



COMMUNITY NEWSLETTER

REFLECTING ON 2022



Reflection on Rock Lake. NPS/Mesner

Dear neighbors and community members:

It's always at this time of year, when the frenzied excitement of summer has abated and the stillness of winter approaches, that I am grateful to be able to take the time to reflect on the challenges and successes we have experienced as a community. Looking back even just a year or two, I am reminded of the countless hardships we endured in a world of unknowns. Contrasted to today, it is uplifting to realize how much stronger we have collectively become. We did not get here alone. We continually strive to strengthen old relationships and foster new partnerships.

The Ahtna Cultural Center, C'ek'aedi Hwnax 'Legacy House', reopened thanks to a new partnership between Ahtna, Incorporated and Wrangell-St. Elias National Park & Preserve. Three Ahtna shareholders, including a supervisor and two interns, were hired for the season to manage the Ahtna Cultural Center day-to-day operations and answer visitor questions.

Additionally, a number of local residents worked and volunteered for the park this season, bringing with them regional knowledge and expertise. We are continually grateful to those that wish to share their love for this place with visitors from around the world; visitors who are continually welcomed, whether it be at the park, at local businesses, or at events hosted by park partners. It is this community effort that creates an inclusive and welcoming atmosphere.

I want to take this opportunity to once again thank community members, Wrangell-St. Elias staff, and park partners for engaging in our shared stewardship mission. I am grateful to live and work with you all as we continue to learn from one another. As you read through this newsletter, you'll see the work we have done was as varied as our workforce; we hired many locally and you'll see how and when you can apply for positions; you'll see we welcomed many visitors who were excited to visit this magnificent and storied land; and much more.

I hope this newsletter finds you and yours well and that you have a wonderful holiday season.

Warm regards,
Ben

VISITOR SERVICES

OPEN FOR BUSINESS

Visitors were able to enter the Copper Center Visitor Center, Kennecott Visitor Center, and the Slana and Chitina Ranger Stations. Visitation (approximately 40,000) was below 2019 (52,251) numbers, potentially due to the Princess Lodge being closed. Alaska Geographic sales, however, were almost double 2019 sales. Proceeds from the sales allow us to support vital education programs like Chosen Frozen and attend local events like 4th of July parades, Kenny Lake Fair, and the Fireweed Festival.



Slana Ranger Station. NPS/Heckerman

LOCAL REPRESENTATION

In the division of Interpretation and Education, approximately half of the seasonal employees, interns, and Youth Conservation Corps staff this summer were from the local area. Local staff provide visitors with first-hand knowledge of the area and have unique perspectives and insights into life in Alaska. Additionally, these local hires build essential professional skills with the NPS that set them up for future careers in the Copper River Basin. Many of these seasonal positions were funded through National Park Foundation grants or National Park Service grants for youth and maintenance projects.



*National Creek and bunkhouse in Kennecott.
NPS/Underwood*

YOUTH IN ACTION

Youth Conservation Corps

Eight youth between the ages of 15-18 participated in Wrangell's Youth Conservation Corps (YCC) program! The YCCs also attended local culture camps; renovated the Chitina Ranger Station; helped out at Junior Angler events; welcomed visitors at the Visitor Center; and assisted with Alaska Geographic sales. Watch for 2023 YCC position announcements!



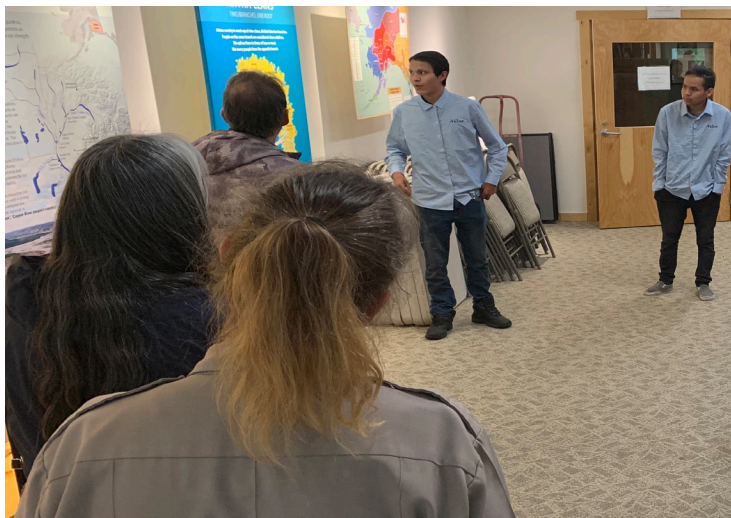
YCC crew working in Viking Lodge. NPS/Repetski

YCC By the Numbers

139 Junior Rangers sworn in
64 miles surveyed
9 miles of trails brushed
2 historical buildings cleaned
0 injuries



YCC Kai Garcia teaches fishing techniques at the Fireweed Festival. NPS/Wittmer



Ahtna Youth Interns, Damien Shank and Ryan George, giving a presentation in the ACC. NPS/Wittmer

Ahtna Youth Interns Welcomed Visitors to the Ahtna Cultural Center

Ahtna, Inc. intern Supervisor, Edward Greybear, worked with two Ahtna shareholder youth to welcome visitors throughout the summer. They provided tours and presented cultural information to many visitors, school groups, and local residents. Twenty-two local elders stopped by the Cultural Center to see exhibits and share traditional knowledge with the interns. This project was funded through the federal Indian Youth Services Corps Program. Watch for announcements for internship opportunities in 2023.

