

## Copper Basin Land and Resource Managers Meeting Copper Basin Land and Resource Managers Meeting

October 2, 2019

### Next Meeting – April 1, 2020

#### **Alaska Department of Fish and Game – Sue Rodman**

The Alphabet Hills Prescribed Burn is a cooperative project with DNR Division of Forestry, BLM Glennallen Field Office, and Alaska Fire Service. ADF&G is coordinating to conduct an environmental review and provide information to communities and landowners in the area.

- Burn is intended to enhance browse quality and quantity for moose by enhancing age diversity of trees and shrubs; few natural ignitions in project area since 1946
- Timing of burn dependent upon conditions
- Project totals 53,590 acres over three units
- Completion may take several years, with 2020 likely the first year
- Smoke Impacts
  - People near Lake Louise are concerned about smoke impacts in summer
  - In late summer/fall, smoldering could impact hunting
- Biologists to study how moose use the habitat before and after the burn
- ADF&G is still studying effects of 38,000-acre prescribed burn west of project area conducted in 2004

#### **Copper Country Alliance – Ruth McHenry**

During the past few months the organization has been spending more time on national and global issues, but there are a number of local activities worth noting, including:

- Sent an alert asking for support for the youth climate strike
- Had a booth with a plastics theme at the Kenny Lake Fair
- Worked with organizations (including Ahtna) and individuals to petition AKDOT to stop spraying herbicides along the Richardson and Tok highways and mow instead
  - 260 signatures collected from across the political spectrum
  - DOT blames funding cuts – spraying is cheaper than mowing
  - Some of the Edgerton was mowed
- Donated to scholarships for the youth stewardship program, thanks to WISE and CRWP this is a great program that gets kids outdoors

#### **Bureau of Land Management, Glennallen Field Office – Marnie Graham**

The lands BLM GFO manages stretch from Cantwell to Ketchikan. GFO began managing BLM lands in Southeast without an increase in staff and we have quite a caseload in Southeast so if you have projects that need our attention please engage with us early.

- Updates on positions:
  - Alysia White is now Assistant Field Manager for Recreation and Lands.
  - Joseph Crane is our new Law Enforcement Ranger.

- Kenny Steck has moved into the Partnership and Public Outreach Coordinator position.
- Jan Miller has moved into the Outdoor Recreation Planner for Campgrounds and Facilities position.
- We expect to have a local hire announcement out soon for an admin position
- We hope to fill GIS, maintenance, anthropologist, and fuels (fire) positions
- Update on subsistence harvest:
  - 65 moose harvested so far this year (about average)
  - About 65 caribou harvested (reports are still coming in)
- Update on NEPA and lands:
  - Completing Haines Amendment to the Ring of Fire Resource Management Plan - a two-year effort centered on heli-tourism and protection of mountain goats
  - Wrapping up comment period for Copper Valley Telecom to put in a tower near Paxson near the existing AT&T tower
  - Working on 17(b) easements, meeting with Ahtna on some complicated easements
  - Working to lift withdrawals, allowing state top filings to fall into place for conveyance
- Update on recreation
  - Backlog of campground maintenance was a big focus this year
  - Visitation up – 212,000 visits to our trailheads and campgrounds
  - Brought on an SCA crew and had almost all campgrounds staffed
  - Worked on Middle Fork Trail
- Update on resources field work
  - Fish Biologist Tim Sundlov did an assessment, inventory and monitoring project to get baseline watershed data
    - Data helps us characterize streams so we have references for the future
    - Enables us to see change over time
    - This effort is going on throughout the state
    - Discovered that the West Fork of the Gulkana has a significant number of salmon in an unnamed tributary
  - Wildlife Biologist Jesse Hankins developing a plan to begin a wolverine study this winter
  - Forester Tim Skiba - active commercial operators in the Tiekel this year
    - Subsistence wood permits can now be obtained online – no cost for subsistence use
    - Permits for one Christmas tree per household also available online
    - Give us feedback on how the online permit system is working
  - Water Reservations applications to ensure enough water and flow
    - completed 11 fish purpose reservations and submitted to Alaska DNR
    - Working on three recreation reservations on the Gulkana

**Bureau of Land Management, Branch of Lands and Realty (BLR), Pipeline Monitoring and Environmental Compliance Section (PMECS) – Rhonda Williams, Paul Degner**

- Alyeska is doing trenching for cathodic protection work at MP 763
- Alyeska did a mainline Integrity dig across from Hogan Hill at MP 150 of the Richardson. It was started in February and finished in April.

