monitoring activities at Crooked Creek.



# KWF Membership

As of 2/21/07

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

## \$500

Peninsula Sportsman's Association  
Ron & Karen Martinelli  
Lisa Parker & Steve Horn  
Sara & Ken Hepner  
Tom Kobylarz & Stephanie Sims

William & Barb Burke  
Joey & David Banks  
Marion Nelson  
Dick Hahn & Loretta Flanders

Dana & Darlene Nichols  
Tom Knock  
Pete Sprague  
Rosie & Bill Reeder  
Karyn Noyes  
Martin McAllister

## \$250

George Kapolchok

\$50 Chinook  
Mark Luttrell  
Bill & Shirley Gifford  
John & Pauline Simmons  
John Delapp & Martha Farris  
Jane & Jack Handy  
Howard & Dyan Ferren  
Barbara Valerious

\$10 Smolt  
Cheri Edwards

## \$200

Sanne Berrig

Jerry & Kathy Herring  
Eve Witten & Randy Hagenstein  
Cheryl Bridge & David Pickworth  
Sammy & Bud Crawford  
Tom & Tanya Boedeker

Additional Contributions  
Cheri Edwards

## \$100 River Steward

Kenai Peninsula Fisherman's Association  
Catherine Cassidy & Erik Huebsch  
David & Kathy Wartinbee  
Janette Cadieux & Theo Lexmond  
John Demske  
Jim & Coleen Fassler

## \$25 Sockeye

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