Traditional Knowledge, Ethnographic, and Subsistence Projects

Work is underway on several traditional knowledge, ethnographic and subsistence projects, with most of the work being carried out by project partners through cooperative agreements.

Ahtna Ethnographic Overview and Assessment (EOA)

This baseline cultural anthropology study includes an annotated inventory of ethnographic and related materials relevant to the Ahtna Athabascans; a narrative synopsis of our current understanding of these materials, with a focus on connections to Wrangell-St. Elias; and an analysis of data gaps and additional research needs. It is being carried out through a cooperative agreement with the Ahtna Intertribal Resource Commission and is scheduled for completion in fall 2023.

Documenting Traditional Ecological Knowledge about Historic Dynamics of Caribou Herds Associated with Wrangell-St. Elias

This project includes a literature review/data mining regarding traditional ecological knowledge (TEK) and historic information (e.g., seasonal movement patterns; and herd sizes, interactions, and habitat relations) of the three caribou herds (Chisana, Mentasta and Nelchina) that spend time in Wrangell-St. Elias, along with new traditional knowledge interviews about caribou with knowledgeable long-term residents. Topics covered in the new interviews include long-term knowledge about seasonal movement patterns, herd sizes, and observations regarding caribou in relation to the larger ecosystem and the other caribou herds. The information will be summarized in a report designed to inform management decisions about caribou. This project is being carried out through a cooperative agreement with the Ahtna Intertribal Resource Commission and is scheduled for completion in late 2023.

Local Knowledge of Winter Environmental Conditions and their Impacts on Subsistence Access

This project documents local knowledge of winter environmental conditions through interviews with trappers and other Copper Basin residents who are out on the landscape during the winter about environmental conditions (e.g., temperatures, snow and ice conditions), how conditions have changed over their lifetimes/careers, other traditional ecological knowledge about winter environmental conditions, and the way in which these conditions have impacted access to subsistence resources. The information gathered during the interviews is being summarized in a technical report. This project is being carried out through a cooperative agreement with the Ahtna Intertribal Resource Commission and is scheduled for completion in late 2022 or early 2023.

Upper Copper River Communities to be Surveyed About Subsistence Harvests

Wrangell-St. Elias Cultural Anthropologists Barbara Cellarius and Amber Cohen are working with the Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G) Division of Subsistence and the Athna Intertribal Resource Commission on an NPS-funded project to document the harvest and use of wild fish, wildlife and plant resources by residents of three Upper Copper River Communities. Fieldwork in Chistochina and Mentasta is scheduled for early 2023 with work in Slana planned for early 2024. The project will include both household surveys and ethnographic interviews. Project products will include a technical report, brief project summaries distributed to community households, and a community-level data set that will be available through ADF&G's Community Subsistence Information System. These communities were previously surveyed in 2010 and 2011 and repeating the survey will allow for an analysis of trends as well as provide a picture of the current status of the subsistence way of life in these communities. This project will provide important information that can be used by both agency managers and local communities in managing or advocating for subsistence resources.

Successful Mentasta Herd Captures

In September, biologists with Yukon-Charley and Wrangell-St. Elias collaborated to deploy GPS collars on adult female caribou of the Mentasta Herd. This is a small herd that primarily resides within Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve that can mix seasonally with the larger Nelchina Herd. The project was successful, and the team put out all 10 collars, bringing the number of active collars up to 13. GPS collar monitoring helps the Park monitor this unique herd's population movements and distribution throughout the year, as well as survival. The Wrangell-St. Elias team thanks the Yukon-Charley team for sharing their time and professional expertise, without which this successful project would not have been possible.



A collared female caribou of the Mentasta Herd in Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve. NPS/Joly

FISHERIES RESEARCH AND MONITORING PROJECTS

Tanada Creek Salmon Weir

With funding through the Fisheries Resource Monitoring Program (FRMP), the Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve (WRST) Fisheries Program operated the Tanada Creek salmon weir located at Batzulnetas. This was the first year of operation since the 2018 season. Weir installation was completed on June 24. The first salmon was documented passing the weir on June 28. As of September 1, there have been 28,115 Sockeye Salmon and 11 Chinook Salmon recorded in passage for the season. The Sockeye Salmon count is above the historical season count average of 17,520, and is on track to be the third highest escapement count documented to this system. The timing of these stocks passing the weir was later than normal throughout the season.



