



COPPER RIVER WATERSHED PROJECT

COPPER RIVER

Runner

FALL 2016



SLANA

When the last federal homestead land went public in 1983, radio host Paul Harvey broadcast, “free land in the Last Frontier.” From across America, hundreds hurried to Slana with big dreams and little preparation. Pioneer romance crashed head on into harsh weather, no jobs, nearly impossible regulations, claim jumpers and chaos. Decades later, like husks of misspent dreams, abandoned cabins lean in the woods. A core few endured. Today, Slana’s homesteaders proudly call their hard won land and the community they built, their very own.

Text by Wendy Erd, Story-telling Facilitator, for introduction to Slana Homesteader audio collage.



SLANA HOMESTEADERS KEN PARRISH (deceased), STEVE AND JOY HOBBS, HELEN WEST (deceased), TIA NESBITT, DAVE WEST, AND STORY-TELLING FACILITATOR WENDY ERD, JULY 2012.

JANELLE EKLUND AND PETER KAUFMAN AT STORY GATHERING WORKSHOP, ASHBY MEMORIAL MUSEUM, COPPER CENTER. APRIL, 2016.

TRAVELING BY STORY THROUGH COPPER RIVER COUNTRY

BY KRISTIN CARPENTER

Every time I drive through the Copper River valley, I’m struck by the landscape. The Wrangell Mountains float above the valley, and below the Copper River flows to the sea, a shiny ribbon at the bottom of high bluffs.

I also pass the occasional empty cabin, a mark of someone’s hard work at building a life in a place where your nearest neighbor could be miles away. The history in this part of Alaska runs long and deep, from traditional Alaska Native fish camps to gold mining, fur trapping, road building, and homesteading.

The Copper River Watershed Project is working with tourism partners in the Copper River valley to bring these landscapes to life with oral histories and people’s stories. If you know a good story-teller or two in your community, you know the power of story-telling and a resonant voice for sharing experiences that tell the story of a place. Our stories connect us to each other as well as deepen visitors respect and understanding of our place.

“How do you make it through the winter here?” “How do you make a living?” “What is homesteading here

like?” These are some of the questions that Copper Basin residents hear frequently from visitors to the region. We have also asked residents what they want to share with visitors, and so far we have heard “we need to share stories that are authentic, real stuff about real people” and “we need to let visitors know the Ahtna people are still here.”

For several years, the Copper River Watershed Project has been working with regional partners such as the BLM/Glennallen Field Office, the Copper Valley Development Association, the Ahtna Heritage Foundation, the Wrangell-St. Elias National Park & Preserve, community volunteers, and the Greater Copper Valley Chamber of Commerce to talk about what themes community members feel are representative of the region. To date we’ve held three talking circles, a planning workshop and a story-gathering workshop. An audio collage was composed from a talking circle of Kenny Lake homesteaders: you can hear about the challenges of hauling water for livestock and building a community on our web site at copperriver.org > Programs > Tourism > Traveling By Story. We’re working now on exploring how to share stories with the traveling public. Please contact me at kristin@copperriver.org if you are interested in participating in this project!

CRWP MISSION

To foster the health of the Copper River watershed’s salmon-based cultures, communities, and economies.

LETTER FROM
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Here's the first message I read in my inbox this morning, from a community volunteer who sits on the CRWP's Finance Committee: "Hate to do this but can't make it this a.m. . . . The caribou are moving and we have to head north to fill the freezer."

That's pretty common here, we do a lot scheduling around the seasons and the tides. The salmon fishing season in the Copper River drainage has ended, and now people are focused on hunting (most households have at least one type of game in their freezers -- moose, caribou or deer). And after the fishing nets are put away and the game meat is processed and wrapped in the freezer, then comes our "meeting season", the time we have to talk about what's happening in our mountains, our fisheries, and our communities.

In November, I'll be attending a conference on "Long-term Challenges to Alaska's Salmon and Salmon-Dependent Communities", and one of the topics on the agenda is climate change. We're still at the very beginning of learning how the earth's warming will affect salmon. What the Copper River has in its favor, as climate change unfolds, is that it's largely intact, without dams or major infrastructure altering its hydrology. The river corridor itself, and Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve to the east, cover swaths of habitat that run from the mountains to the sea, unimpeded. Wildlife and fish have the freedom to move up or down this corridor as they adjust to the changes happening in this corner of the world.

That makes the Copper River watershed not only a source of wild, high quality food both for its residents and for salmon lovers everywhere, but a place that's invaluable to researchers. An



intact watershed is an ideal place for studying natural processes of salmon and wildlife in their undisturbed state (although climate change is playing a hand now). On the Copper River delta, for example, a lot of the research being conducted is using the natural temperature difference between the west delta and the east delta (which is cooler because it's closer to ice fields) as a projection of possible climate change impacts. "Space for time" substitution allows researchers to collect data on differences in populations or on seasonal time differences, and use these data to make informed projections of future impacts. We can use the delta to try to become more prepared for upcoming climate changes and the effects on aquatic habitat.

