



COPPER RIVER WATERSHED PROJECT

COPPER RIVER

Runner

FALL 2012



SAM LIGHTWOOD AND KEITH MURRAY AND OTHER RELICS FROM THEIR HOMESTEADS, KENNY LAKE, ALASKA. PHOTOS BY WENDY ERD

PROGRAM UPDATE

TRAVELING BY STORY

BY PIPPA STANLEY, CRWP SUMMER 2012 INTERN

“Oral histories provide an entirely new and vivid experience of a place”

This summer, I listened to nearly 30 oral history recordings from Copper River Country and each one reminded me again how extraordinary it is to listen to someone tell their own story, in their own words and with their own voice. Oral histories provide an entirely new and vivid experience of a place, whether the listener is passing through or a resident already familiar with the voices that they hear on the tape.

As Wendy Erd, our staff writer, says in her introduction to *Traveling By Story*, they reveal an “inner, unseen geography ... these voices connect us to place and to each other.” This summer Wendy and I began to take *Traveling By Story* from concept to reality: mapping the unseen geography of the watershed and finding the points of connection between storytellers, listeners, and the land.

Working with recordings of the three talking circles held this spring in Kenny Lake, Slana, and at the Ahtna Cultural Center, we approached the stories

not just as records of life but also as the art that they are, with the extraordinary environment of the Copper River watershed seeming to produce equally extraordinary storytellers. We thought of the stories as comprising an audio version of a museum exhibit, in which we grouped individual stories based on their geographic location to reveal the connections between individual stories and their common connection to place.

For each of the three locations, Wendy wrote a brief, evocative text inspired by her visits and interviews there that sets the stage for the stories. We then chose a selection of stories to be compiled into a three to four minute audio piece, with the first one, composed of stories from Kenny Lake, being completed at the end of the summer.

When the next two audio pieces are finished, all three, along with Wendy’s text and photos, will be accessible on Copper River Watershed Project’s *Tour Our Watershed* webpage and through the *Local Tours* feature of the *Alaska App* — a first taste of what we hope will be an ongoing project to document and showcase the rich story-heritage of Copper River country.

CRWP MISSION

To foster the health of the Copper River watershed’s salmon based cultures, communities, and economies.

LETTER FROM THE
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Dear friends of the Copper River,

Several large skeins of geese flew overhead two days ago, making their way south to warmer wintering grounds. I think they thought they could put off the trip a little longer, but the five inches of new snow – in mid-October! – that fell in town at sea level this week gave them the final push.

Sandhill cranes and geese flying south over town are a sure sign that the fishing season is finished for this year. Fishermen are hauling their boats out of the water and winterizing their engines, maybe mending nets for next year. In the Copper Basin, subsistence fishers took their fishwheels out of the river in August and then turned to hunting moose and caribou for their freezers.

This was a banner year for fishing on the Copper River, which is good news not just for fishermen, but for all members of the Copper River watershed community who are spread far and wide across the country. Yes, fishermen earn a living from fishing for salmon, yet fishing permit holders live not just in Alaska: about half live in the lower 48 where they spend their earnings in the winter. The seafood processors who operate the canneries, and have their headquarters in Seattle that employ several hundred people there, also benefit from the Copper River's bounty. Sport fishermen who travel from the lower 48 to fish marvel at the world class waters on tributaries to the Copper River.

And we all benefit enormously from the Copper River's value to science. Biologists have long emphasized the importance of maintaining pristine ecosystems to serve as refugia for threatened species and long-term reserves for

research opportunities. The Copper River serves this function for researchers who want to explore an undisturbed system, one where the natural migration and reproductive processes of salmon can be observed. These observations help with efforts to restore salmon runs in other parts of the Pacific Northwest.

Thank you for your continuing support of the Copper River Watershed Project, because we ALL need the Copper River to continue to thrive, and be an example of an intact watershed with an annual, renewable resource – strong salmon migrations that feed thousands and generate millions of dollars, every year.

Sincerely,

Kristin Carpenter



CRWP STAFF

Kristin Carpenter, *Executive Director*
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Copper Basin seat, *open*



CLASSROOM CURRENTS

BY KATE MORSE

“Ooooooh, that stinks!”, “Take a picture of me in my waders!”, “I think I know what this plant is called ...”. These were just some of the comments overheard this fall as Cordova’s 10th grade class embarked on a wet and wild adventure to Odiak Pond to study wetland plants.