- BLM BLR is working with Alyeska to determine how to address invasive plant species.
- PMECS Valdez staff was out of the office for training in June 2019.
- Will meet with Alyeska in November to learn about Alyeska's permitting needs for the year and timelines for projects.
- PMECS staff participated in oil spill contingency exercises at the Valdez Marine Terminal in June and provided oversight. Oil spill contingency equipment was inspected in the region.
- Summer maintenance along the pipeline, not a lot of new activity.

#### **Ahtna, Inc. – John Leonhardt**

- Ahtna Inc. lands were affected by fires this past summer
- Carnivore stewardship is in its second consecutive year, studying density of bears
  - Project uses cameras and collects hair samples for analysis
  - Hair and tissue samples have been sent for DNA analysis
- Working with NRCS on a high tunnel project – 400 pounds of vegetables produced
- Working on fuel breaks
  - Gakona fuel break nearing completion
  - Planning a fuel break for Gulkana
  - Eventually want to have fuel breaks around all Ahtna communities and around the office
  - Gakona is taking wood from the fuel break, but it can be difficult to access the downed trees on some of these projects and difficult to get people to take it.
- Completed a moose enhancement project near Cantwell
- Cutting a trail on the other side of the river to give elders and youth more hunting opportunities
- Fuel spill in Mentasta on the Eagle Creek Trail, a 17(b) easement
  - Undetermined amount of fuel
  - DEC is on the scene
  - Could have leaked into a stream
- Working on the Katsina trail. Want to use this as an example of what we can accomplish
- Trying to get funding for improvements for next summer

#### **Alaska Department of Fish and Game, Glennallen – Heidi Hatcher**

- Tracy Hansen hired as assistant area sportfish biologist
- New wildlife technicians hired - Israel Wick and Kate Wilson
- Got a photo census of the Nelchina caribou herd
  - Last year - low calf recruitment and low productivity over the winter, didn't aggregate well, shut down the season
  - This year – they only went to the Mentasta Mountains, good recruitment, productivity high, aggregated well, more than 17,000 calves

- Went from a count of 35,000 last year to 53,000 this year
- Harvest has been a bit slow – 2,400 so far
- Surveyed sheep in the eastern Talkeetna Mountains, productivity is high
- Surveyed sheep in Wrangell Mountains, population looks stable
- Bison in Copper River and Chitna – populations appear stable
- Been busy with hunt administration – sealed 60 sheep
- Will be doing fall composition surveys for caribou this week if the weather holds
  - This will provide the fall population estimate
  - Over the next two years we will deploy 64 new satellite collars to keep track of the herds
  - Might double the bag limit for subsistence hunts, depending on numbers

### **Chickaloon Native Village – Brian Winnestaffer**

- Angie Wade is lead of our tribal historic preservation program
- We will be offering Sec. 106 processes training and invite others who may be interested
- Looking into the Vietnam veteran Native allotment program run by the BIA – people need to let BIA know they qualify
- Having a grand opening for the addition to our school
- I will be taking kids out for a caribou harvest opportunity
- Will be having the Chickaloon Connection camps with kids and elders
- Will be going over traditional trails with the elders
- Chickaloon recently acquired a fish wheel on wheels and we are looking for a good spot to put it
- Harvest of caribou and salmon go to the elders lunch program