And maintaining the Copper River watershed for future generations is important because our "watershed family" is expanding! The photo gives it away, of course: Kate Morse, our powerhouse Program Director for Watershed Education, and her husband Andy are expecting twin girls early in November.

With appreciation for your support,

Kristin Carpenter

CRWP STAFF
Kristin Carpenter, Executive Director
Kate Morse, Program Director
Chantel Caldwell, Invasive Weeds Program Manager
Shae Bowman, Operations Manager
Don Hofstetter, Invasive Plants Coordinator, Copper Basin
Trevor Taylor, Invasive Plants Field Staff, Copper Basin

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CLASSROOM CURRENTS
SOWING STEWARDSHIP, ONE SALMONBERRY AT A TIME

As I brainstormed ways to complete a bank re-vegetation project during an already busy spring, I knew I needed a group of volunteers who could handle tough, outdoor labor. Also in search of fill material, I called the head of Cordova's Public Works Shop who happened to be a Boy Scout leader. He mentioned some up and coming Boy Scout youth leaders looking to achieve their Life Scout Rank (one step below Eagle Scout).

It took one more call to 9th grader Kaleb Carillo and I had my project leader. He met with his peers at their next Boy Scout meeting and organized the job. On a Friday afternoon Kaleb led a team of boys to collect salmonberry shoots for transplanting, while I used this opportunity to get rid of some of the spruce and hemlock seedlings cropping up in my yard. The next day we gathered at the stream to move the fill and dirt and put the plants in their new home.

CRWP had partnered with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) a few years back to improve access on Eccles Creek to upstream spawning and rearing habitat for pink and coho salmon and cutthroat trout by replacing an undersized culvert. Downstream of the culvert lies private property where a previous homeowner had removed all the streambank vegetation. Without those roots to hold soil, the front yard was washing away.

CRWP partnered with the USFWS and the current homeowners to create a plan for reinforcing the bank. The homeowners placed rip-rap to armor the bank against the torrents that swell Eccles Creek during Cordova's frequent rainstorms. Our job was to establish vegetation on top of the rip-rap. Bankside, or riparian, vegetation is key to healthy fish habitat because roots help keep soil in place, while brushy plants provide shade to keep the stream cool and habitat for insects that feed the inhabitants of the stream.

After the dirt-moving and planting, Kaleb reflected on the experience. "This project taught me that a lot of people are willing to help and all you have to do is ask. Also, that motivated people are easy to lead." He is proud to see the project finished, and was impressed by the number of people who showed up.

CRWP is proud to involve youth in these restoration projects and values the skills and energy they bring to fish habitat restoration. In return, these hands-on experiences allow up and coming leaders to develop communication, leadership and organization skills that will benefit them throughout their lives.



Boy Scouts working hard together to "move the mountain" of fill that provided a growing medium for plants among the large boulders.

Teamwork was needed to place the new plants and carefully cover their roots with topsoil.



Eccles Creek stream bank re-vegetation volunteers.

"TELL ME, I'LL FORGET
SHOW ME, I'LL REMEMBER
INVOLVE ME, I'LL UNDERSTAND"

-CHINESE PROVERB



Bank erosion before restoration.



Rip rap installed by homeowners to armor stream bank.



By the end of the growing season, transplanted plants were thriving in their new home.



SLED DOGS SLEEP WEED FREE AT THE CB 300

BY KARI ROGERS,
Community Volunteer, with contributions from
CHANTEL CALDWELL,
CRWP Staff Invasive Weeds Coordinator



Farmer Mike Schultz and volunteers load certified weed-free straw for transport.



CB 300 dog teams resting on warm straw beds. Photo by Tracey Porreca

CONVINCED OF THE LOGIC and need to join the growing effort in the Copper River Valley to reduce the negative impact of invasive plants on our natural environment, a unanimous decision was made by the Copper Basin 300 Board of Directors to use only certified weed-free (CWF) straw as bedding for dogs at all race checkpoints in the upcoming 2017 Copper Basin 300 sled dog race. However, because CWF straw comes at a slightly higher cost per bale than regular straw (\$10/bale vs. \$8/bale), the non-profit CB 300 organization would need financial assistance to attain this goal.

