



COPPER RIVER
WATERSHED PROJECT

COPPER RIVER

Runner

FALL 2019



COPPER RIVER CLEAN UP:

Leave It the Way You Found It

KRISTIN CARPENTER, *Outgoing Executive Director*

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 river 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 escapement goals, sonar, harvest data and in-river 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 sadly, 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 pursuing funding to excavate the abandoned vehicles. Ahtna Inc., the Chitina Corporation, the Chitina Village Council, the Alaska Departments of Fish & Game and Natural Resources, the Wrangell-St. Elias National Park & Preserve (WRST) are all partners in working toward cleaning up the shoreline of the Copper River.

These partners, WISE (Wrangell Institute for Science and Environment) and two dozen community volunteers came together on August 13, 2019 to help clean up the trash that could be collected by hand. The group picked up about 9 cubic yards of trash (almost one dump truck load) 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 WRST staff capped the day by hauling and disposing of the trash that was collected.

Together, we're working to get a message out to folks who visit this 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.

OUR NEW EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

DEAR FRIENDS,

KRISTIN: Fall is a time of transitions: kids are back in school, for us it's a shift from summer field work and programs to the season of planning, meetings and grant writing. Right now we have some big transitions going on here at the CRWP that we'd like to share with you. After a months-long, deliberate search process for its next staff leader, the CRWP is introducing its selection of Lisa Docken as its new Executive Director.

Of all the partnerships we work on throughout the watershed, the teamwork between an executive director and the Board of Directors and between an executive director and staff are the most crucial. That's why I'm excited to be welcoming Lisa to the organization, because I believe her creativity and research training will be a great foundation for leading the CRWP in its next chapter.

We have another new staff members too. Ashley Taylor, Alexis Cooper, and Kari Rogers, who is now working as a Project Manager for the CRWP in the Copper River basin (more inside).

ROBIN: For the Board of Directors, the process of finding a new Executive Director included initial denial, a steep learning curve, and the exciting process of interviewing many bright people who aspired to the job. As we realized what big shoes we needed to fill, we also had to recognize that the job is very different from the one Kristin first took 20 years ago, as sole employee of a brand-new dream.

With input from the board and staff, the search committee sorted through several dozen resumes, and interviewed interesting people from near and far. We are thrilled to have found a new ED who we feel embodies the passion and professionalism that this job requires. The Board of Directors looks forward to supporting Lisa and the staff as they pivot into this new chapter.

LISA: I am very honored to begin working with the incredible staff and Board of Directors as appointed Executive Director for the CRWP. Kristin has fostered and nurtured this organization for two decades, so I look forward to absorbing as much information from her as possible during our transition. Also, I am very excited to meet all the partners that have been critical for numerous collaborative projects throughout the entire Copper River watershed. Thank you for this opportunity.

We look forward to sharing more about these transitions with you
as we move into our fall and winter "planning season,"

Kristin, Robin, Lisa



MEET LISA DOCKEN



CRWP STAFF

Lisa Docken, Executive Director
Chantel Adelfio, Invasive Plants Program Manager
Shae Bowman, Operations Manager
Alexis Cooper, Finance Director
Kate Morse, Program Director
Kari Rogers, Copper Basin Project Manager
Ashley Taylor, Invasive Plants Technician, Cordova

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CLASSROOM CURRENTS

CONNECTING COMMUNITIES

with their CORNER of the WATERSHED

KARI ROGERS & KATE MORSE



“Dip your hands in its chill water. The river will carry your touch around the bend, riding in the current. Downstream, it meets the Copper River itself, scratchy with grit and pearled a silty grey from its glacial source high in the Wrangell Mountains.

With a watershed’s intricate geometry, branching creeks, streams and rivers merge and empty into the meandering Copper River. After some days, the water you touched will braid across the wide Copper River Delta where it will blend its milky waters with the blue-green Gulf of Alaska.”