Thanks to the generous support of the Chugach National Forest’s Cordova Ranger District and the Prince William Sound Regional Advisory Committee, CRWP has 13 new sets of waders available for use in all its education programs. We are excited to take kids out from behind a desk and immerse them, literally, in the ecosystems about which they are learning.

In the coming year CRWP will continue to expand these outdoor learning opportunities to communities throughout the watershed. Recent training sponsored by the United States Fish & Wildlife Service provided valuable resources for supporting the creation of schoolyard habitats. By working with school administration,

teachers, maintenance staff, and most importantly students, we hope to help schools in the region establish accessible, engaging outdoor settings for getting kids out of the classroom and for keeping learning exciting!

The motivation for this effort is largely driven by the students—to see them all come to life as they are removed from the normal classroom environment and to surprise them that math, science, and language arts are relevant and can be fun! In the words of past Odiak Pond study participants, “It was the best science experience ever, because I got to meet lots of cool people and we got to do our own science testing and sampling outside of class.”

“I really liked using the science kits to run the water tests. We were able to follow the instructions and run the tests on our own, just like real scientists.”

And most importantly, these programs help to empower our young people to share what they know and be an active part of making our communities a better place. As one student said, “I thought it was really great that we were able to find salmon in the pond and show the community that the pond is important.”

THE CRWP WOULD LIKE TO CONGRATULATE OUR 2012 SCHOLARSHIP AWARDEES, ANGELINA KELLY OF CORDOVA & DIRCK ROSENKRANS OF COPPER CENTER!

These students were selected by our board based on their records of academic achievement, community involvement, and dedication to environmental stewardship. We would like to thank all students who applied, and we wish them well in their continuing education and in all their future endeavors.

Learn more about their discoveries and view their creative outreach projects on our website:
copperriver.org/programs/watershed-education/odiak-pond-field-study-1

SALMON, BERRIES AND MUSHROOMS ARE SOME OF THE MANY SUBSISTENCE RESOURCES ENJOYED BY COPPER BASIN RESIDENTS.



ABOVE PHOTO BY KIM ARTHUR



PHOTOS BY BARBARA CELLARIUS



TRACKING CHANGES OVER TIME

SUBSISTENCE USERS INFORM PHENOLOGICAL MONITORING FOR CLIMATE CHANGE

BY MARGOT HIGGINS, UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA BERKELEY

On the tattered meteorological calendar that lives among jars of canned salmon, moose salami, spruce tip beer and pickled garlic, Wrangell Saint Elias Park and Preserve resident Bill Rickard* has been marking natural history observations since 1978 when he first arrived in Alaska. Daily entries recall his first jar of cranberry liquor, canned cauliflower and blueberry jam. For a ten-year period, Bill only left the Park two times, and through almost thirty years of concentrated time living inside the park, he has gained a unique perspective on the changes that have occurred in the land.

For six consecutive summers, Bill has been keeping an eye on a pair of trumpeter swans that nest in the pond that is adjacent to his property. Trumpeters usually mate for life and Bill knows that this couple has only reared four successful cygnets since they first paired up, including two hatchlings this past summer. An earlier arrival than usual this year just might tip the odds in favor of this threatened species, which has only 110 days to fledge before the ponds typically freeze in early October.

Known as “nature’s calendar,” phenology is the study of seasonal biological events such as flowering, migrations, and breeding. Alaska park residents like Bill, many of whom pre-date the establishment of the Alaska park system in 1980, offer an important contribution to phenological monitoring for climate change. There are 23 resident-zone communities in the Park, where residents are eligible for subsistence. These subsistence users are in a unique position to offer records of phenological observations through photographs, hunting and gardening journals, daily calendar entries or oral histories.

Using ethnographic methods, my research examines the extent of phenological observations that are taking place in WRST, the opportunities and constraints that local residents face in participating in phenological monitoring and what kinds of support might best support this involvement. Because different park residents are focused on different phenological observations — ranging from ice freeze and break up to insect hatches, vegetation and migration patterns — my research aims to offer a broad perspective of the phenological events that are occurring and a framework for natural resource managers and local residents to work more collaboratively.

My PhD research is focused on the local knowledge and experience of people like Bill, who choose to live in such close proximity to the land. Bill is one of 5200 people living in and around WRST who are eligible for subsistence. These local residents may offer a unique opportunity for monitoring of the impacts of climate change.