Ever ready to promote the health and well-being of our environment, both the CRWP and the Copper Country Alliance hailed the CB 300 decision and provided the necessary funds to purchase CWF straw. So, on a cold frosty morning in early October, enthusiastic volunteers drove north to Delta Junction to load and bring home 250 bales of CWF straw. Many thanks to Scott Fietch who donated the use of his truck and custom-built trailer to the cause, and to American Village, Inc. for dry storage space until the January race rolls around.

The CB 300 is a non-profit, 100% volunteer organized sled dog race and is known as the “toughest 300 miles in Alaska”. The event hosts 50 racers from all over the world, including Alaska. The trail is approximately 300 miles and travels through towns and non-developed habitat of the Copper Basin. But just how do sled dogs and humans spread invasive plants in the dead of winter?

Most invasive plants reproduce via seeds, which can remain viable for several decades. In order for seeds to germinate they require scarification, provided by freeze and thaw cycles, fire, or passage through animal guts. We often transport seeds without knowing on our clothing, pets, shoes, and tire treads. The movement of soil, gravel, and straw can also play a large role in spreading invasive plants. This is where sled dogs play their role in spreading invasive plants. Straw is commonly used for animal bedding or feed in backcountry locations. During the CB 300, straw will be used as bedding for sled dogs. Harvested straw can contain invasive plant seeds, which can then be shipped to locations throughout the state.

Alaska’s Department of Natural Resources has programs in place to certify both gravel and forage materials as weed free. This voluntary program gives Alaskan producers the opportunity to have their crop inspected and certified weed free. Certified weed free products also gives buyers the opportunity to make informed choices that decrease the spread of invasive or noxious weeds into pristine natural habitats.

To volunteer at this winter sporting event, contact Jan Miller, our volunteer coordinator, directly or by e-mail at copperbasin300@gmail.com. To make a financial contribution of any size, visit the CB 300 website at cb300.com, and follow the race on Facebook!



giving FROM THE WATERSHED



With the holidays not far around the corner, we thought we’d share some ideas for holiday gift giving from businesses that support the Copper River Watershed Project!



NORTHERN FISH ALASKA’S Cordova plant began as Prime Select Seafoods, a small custom-processor that bought fish exclusively from fishermen who followed careful handling practices to ensure the highest quality salmon, halibut and black cod. In business for more than 100 years, Northern Fish is one of the oldest continually operating smoke houses in the U.S. Northern Fish Alaska shares 8% of its proceeds from sales of salmon through the CRWP web site (see copperriver.org > About Us > Buy Fish), and supports our community events like the Wild Harvest Feast by donating salmon for preparation by a guest chef.



COPPER RIVER SEAFOODS is today the largest Alaska-owned seafood processor in the state of Alaska. The company began in 1996 when four quality-driven Alaska fishermen combined their businesses. Pip Fillingham, Bill Bailey, Scott Blake and Scott McKenzie followed a passion to process and promote the superior Copper River salmon in a way that would respect its quality, generate a fair profit for fishermen, and introduce consumers to the savory world of seafood. Copper River Seafoods supports the CRWP by donating salmon for their community events, and contributes directly to its watershed education programs.



ALASKA GLACIAL MUD is a Cordova-born business offering pure glacier-derived natural and organic spa therapy products for face and body, including purifying mineral mud masks and exfoliating mud soap bars using Alaska glacier mineral mud. Visit alaskaglacialmud.com for product bundles and gift sets. Alaska Glacial Mud Co. shares 10% of its annual proceeds with local organizations that work for maintaining wild salmon habitat, including the CRWP, and often donates mud products for prizes and silent auctions at our community events.



INVASIVE PLANTS TEAM

“The Invasive Plant Crew works hard to prevent new introductions of invasive plants while closely monitoring and treating previously introduced invasive plant populations. Controlling invasive plants in the Copper River watershed is an immense task, but it is possible through collaborative efforts with our partners and community members.”



NEW
• SINCE SEPT. •
Invasive Plant Program Manager



Don Hofstetter
Invasive Plants Coordinator,
Copper Basin



Trevor Taylor
Invasive Plants Field Staff,
Copper Basin

RIDGELINES: AROUND THE WATERSHED

COPPER RIVER BASIN AREA PLAN COMMENTS AVAILABLE

Alaska's Department of Natural Resources (DNR) completed its scoping process for collecting public comment on updating the 30 year old Copper River Basin Area Plan in April, 2016. DNR is now analyzing recommendations and comments made at the scoping meetings to develop land use alternatives, which will be circulated for comments in winter, 2017. Of the 86 comments received, 33 (38%) requested closing the Tangle Lakes district to mining, 25 (29%) requested a non-motorized zone or more active management in Thompson Pass, six commenters asked for non-motorized areas in the basin, and five commenters believe no additional motorized vehicle restrictions in Thompson Pass are needed. Commenters also touched on settlement of State lands concerns, invasive species, climate change, water quantity/availability concerns, access to Klutina Lake and other rivers and lakes. A PDF file of the comments is available at Alaska.gov > Mining, Land & Water > Land Use Planning > Area Plans Online > CRBAP.