### **Wrangell Institute for Science and Environment – Robin Mayo**

- We had a really good summer, despite some funding challenges
- BLM and Prince William Sound College enabled us to pay our intern
- WISE has received donated property
  - 40 acres with a pond, stream, and wetlands
  - Has a conservation easement
  - There is money that will help us develop it into an educational site
  - Development will be a long-term project for us
- Winter Fun Day at Wrangell-St. Elias is on Dec. 23, first day of winter break
  - Craft projects, snowshoeing, and skiing
  - Generally have about 70 people
- BLM funding for next year will enable us to focus on aquatics and fish
- Upcoming Copper River Basin Symposium: Tradition, Science, and Stewardship – Feb. 18-20
  - There will be a focus on salmon habitat, but all disciplines are welcome
  - Opportunity for people to mingle and network
  - We have National Fish and Wildlife Foundation funding
  - We are looking forward to hosting any research topic

- Proposals due Nov. 15
- Will be held mainly at Wrangell-St. Elias National Park
- We really hope to have representation from all agencies
- Next meeting to discuss this is Oct. 24

### **Copper River Watershed Project – Kari Rogers**

- I am new to the Copper River Watershed Project. Our organization is based in Cordova and I provide up-river representation here in the Copper River Valley. I started the job in mid-June.
- We have led springtime stream exploration field trips in Mentasta, Slana, Kenny Lake, and Glennallen.
- Assisted with youth education stations at WISE Earth Discovery Days
- Co-hosted 10 teenagers from upriver and downriver during annual Copper River Stewardship Program.
- Fifty-plus community members turned out to participate in community Canoe Day events held in Mentasta and in Slana during early August. Opportunity to connect residents with the great outdoors and their local watershed area.
- Provided youth with outdoor education at WISE's annual Changing Season program at Kenny Lake School, Glennallen School, and Upstream Learning Correspondence School.
- Partnered with Prince William Sound Aquaculture for a field trip to Gulkana fish hatchery. Presentation focused on the life cycle of sockeye salmon and how the fish hatchery serves to improve salmon fry survival and spawner returns to homestream.
- CRWP is always available and ready to join with other organizations and agencies for youth programs. Let us know.
- Kate Morse at CRWP has been working to improve fish passage on the Little Tonsina. She is working to secure additional funding for further feasibility study and implementation on the ground.
- Collected trash/debris from area adjacent to Copper River dipnet fishery access at Chitina, including at O'Brien Creek access point, along the road to O'Brien Creek, road from Chitina to bridge and other side, camping areas, and an old dump site with the help of WISE, NPS, and McCarthy River Tours
- Invasives –
  - Removed 1,200 pounds of white sweet clover from several locations around the Copper River valley including Chitina, Kenny Lake, Old Edgerton, Copper Center, Tazlina, Glennallen, Gulkana, gravel bars along Gulkana River, Gakona, Tok Cut-off Hwy, Sourdough Campground and boat launch, Sailor's Pit, and Paxson.
  - Annual weed smackdown at Gakona River bridge – removed 250 pounds of white sweet clover
  - Spent a lot of time on the lower stretch of the Gulkana (between Sailor's Pit and bridge) and removed about 300 pounds of WSC from gravel bars
- We are researching financial feasibility of hiring an SCA crew to work with us on Gulkana River gravel bars for removal of white sweet clover.

- Organizing a meeting of Copper River Salmon Harvesters in February 2020. – we have funding from the North Pacific Research Board to bring harvesters together in a non-regulatory setting to share observations and perspectives
- Executive Director Kristin Carpenter is stepping down to pursue other interests. CRWP has made an offer to Lisa Kennedy, an arctic research scientist, for the position. She lives in Cordova and hopes to use her research skills to continue with current and future projects. She will begin the work of Executive Director in mid-October. There will be an overlapping transition period between Kristin and Lisa, with their intent to visit the Copper River Valley together and meet with partners here.

**Also in attendance:** Trenton Culp, Ahtna, Inc.  
Dustin Carl, Ahtna Inter-Tribal Resource Commission  
Todd Rinaldi, Alaska Department of Fish and Game (by phone)  
Valerie Lenhartzen, BLM Glennallen  
Maureen Clark, BLM Anchorage District