*Name has been changed to protect the anonymity of the individual. Margot is a PhD candidate in the Society and Environment Division of the Department of Environmental Science, Policy and Management at UC Berkeley. She is the recipient of a 2012 George Melendez Wright Society fellowship and a 2012 Murie Science and Learning Center fellowship. For more information, Margot can be reached at margothiggins@berkeley.edu

PROGRAM UPDATE

MINING FOR COHO SALMON HABITAT

BY KRISTIN CARPENTER

A simple idea from his mining days inspired Cordovan Ralph Bullis to apply for U.S.D.A. Forest Service funding with an idea about how to restore coho salmon habitat.

Walking along an old Forest Service salmon spawning channel on the Copper River delta, he noted how its streambed was covered with a film of fine silt. It was quite apparent to Ralph that any salmon eggs that were laid in the channel would be smothered by this fine sediment. How could that silt be removed from the stream? In other regards — no barriers to fish passage along the stream or under the Copper River Highway, natural vegetation along the banks and no development in the stream's vicinity — the stream met all the right criteria for use by spawning coho (*a.k.a. silver*) salmon.

With the help of a federal grant, Ralph got the idea to buy a gold dredge with a small, 6.5 hp motor to operate a 4" hose suction dredge and use it to vacuum the silt, literally, from the stream. He mounted it on a piece of old surfboard so that it could float along with the operator. For three weeks, Stan Francois-Aime, another field crew member for the project, moved down stream on foot as he vacuumed up the silt from several hundred feet of stream channel. The CRWP managed the grant for Ralph and coordinated with the US Forest Service for technical assistance.

When the spawning channel was originally built in 1987, the USFS had scooped out a channel in the stream with a loader. This created a flat, uniform riffle similar to the successful spawning channels for pink and chum salmon in British Columbia. Coho salmon, however, prefer to spawn in the tailouts of pools, where the streamflow is forced through the gravel to bring oxygen to the eggs. Also, scooping out the Mile 25 spawning channel had the effect of widening the stream, which slowed down the water velocity. Slower-moving water meant that the silt could settle out rather than being moved along by the stream's natural function.



As we talked through this project with our USFS Fish Biologist advisor Ken Hodges, I wondered “how is more silt not going to be re-deposited?” (*I’m not the habitat expert in fish biology, I’m the generalist, trained in public policy.*) Ralph and Ken answered that question by looking at the natural coho salmon spawning areas in the areas downstream from the spawning channel. In the areas where the stream was more narrow and water velocities were greater than 1 foot per second, the silt was carried away and there were clean gravels for spawning. These areas were being used by coho salmon for spawning. Ralph and Ken measured the low winter flow in the spawning channel and determined that if the channels were narrowed a few feet, there would be sufficient water velocity to keep the gravels clean.

Our field crew did that work too, using rock and gravel to re-construct a more natural stream bottom. Stan used the dredge in reverse, using it like a firehose to push the larger substrate up along the sides of the bank to narrow the channel and create pools at the same time. Larger rock was used to build up the stream channel banks and form pools every 50 - 60 feet. The pool formations are now constricting the channel flow a bit and increasing stream velocity, keeping the silt moving down stream. The final step was to place coarse gravel in the tailouts of the pools in which coho salmon will lay their eggs. The eggs need the gravel to protect them, but also to allow oxygenated water to flow through the gravel pore spaces and over the eggs, keeping them aerated.

This project was one of several funded through the Secure Rural Schools Title II program based on National Forest timber receipts. A volunteer committee of Prince William Sound residents allocated funding to a wide range of community-based projects like Ralph’s, broadening the base for partnerships that benefit watershed restoration and recreation infrastructure.

RIDGELINES: AROUND THE WATERSHED

WETLAND EDUCATION PROGRAM GOES GLOBAL

WetlandsLIVE: A Distance Learning Adventure is a year-long educational program for grades 4-8 shown through a series of free live webcasts brought to you by the USDA Forest Service and Prince William Network. Wetlands around the world will be showcased to illustrate the functions and ecology of wetlands and their importance to people and wildlife, especially for migratory birds and fish. The Copper River Delta is an integral part of many of these migration routes. The upcoming webcasts will be March 8, 2013 from Panama and then May 9, 2013 from Cordova. Along with the webcasts are 2 video contests for students to show what they're doing in wetlands for a chance to win money for their schools.

