



**COPPER RIVER
WATERSHED PROJECT**

COPPER RIVER

Runner

SPRING 2020



Top left photo by Lisa Brinkley, CWRP

COPPER RIVER BASIN SYMPOSIUM: *Tradition, Science, and Stewardship Take Root*

BY ROBIN WARD, Staff Writer

A geologist, a biologist, and an archaeologist walk into a room...it sounds like the start of a joke, but it really happened in late February at the inaugural Copper River Basin Symposium at Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve Visitor Center. And the results were inspiring!

The idea first appeared at a CWRP staff meeting in 2016. The Copper River Delta has a long history as a river system which flows on the region as a system. Could we help create a similar focus for the Copper River Basin? Like a month later, the seed of an idea picked up leaves as it was rolled around, adding patterns and scope. How about including and honoring traditional ecological knowledge? What if we dug deeper on a key river topic, salmon habitat? What patterns would draw the vision and help make it a reality?

Building on a theme of Tradition, Science, and Stewardship, the idea took root. The two-day symposium included keynote speakers, 26 short presentations, and a poster session. A panel discussion defined new opportunities and challenges in working with indigenous communities. Alaska elders provided wisdom in daily reflections, and there was a presentation by Copper River Stewardship Program youth.

Topics ranged widely from fisheries to archeology to geology, but all related closely to the Copper River Basin. As well as sharing knowledge, participants shared meals, personal connections, stories, and ideas. Many stories and values shared resonated and moved us to the land.

From the perspective of a board member, this event represents the heart of CWRP: connecting people and knowledge, celebrating our ancestral ties, finding bridges across our differences. Like so many of our programs, it simply could not have happened without a team of partners: Alaska Heritage Foundation, Alaska Incentivized Resource Conservation, Alaska Department of Fish and Game, Wrangell Institute for Science and Environment, Wrangell Mountain Center, and Wrangell-St. Elias National Park.

The symposium was a celebration of the region, and the hard work done by the people who study, manage, love, and rely on our resources. It inspired growth and cooperation between diverse groups, and helped raise awareness of the value of science and tradition, and the importance of stewardship.

Change is everywhere, in natural systems and in human systems. Sometimes it is subtle and slow, like a meandering river, and sometimes it happens in a flash. This month I am transitioning away from six years of service on the Copper River Watershed Project Board, an experience of growth and inspiration for which I am grateful. The world is being pushed/challenged unlike anything we've seen in our lifetime. Copper River Watershed Project, with our values of collaboration, education, partnership, and resilience, is here to be part of the solution.