Wendy Erd wrote these words for an interpretive sign we installed at a wayside by the Slana River some years ago, and still the message resonates with our work to engage residents of all ages in outdoor explorations and adventures in their backyard. Not only do we encourage people to emotionally connect with the streams or lakes where they recreate, hunt, or fish, we want them to understand how where they stand, swim, or float is structurally connected to the greater Copper River watershed.

In early August, CRWP hosted two separate community Canoe Days in the headwaters of the Copper River. Our first event found us on standing on the shore of the crystal-clear water of Mentasta Lake, surrounded by children and their families, each eager to begin explorations of their home waters. Once safely equipped with PFDs, the children paddled around and peered down into the shallow water at the bright red backs of spawning salmon. Eagles flew from tree top to tree top, caught up in the children’s excitement of waterborne freedom and their wonder for the intriguing life cycle of salmon on display and so close at hand.



A day later and twenty-some miles down the road, 31 nature loving adventurers set out on a half day exploration of the Slana River, enjoying the easy-flowing waters of the Slana River as they worked their way downstream to its confluence with Ahtell Creek.

While getting to experience these incredible parts of Alaska, we gained a better understanding of our connection to each other and to the building blocks of the Copper River watershed: glaciers and snow-cruled ridgelines and deep valleys, precipitation falling from clouds, rocks and soil supporting plants of all sizes, abundant wildlife and fish, and the innumerable waterways funneling ever downward, leading to a brilliant blue ocean.



Time on the water provided us with a renewed commitment to care for the sum total of the Copper River watershed and all of its inhabitants. Whether for good or bad, we recognize that our daily actions translate into a downstream ripple effect for our neighboring communities and for the salmon that also claim the Copper River watershed as their home.

For these incredible experiences and stewardship reminders, we give our thanks to BLM, Huck Hobbit’s Homestead, and Mentasta Traditional Council for your generous support of CRWP’s annual community canoe day outings.



THE CHALLENGE OF WHITE SWEET CLOVER

BY KARI ROGERS, Copper Basin, Project Manager

WHEN I CONSIDER WHITE SWEET CLOVER's ability to mass produce seeds from a single mature plant at the rate of 350,000 seeds per year, it's easy to recognize the importance of facing this challenge head on to prevent its spread within the Copper River Valley. White sweet clover (WSC) is not native to Alaska, and flourishes in areas of natural and human-caused disturbance to the ground cover; roadways or trails, gravel parking lots, within gravel pits, and most unfortunately, on gravel bars and rocky shorelines of our river systems. White sweet clover is easily spread through seed being transported by vehicles, contaminated soil and gravel used for construction projects, and waterways carrying seed downstream.

This extremely invasive plant is known to successfully outcompete native plants for soil nutrients, water, and sunlight. After WSC dies back, the seed continues to spread to areas via our clothing or in the tread of tires, etc. Seeds of WSC remain viable in the soil for up to 81 years, easily creating a seedbank that must be managed repeatedly.

Hope is not lost, if we work together we still have the opportunity to combat this intruder and win! Treatment methods of WSC include hand pulling, mowing, and herbicide treatment. When pulling WSC, completely remove the taproot to prevent resprouting of the same plant. Once the flowering stage of the plant is underway, the maturing plant should be bagged and disposed of to prevent seed dispersal. If the plants have set their seed (usually late July), we recommend not pulling them at all, as there is a greater risk of inadvertently dispersing the seed to other areas.

Copper Basin partners are actively working to control the spread of WSC in our communities and outlying areas. However, even with all these efforts, more public involvement is needed. The CRWP and its partners hold community weed-pulling events annually to increase awareness and encourage local residents to join the good fight against invasive plants. We need all hands on deck to preserve and protect Alaska's beautiful natural environments!



