



**COPPER RIVER**  
**WATERSHED PROJECT**

COPPER RIVER

*Runner*

SPRING 2022



Photo DOWL Engineers

## FINDING TRACTION on seemingly intractable projects

BY KATE MORSE, PROGRAM DIRECTOR

There is no clear paper trail for who owns Eyak Lake weir, located where Eyak Lake drains into Eyak River, along the Copper River Highway in Cordova. However it was easy to find consensus that the infrastructure is starting to fail, and it is a barrier to the movement of fish up and downstream, in particular smaller juvenile life stages of species like Coho Salmon, Sockeye Salmon, Cutthroat Trout, and Dolly Varden. Local understanding was that it was installed after the 1964 earthquake to stop the lake from draining after tectonic activity uplifted this area. The priority goal was keeping highly productive nearshore Sockeye Salmon spawning beds underwater.

However, since its installation, there was no clear designation for who was responsible for maintaining the weir, and attempts to maintain it fizzled out from lack of clear ownership. And then CRWP was tapped in. Luca Adelfio, former biologist with the U.S. Forest Service/Cordova Ranger District, helped secure funding for CRWP to try to gain traction to address the weir. We called on our network of fish passage partners to see who else was interested in tackling this unique fish passage challenge.

Our partners didn't disappoint. With additional financial and technical support from Alaska Department of Transportation, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, NOAA, and Alaska Department of Fish & Game, we

were able to leverage funding from National Fish & Wildlife Foundation to complete preliminary investigations at the weir and determine potential concepts for improving fish passage and meeting community goals like safe access for fishing and the ability to pass boats at certain flows. We were also able to spend some time digging through archives at the local newspaper and found some helpful information regarding installation of the weir, including the State department (no longer in existence) that oversaw the contract for building the weir in 1972.

Once we had concurrence between the community of Cordova and our agency partners for the preferred concept, we were able to submit a request for funding to the Exxon Valdez Oil Spill Trustee Council to design and install an improved structure. We are pleased to report we received \$5.7 million to implement this high priority project—demonstrating that we did indeed get some traction for what started as a seemingly intractable project.

It's hard to give a name to the role CRWP plays in these sorts of projects. I've heard "convener" and "facilitator" used, and also enjoy throwing around how I perceive my main job as "herding cats". Whatever you call it, it takes someone in this role to help gain traction, to keep partners on the same page, maintain consistent, open communication, and to do the leg work to help gather information, expertise, and/or financial resources necessary to address whatever the problem might be. CRWP is happy to play this role, and is only able to do so with the generous support of our individual members and donors, who help support our time to innovate, get creative, and herd cats! Thanks to all of you for helping us to gain traction on what seemed to be an intractable problem.



Photo USFS

## LETTER FROM CRWP EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



Dear CRWP Supporters,

Our Spring 2022 newsletter is filled with celebration! I'm so happy to share our completed projects like the Shelter Cover Recreational Access Stairs where locals enjoyed a Dip and Donate ocean swim to raise funds for Doctors without Borders, headway in the recycling industry turning gillnetting into clothing, highlighting the wonderful work of our young educators, work in fighting invasive plants across the state and our efforts in convening partners in closing data gaps in habitat assessments for salmon across the watershed. Yes, there is a lot in this newsletter and it's a feel-good read.

Reporting on the end points of projects is always the easy part. So much effort goes into identifying needs, coordinating partners, sourcing funds, planning the project and then implementing. But boots-on-the-ground is what the Copper River Watershed Project does best. Our team is able to work through challenging projects so all our members, partners, and the salmon and wildlife get to enjoy this region now and beyond.

At the Dip and Donate community-led event, I watched as kids laughed and splashed, how mothers smiled after their kids and I watched in awe as a young little friend of mine, Ava, became a little mermaid enduring the cold and loving every minute. The Shelter Cover Recreational Access Stairs we all used that day was a complicated project. And yet, I realized that no matter the project complexities, our watershed communities, CRWP members and this region are the best fuel to move forward!