Contact: [Brandon McCutcheon](mailto:Brandon.McCutcheon@alaska.gov), [Brandon.mccutcheon@alaska.gov](tel:(907)269-8536), (907)269-8536.

CORDOVA'S FIRST 'DELTA RESTORATION TEAM'

This summer, high school students from all over the country came to Cordova to participate in Prince William Sound Science Center's service-learning overnight camp. The camp, nicknamed DiRT Camp, focused on restoration

activities, ecosystem stewardship, and leadership development. As part of building a stewardship ethic, students gained experience in a wide range of careers that involve outdoor restoration work. While partnering closely with the United States Forest Service Cordova Ranger District, campers re-vegetated Dusky Canada goose nest islands, created overwintering habitat for juvenile salmonids, improved a local hiking trail, and much more. The week long outdoor-experiential-learning camp revolved around the ultimate goal of creating great stewards: the knowledge, skills, and attitudes gained at camp were taken back to the campers' communities and will hopefully stay with them for years to come. This camp was made possible by a generous grant from Wells Fargo and the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation.

Contact: [Lauren Bien](mailto:Lauren.Bien@pwssc.org), Science Education Coordinator, PWSSC, (907) 424-5800 x231, lbien@pwssc.org, pwssc.org.

TREK AND BASECAMP SCHEDULE AT COPPER RIVER SCHOOL DISTRICT ALLOWS FOR IN-DEPTH LEARNING

Declining enrollment usually means fewer course options for students, but the Copper River School District's (CRSD) new variable-term high school schedule of two-week intensive Trek classes and four-week Basecamp core classes has actually helped expand course offerings. During the shorter Trek sessions, students have only two classes a day. For the popular Conservation and Outdoor Leadership

class, in which students learn hands-on skills specific to the Copper River basin, students spend 2.5 hours each day learning about basic conservation, Alaska mammal and fish identification, fisheries and sampling techniques, tree and shrub identification, rifle and shotgun shooting techniques, and more. In the two semester class, students learn how to set stream nets and field dress an animal, earn Hunter Education Certification, gain Wilderness First Aid Training, practice map and compass navigation skills, participate in the National Archery in the Schools Program, and get their hands dirty with real-life, hands-on experiences in the field. In partnership with BLM and Alaska Department of Fish & Game, the CRSD is providing students with access to instructors with years of field experience and expertise. Now in its second year, the Conservation and Outdoor Leadership class is resulting in a new crop of watershed stewards.

Contact: [Tamara Van Wyhe](mailto:Tamara.VanWyhe@crsd.org), Copper River School District, (907) 822-3234.



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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

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COPPER RIVER
WATERSHED PROJECT



Newsletter

FALL 2016

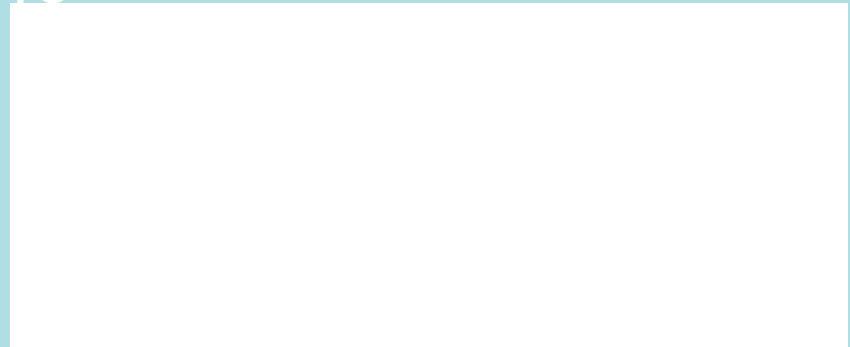
inside

*Eccles Creek stream
bank re-vegetation*

Sled dogs sleep weed free

*Giving from the
watershed*

TO



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**BRUCE, KARI & GRACE
ROGERS**
GAKONA, ALASKA

WE SUPPORT THE COPPER RIVER WATERSHED PROJECT for many reasons, but primarily because life gets busy, even here in Alaska, and we aren't always aware of current environmental issues. CRWP staff serve as our eyes and ears on watershed-wide natural resource topics ... always cognizant, engaged and involved in local issues that resonate with us, right where we live. CRWP is proactive where possible and reactive where necessary. Their interagency youth environmental education programs are invaluable for increasing the understanding and raising the awareness of our future decision-makers on relevant local conservation matters. Thank you CRWP for your vigilance and your spirited dedication to the place we gratefully call our home!