COPPER RIVER WATERSHED
PROJECT'S NEW COPPER BASIN

staff member
KARI ROGERS

It didn't take Kari long to realize that the wild places where she lived and roamed in the Lower 48 were missing a lot of integral parts and pieces to the whole, healthy ecosystem puzzle. Working to replace the missing pieces within an established agricultural system was never realistic or satisfactory, and always met with resistance. Consequently, she and her husband Bruce set their sights on making a life for themselves in Alaska where all the parts and pieces of a truly wild landscape are still intact and highly valued by those who call Alaska home. For the past 18 years, Kari and her family have lived along the banks of the Copper River, overlooking vast wild landscapes and staying in tune with the rhythm of nature and the seasons. They place great value on friendships, community involvement, and living a simple, back-to-the-basics life. Kari views her work with Copper River Watershed Project as a privilege which enables her to share a lifelong love of nature with the next generation of natural resource stewards.





SENA SEA

WILD ALASKAN FISH



SHOP SENA SEA TO SUPPORT THE COPPER RIVER & THE CRWP

Sena Sea Seafoods is a family-owned and operated commercial fishing business that prioritizes sustainable fishing practices from how they handle the fish in the net to the packaging in which seafood arrives at your doorstep. Above all else, Sena Sea wants to provide you with the amazing seafood their family has been enjoying for three generations, but in the most sustainable and ethical way possible.

When you choose wild salmon, you give value to the salmon and when we collectively value an important resource like salmon, we can protect the freshwater habitats on which they depend. Your purchase from Sena Sea can have an even bigger impact when you shop Sena Sea via the CRWP website!

Follow the link on our web site to their on-line seafood catalog, and they will donate eight percent of proceeds from our affiliate sales to the CRWP: copperriver.org/about-us/buyfish/

"When we decided to direct market our fish it was, and still is, very important to us that we not only supply clean, sustainable fish direct to the consumer, but also that we work as a force for good, promoting sustainable practices and teaching stewardship to the next generation. That's why we're so pleased to partner with the Copper River Watershed Project." – SENA WHEELER



more ways TO GIVE

Drifters Fish

Drifter's Fish is the husband and wife team of Michael and Nelly Hand whose business model is a Community Supported Fishery (CFS) that allows Drifter's Fish to supply high quality, sustainably caught salmon directly to CSF customers year-round. The Hands are committed to taking care of the watershed, and Drifters Fish gives back 1% of its annual sales to support the CRWP's salmon habitat and watershed education programs. Look for a Drifters Fish Dinner Event and purchase jars of smoked salmon at driftersfish.com.



This Cordova-born business offers spa therapy products for face and body using Alaska glacier mineral mud and other wildcrafted Alaskan ingredients. But it is about more than just really good skincare for this company! Alaska Glacial Mud Co. shares 10% of its annual proceeds to support wild salmon habitat. Visit alaskaglacialmud.com for product bundles and gift sets.

amazon smile

Whenever you shop online with Amazon, you could be sharing a small percentage of what you pay for your items with the Copper River Watershed Project. Just go online to smile.amazon.com and select Copper River Watershed Project as the charity to which you wish to donate.



Support CRWP just when you shop at Fred Meyers by linking your Fred Meyer Rewards Card to the Copper River Watershed Project. Once linked, every time you shop, your rewards card will continue to earn rewards points, fuel points, and rebates to count toward a CRWP donation from Fred Meyers! To sign up, please visit fredmeyer.com/communityrewards

RIDGELINES: AROUND THE WATERSHED

COPPER RIVER BASIN SYMPOSIUM: TRADITION, SCIENCE, AND STEWARDSHIP

The Copper River Watershed Project has partnered with Wrangell Institute for Science and Environment, the Wrangell Mountains Center and the Wrangell-St. Elias National Park & Preserve to host a *Copper Basin Symposium: Tradition, Science, and Stewardship*. The Symposium is designed to facilitate knowledge sharing and research coordination across the Copper River Basin on topics ranging from climate research to traditional ecological knowledge. We hope this symposium will strengthen relationships and collaborative research and management activities among federal and state agencies, Native corporations, tribal councils, researchers, and community members who together share a stewardship interest in the Copper River Basin. The Copper Basin Symposium will be held on February 18-20, in Copper Center, Alaska. The 2-day Symposium will conclude with a facilitated half-day workshop synthesizing salmon and salmon habitat research. We are excited to dive into a variety of topics and learn from local researchers and long-standing community members!