Tanada Creek Salmon Weir and Crew. NPS Photo.



Underwater image of sockeye salmon passing the Tanada Creek Weir. NPS Photo

Tracing Mercury in Lake Trout Food Webs

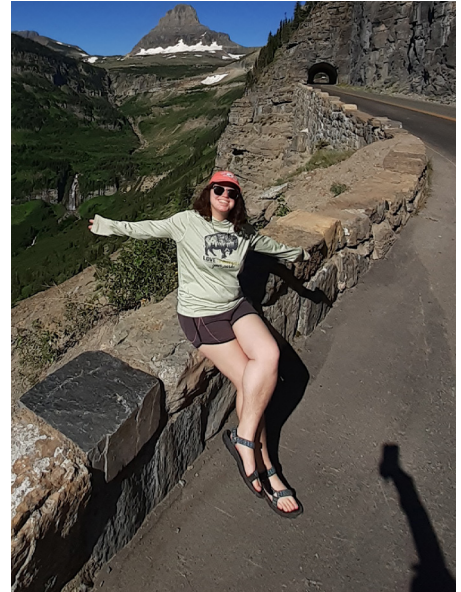
As part of a collaborative project between NPS and the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS), researchers performed field sampling in Copper Lake and Tanada Lake in late June. This study intends to trace Mercury (Hg) in Lake Trout food webs and was prompted by findings of elevated Hg levels in muscle tissue of Lake Trout residing in certain lakes of Alaska parks. One additional lake (yet to be determined) may be sampled in the 2023 field season. Be sure to check the USGS' Alaska Science Center website in the coming weeks for additional information. <https://www.usgs.gov/centers/alaska-science-center/science/ecosystems>

Wrangell Welcomes New Employees

Cultural Anthropologist

Amber Cohen is a new cultural anthropologist for Wrangell St. Elias National Park and Preserve. She began her NPS career as an oral history intern for the NPS National Capital Region. She holds a master's degree in Applied Anthropology from the University of Maryland, College Park where she worked with the National Capital Region Ethnography team to conduct field research on subsistence fishing and harvesting practices on the Anacostia and Potomac rivers in Washington, D.C.

After completing her master's degree program, she served as a rural aquaculture promotion Peace Corps volunteer in Zambia which focused on small-scale fish farming and harvesting. She has worked seasonally at Shenandoah National Park, Joshua Tree National Park, and most recently, Mount Rainier National Park. She is excited to support the Resource Stewardship and Science team at WRST.



On Going-to-the-Sun Road, Glacier National Park. Photo/ Cohen



In the field sampling dissolved oxygen for a fisheries project. Photo/Cutting

Wildlife Biologist

Dr. Kyle Cutting is a new wildlife biologist at Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve. Since 2010, Kyle has built a biological research program focusing on Red Rock Lakes National Wildlife Refuge and surrounding landscapes on the western side of the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem (GYE) in Montana.

During his tenure in Montana, Kyle designed projects to help inform complex land management decisions through an adaptive management framework of priority habitats and species including work on habitat selection, foraging patterns, and survival of endemic arctic grayling, habitat selection and demographic response of birds including grouse, waterfowl, and songbirds, and willow browse patterns by moose. Kyle has served on various conservation and science teams consisting of land managers and scientists tasked with developing projects and partnerships around land conservation needs.

Kyle enjoys scientific writing and pushes himself and colleagues to publish results in peer-reviewed journals. Kyle is interested in adaptive management, terrestrial and aquatic ecology, ornithology, adaptive habitat selection, stable isotope ecology, quantitative ecology, community-based conservation, and mentoring.

Timeline for Employment Opportunities

November

USAJobs (www.usajobs.gov) announcements begin to come out for Park Ranger and Park Guide seasonal positions in Slana, Copper Center, Chitina, and Kennecott.

January

Local hire announcements come out for seasonal positions in Slana, Copper Center, Chitina, and Kennecott.

Announcements for Student Conservation Association interns.

February-March

Announcements for Ahtna Youth Interns and Youth Conservation Corps (<https://www.nps.gov/wrst/learn/management/ycc.htm>)

Stay in the Know

Get up-to-date Information about Wrangell-St. Elias!

Join the "Locals Listserv!" Request a subscription by emailing wrst_public_affairs@nps.gov and putting "Locals Listserv" in the subject line. Members receive timely news releases, Cultural Heritage Highlights, Research in the Park information, and Community Newsletters. Members can unsubscribe at any time.



*Confluence of Baldwin Glacier and Fraser Glacier.
NPS/Frank*
