



COPPER RIVER
WATERSHED PROJECT

COPPER RIVER

Runner

FALL 2017



FLOATING THROUGH THE COPPER RIVER WATERSHED

Community canoe outings float in Mendenhall Lake and River

By David BISHMAN, COYOTEVA/ALASKA PHOTO

As I floated in a canoe on the Stone River, I reflected on how amazing it was that I was three hundred or so miles from my home of Coonara, but I was still in the same watershed! Even though there is no ocean, the trees are a different species, and I don't recognize the fungi in the forest, there is still one thing that I know and recognize . . . the salmon, and this thought makes me feel at home. Salmon that were at the mouth of the Copper River this spring could be the same salmon that are swimming in the river I am floating on right now.

This summer, we hosted two days of recreational canoeing and watershed-themed activities at Mendenhall Lake and the Stone River.

In Mendenhall, approximately 60 youth and elders attended the community canoe day. The day began by getting everyone out in a canoe to explore Mendenhall Lake from the surface. After a delicious BBQ lunch, the youth were invited to dive their waters, because citizens scientists and volunteers who was being beneath the surface of the water. The citizen scientists were excited to discover a few fungus on rocks in the stream beds that were on the night before. They also recorded data about the stream including temperature, pH, width and depth

of the stream, and streambed composition. We all enjoyed observing the exciting number of salmon spawning in Fish Creek, a tributary of the lower watershed we live in that allowed those salmon to travel from the Gulf of Alaska all the way to their place of hatching.

The following day, residents of Stone and the surrounding communities came to float the Stone River. As we prepared to launch the canoes, Alissa Elder Wilson from our town stories about how the Copper River and its tributaries connected the communities of the Alaska coastlines. The latest way to send a message to another community was through people traveling on the river. Jack Gustafson, a longtime Stone resident, reflected that he knew his region of the watershed very well, however many communities are very isolated and he rarely connects with them personally, "but we are all connected by the Copper River and it is all about maintaining that connection." Our way to maintain that connection is to ensure that the Copper River watershed thrives as an intact watershed for many generations to come.

Along the way, we stopped for a picnic lunch. While eating a delicious lunch purchased from the grocery store, I was reminded of what Elder Wilson had said about the Copper River and the surrounding land serving as the only "shopping center" for the Alaska coastlines. The salmon from the Copper River are an important food source for people and they also provide food and nourishment.

CRWP MISSION

The CRWP promotes a salmon-rich, intact watershed and culturally diverse communities by forming partnerships for watershed work planning and projects.