

Copper River Country Stories Map Project

By Vicki Penwell

On January 21 and 22, people from around Copper Country met to formulate a work plan for developing a Copper River Country Stories Map and Guide.

According to Kristin Smith of the Copper River Watershed Project (CRWP),

based in Cordova, the idea for the guide came about nine years ago when she and others were working on a tourism project and were inspired by the rich collection of diverse stories to be told from the Copper River headwaters to the delta. It occurred to them that a pro-

ject could be developed that would "help communities guide tourism growth rather than be driven by it."

Last July, Copper Valley Development Association (CVDA) and the Copper River Watershed Project submitted a request for assistance for such a project to the Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance Program (RTCA). Along with RTCA, Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve and Prince William Sound Community College (PWSCC), a core group began formulating a vision statement and plan for community meetings that would gather input from residents and local groups.

In January of this year, eleven people attended the kick off session held at the CVDA offices in Tazlina. Smith, along with Katrina Church-Chmielowski of PWSCC and Heather Rice of RTCA, introduced the concept and lead small group discussions about map elements, map style and potential stories. Participants agreed that there was a need for a product directed at tourists that would include information about historic events, trails, natural history landmarks and other features of Copper River Country.

Rice, who facilitated both meetings, found that "participants were looking for a way to share the story

of the region with an authentic voice. Something different than existing maps that participants felt were focused on simply navigating the area and finding businesses."

The Copper River region is not included in many Alaska tourist guides, and many travelers simply "pass through" with no knowledge of the unique features or visitor opportunities available.

Katrina Church-Chmielowski points out that there is no single product that introduces people to the people and features of the 23,020 square mile Copper River Country. She says, "Visitors piecemeal together information they need to explore and learn about the area. The Copper River Country Stories Map

After the all day workshop on January 22 held at the American Legion Hall in Glennallen, a plan for moving forward emerged with a goal of having a printed map available for the summer of 2010. Smith says that she hopes to find funding so that the first printing of the guide can be distributed to visitors free of charge. The group envisioned a potential suite of products that would include web based information as well as hard copy products available at local businesses. The Copper River Country Stories Map and Guide working group is intended to include additional participants as the project develops. The next meeting will take place some time late in March. Those interested in participating should contact the CVDA at 822-5001 or cvda@cvinternet.net.