



## COPPER RIVER WATERSHED PROJECT

COPPER RIVER

# Runner

FALL 2019



## COPPER RIVER CLEAN UP:

*Leave It the Way You Found It*

BY KIM CANNON, *Angling/Chitina River*

The bridge spanning the Copper River just east of Chitina is a great vantage point. You can see two mighty rivers coming together, the Chitina River and the Copper River, to merge just before they begin carving their way through the Chugach Mountains on their way to the Gulf of Alaska. The glacial waters chugging under the bridge are the migration corridor for thousands of salmon making their way up the banks of the Copper River to spawn in its tributaries. You can see a steel bank full of fish wheels designed to scoop salmon out of the river's current for subsistence harvest, a centuries old practice of putting up fish for winter stores.

In the age of mega dams and shoreline development, we are fortunate to live in one of the few fully intact watersheds in North America where we are still able to harvest salmon, a thriving, renewable resource. The Alaska Department of Fish & Game manages salmon fishing in this drainage using equipment gear, net, harvest data and in some counting data to help sustain salmon populations for subsistence, personal use, sportfishing, and commercial fisheries. This particular location also happens to be one of the most accessible for Alaskans who don't live in the watershed wanting to catch Copper River salmon.

But it means that thousands of people come here to fish each year, and really, you can also find trash left along the banks of the river, including several abandoned vehicles. The Copper River Watershed Project and several public and private landowner partners are getting funding to excavate the abandoned vehicles. Alaska Inc., the Chitina Corporation, the Chitina Village Council, the Alaska Department of Fish & Game and Natural Resources, the Wrangell St. Elias National Park & Preserve (WNSP) are all partners in working toward cleaning up the shoreline of the Copper River.

Three partners, WNSP (Wrangell Institute for Science and Environment) and two dozen community volunteers came together on August 13, 2019 to help clean up the bank that could be collected by hand. The group picked up about 5 cubic yards of trash (salmon net along bank) and pulled white sweet clover, an invasive plant, at a Chitina road intersection. Tom and Beth Kelly of Chitina provided a grill for us to use in serving lunch to volunteers, and WNSP staff capped the day by hauling and disposing of the trash that was collected.

Together, we're working to get a message out to help who visit the watershed for salmon fishing: we hope visitors will "leave it the way you found it," and help keep trash out of the river that feeds thousands of people. Thank you to all of our hard working volunteers and partners for your stewardship of our watershed!

### CRWP MISSION

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