

PRESS RELEASE :

Traveling by Story Through Copper River Country

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COPPER RIVER WATERSHED PROJECT RECEIVES ALASKA HUMANITIES FORUM FUNDS FOR SHARING REGION'S ORAL HISTORIES

The Copper River Watershed Project (CRWP) and a broad team of partners have been awarded \$8,000 from the Alaska Humanities Forum for conducting and recording oral histories of Copper Basin residents. Alaska's Copper River basin has a profound cultural history but the last generation of Ahtna language speakers and original homesteaders is slipping away. *Traveling by Story* was conceived as a way of bringing history to life, of telling the stories of this unique region through the voices of its people. Copper River Country is home to a wealth of stories that fill the valley: from the last American homesteads in Slana, to the salmon that sustained the Ahtna people, to the geologic forces shaping the basin and its gold and copper mining riches, a trip through Copper River Country has so much to offer.

Project activities that will be funded through this grant include holding three talking circles, or facilitated conversations, focused on particular themes. We plan to hold the talking circles in locations spread throughout the basin to provide forums for a mix of diverse voices and stories. We'll also make use of existing recordings of oral history interviews collected by the University of Alaska's Project Jukebox program. We will record new oral histories as well, and develop interpretive text to accompany selections from the recorded oral histories.

The CRWP and its partners plan to present the stories initially through a web site, with development of a smart phone application and a printed map guide to follow. The group is trying to build on work initiated in 2006 when residents and tourism businesses around the Copper River valley gathered to develop a regional identity. With tourism in the region growing steadily, the group hopes to create avenues for connecting with visitors to convey what makes this valley so special. Many visitors are interested in the unique aspects of the region's rural culture and want to understand how we live and work in our communities. The workgroup anticipates that a deeper understanding of the Copper River Country will encourage respect for private and public lands and the people of the area.

Project partners to date include: PWS Community College, BLM/Glennallen Field Office, Ahtna Heritage Foundation, and the Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve. We will also be working with the Wrangell Mountains Center, which received a similar grant, and welcome the participation of other partners who might be interested.

The Alaska Humanities Forum funds projects that use the wisdom and methods of the humanities to enrich the civic, intellectual and cultural life of all Alaskans.

To learn more about this and other CRWP projects, please join us for a Wild Food Feast and Film Festival in Glennallen on March 31, 2012 at the American Legion Hall.