Learn more: <https://copperriver.org/news-events/copper-river-basin-symposium/>.

THE CHANGING CLIMATE IN ALASKA

Many Alaskans enjoyed a beautiful, sunny summer, although it didn't take long for enjoyment to turn to worry. Record breaking temperatures throughout the state has led to decreased snow cover, increased rates of glacial ice melt, and warmer water temperatures (freshwater and marine). The Copper River experienced high discharge this summer due to unprecedented glacial melt rates, but our local rain- and snow-fed streams ran low or even dried up. This led to large die-offs of spawning salmon that became trapped in low, warm water streams that lacked enough oxygen to support returning fish populations. The lack of precipitation in the Copper River Watershed created obstacles not just for fish, but also humans. Here in the rainforest, Cordova had to conserve water usage across town and pull water from our secondary sources, while in the Copper Basin they had the additional concern of wildfires. In a recent article published on SNAP (Scenarios Network for Alaska + Arctic Planning), Nancy Fresco from University of Alaska Fairbanks highlighted the 2.4 million acres of forest burned across Alaska from over 600 wildfires. She noted that current studies show Alaska's wildfires becoming larger, more frequent, and more intense. An increase in frequency and intensity feeds the cycle of climate change because these fires are releasing more carbon dioxide into the atmosphere which in turn worsens the projections of climate change and its detrimental effects on our environment.

Learn more: www.snap.uaf.edu

COPPER RIVER SALMON HARVESTERS ROUNDTABLE

A third annual Copper River Salmon Harvesters Roundtable will be held in February, 2020 in the Copper Basin. Members of all salmon fishery groups -- subsistence users, dipnetters, sport fishermen, and commercial fishermen -- are invited to participate in a conversation about on-the-water conditions, fish and fishery observations, and learn about current research on salmon populations in the Copper River watershed. Meals, lodging and travel expenses are covered for participants. *Please contact us at info@copperriver.org if you are interested in participating or would like to see notes from past Roundtable gatherings.*

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WATERSHED PROJECT



watershed
(wa'ter-shed)
the region or area drained
by a river or stream:
all the land that carries
rain to the same river system

THANK YOU MEMBERS & SPONSORS

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Newsletter FALL 2019

inside

Copper River Clean up

New Executive Director

Connecting Communities

Holiday Giving

White sweet clover

TO

WHY WE SUPPORT CRWP

NIK & GINA MERLINO

McCARTHY, AK



MY FIRST EXPERIENCES in the Copper River watershed was exploring Prince William Sound in 1988, the year before the *Exxon Valdez* oil spill permanently altered the ecosystem. I remember, as a young child, watching in sadness as news reports came in about the immensity of the tragedy. A year after the spill, I came to Kennicott/McCarthy for the first time, staying in a friend's cabin and exploring Kennicott's then-abandoned buildings. From those two experiences I was hooked, over the next 30 years I would spend time working, exploring and settling down and raising a family here.

A decade ago, my wife Gina and I founded McCarthy River Tours, river exploration dedicated to establishing a sense of place and connection to our watershed. One of our operational beliefs as a company is to "give back" to the land and community that sustain our way of life. The Copper River Watershed Project's commitment to educational programs, noxious weed abatement and salmon passage issues help enrich our communities and minimize our impact on the land. As our watershed continues to grow as a tourist and recreation destination, it is important for us to have an organization that is taking a big picture approach to sustaining and preserving our region's cultural and natural resources with tangible, on the ground, community supported programs.