For more information, visit the WetlandsLIVE website at <http://wetlandslive.pwnet.org> and find us on Facebook to see what schools and youth around the world are doing in wetlands.

YOUTH ENGAGED IN THE WILLOW CREEK RESEARCH PROJECT

2012 has been a productive year for the Willow Creek Research Project. Flow measurements and conductivity measurements have been taken throughout the late spring and summer at three key sites along the creek. In addition, springs flowing from the Tonsina River bluff have been explored and sampled, beginning the attempt to determine if they are fed by Willow Creek water that has gone underground. The largest body of water in the Willow Creek watershed is Willow Lake, whose drainage forms a small tributary to the

creek. This drainage was explored for the first time in this project, with more flow and conductivity measurements taken. In addition to volunteer assistance, the Willow Creek Research Project benefited this year from the help of a paid youth research assistant, Tessa Wygant from Kenny Lake High School. More young people contributed to the project in May, when Kenny Lake middle school science students participated in a day of research along the creek near the school grounds.

For more information contact Dave Wellman, email: contact@willowcreekwater.org or visit www.willowcreekwater.org.

CHINOOK SALMON SYMPOSIUM CONVENED TO ADDRESS DECREASING CHINOOK RUNS

Recent downturns in state-wide Chinook salmon abundance, including on the Copper River, have resulted in fishing restrictions and closures and have contributed to social and economic hardships across many communities in rural Alaska. Researchers from a variety of private, state, federal and academic backgrounds met in Anchorage Oct. 22-23rd to discuss abundance and productivity trends of Chinook salmon and to identify key knowledge gaps and assemble a list of potential research priorities to fill the gaps. Specific topics discussed include the current Alaska stock assessment, ecology and stock assessment in the marine environment, and hatchery research and production.

A draft gap analysis as well as information about the symposium can be found on ADF&G's website at: http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=chinook_efforts_symposium.information

ECOTOURISM IDENTIFIED AS ONE STRATEGY TO PROMOTE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN COPPER BASIN

Copper Valley Development Association has begun implementation of the economic development measures established through the 2012 revision of the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy plan (CEDS) for the region. Among the vital and suggested projects arising from regional discussion is the development of eco tourism in the Copper River Region. In the coming months, through an established partnership of key stakeholders and with the support of the Alaska Department of Commerce, Community and Economic Development, we will identify existing and potential eco tourism providers in the region, establish all inclusive visitor packages designed to showcase the region's hidden eco treasures and, promote those packages within the state, nationally and internationally. In a balanced and non consumptive manner, it is our objective to expand and solidify the tourism market of the Copper River Region relying on existing resources and infrastructure.

For more information contact Sandra Wagner, Executive Assistant/CEDS Project Manager at 822-5001 or swagner@coppervalley.org.



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COPPER RIVER
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Newsletter

FALL 2012

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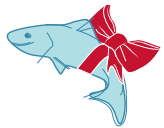
WHY I SUPPORT CRWP



DR. OLIVER OSBORN
CORTE MADERA, CA
FORMER CORDOVA RESIDENT &
CITY COUNCIL MEMBER

I support the Copper River Watershed Project because it is full of good people doing good things. The Copper River area is a national treasure, and very special to me personally after all my years in Cordova. I believe that we humans must not overpower and destroy natural systems. We must limit our impacts, and let wisdom guide our hands.

GIVE THE GIFT OF SALMON THIS HOLIDAY SEASON



Having a hard time finding the perfect gift for someone on your holiday shopping list? Give the gift of salmon!

By ordering salmon through our webpage, 8% of sales support CRWP programming, including habitat restoration, water quality monitoring, and hands-on education projects. More information on items in stock at: <http://copperriver.org/buy-fish/prime-select-order-page>.

A membership to the Copper River Watershed Project is also a great way to give a gift FOR the salmon! Your membership contributions help us demonstrate to outside funders there is grassroots support for the work we do. These unrestricted funds also help CRWP to develop new, exciting programs, including work to expand our hands-on education programs for students throughout the region and our volunteer-based habitat inventory program called Salmon Blitz. Starting in 2013 we will engage volunteers of all ages to help document the extent of habitat being used by adult and juvenile salmon species to ensure these waterways are protected into the future. *To learn more about this program or to sign up as a volunteer, contact Kate Morse at kate@copperriver.org, (907)424-3334.*