Onwards,

Lisa Docken

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### CRWP BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Nik Merlino, *Board Chair, McCarthy*  
Pete Mickelson, *Vice President, Cordova*  
Caitlin McKinstry, *Secretary, Cordova*  
Matt Piche, *Treasurer, Cordova*

Sunshine Meitzner, *Glennallen*  
Dave Saiget, *Cordova*  
Kate Wilson, *Copper Center*

### CRWP STAFF

Lisa Docken, *Executive Director*  
Kate Morse, *Program Director*  
Shae Bowman, *Operations Manager*  
Chris Iannazzone, *Greenhouse Initiative Development*  
Kirsti Jurica, *Hydrologist*  
Daniel Schmalzer, *Invasive Plant Program Manager*  
Ashley Taylor, *Watershed Restoration & GIS Staff*



## SPOTLIGHT ON OUR STUDENT INTERN: MIA SIEBENMORGEN-CRESSWELL

**Our rockstar intern, high school senior and life-long Alaskan Mia Siebenmorgen, shared with us her passionate approach to life, her time with the Copper River Watershed Project, and what might be next for this bright young lady!**

### Why did you choose CRWP?

**MIA:** I've always had a passion for environmental science having grown up in Alaska, surrounded by a culture based off of the land. I was drawn to CRWP because it addresses the interconnectedness of ecological, cultural, and economic issues in our region and has a lot of awesome people I can learn from!

### What has been the coolest thing you have done as part of your internship so far?

**MIA:** It's been cool to get a better understanding of how organizations like CRWP tackle different projects. In the fall I helped with invasive plant removal, and got to draft a portion of the grant proposal for an infographic I get to design! Getting to build on skills and previous experience I have, whether creative, technical, or academic, has been a blast.

### What are you looking forward to in the remainder of your internship?

**MIA:** I'm really excited to help with the Copper River Stewardship Program this summer! I love getting to spend time outside learning from people with different connections to PWS and the watershed.

### Future plans? Any new skills from working with CRWP you'll carry forward?

**MIA:** I'm applying for a program called Freiwilliges Ökologisches Jahr, which connects young adults with a network of environmental science + education-oriented internships in Germany. Whether it be fieldwork, grant writing, organizing events, or filling out permits, working with the Watershed Project (this year and others) has helped me prepare for whatever comes my way! I am hoping within this next year (I am taking a gap year) I will figure out before I go to college what is motivating me as far as post-secondary education. I know that I am interested in some sort environmental science or policy-oriented career.

We are so honored Mia has shared her skills and time during her senior year with us. Program Director Kate Morse nominated Mia for a Spirit of Youth Award to celebrate what an outstanding role model she is to her peers ([www.spiritofyouth.org](http://www.spiritofyouth.org)). We are thrilled to have recently learned she received one of the awards and associated scholarships and will be recognized at a virtual event this May. We're proud of you Mia! Mia has also inspired us to develop a stewardship-focused internship for high school students on a more regular basis in order to provide more opportunities for local youth to learn how to put their passion, interest, and skills into action for the betterment of their community and surrounding environment.

*large image*

Mia helped the U.S. Forest Service maintain Dusky Canada Goose nest Islands during her 2018 Copper River Stewardship Program adventure. Image courtesy Prince William Sound Science Center

*upper left*

Mia helps survey a stream on the Copper River delta. Image courtesy Prince William Sound Science Center

*middle image*

Mia December 2021: Mia's shared her awesome artistic skills with us, including the creation of this beautiful and educational depiction of the salmon life cycle that allows the passer-by to become a part of it!

*right image*

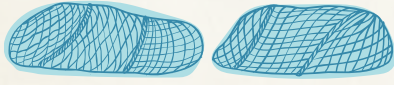
Mia with the salmon tank, 2022: Helping to maintain the salmon tank in Cordova's elementary school is one of Mia's tasks as part of her internship.

## WHAT'S HAPPENING WITH CORDOVA'S

# FISHING NETS?

BY SHAE BOWMAN, OPERATIONS MANAGER

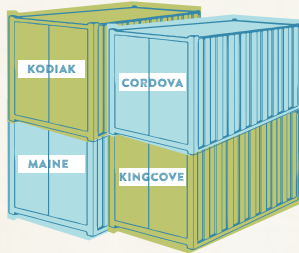
NETS COLLECTED FOR  
RECYCLING & BALED



SHIPPED TO NET YOUR PROBLEM



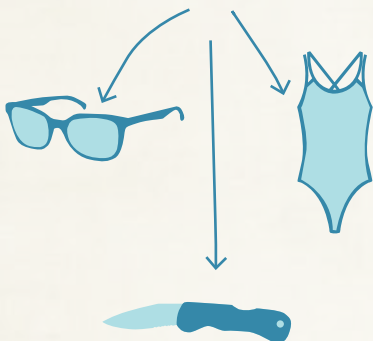
CONSOLIDATED WITH OTHER NETS  
FROM OTHER COMMUNITIES



SHIPPED TO RECYCLERS



MADE INTO MANY PRODUCTS



2021 was a big year for the Fishing Web Recycling program in Cordova. This past year marked the first full year baling fishing nets and working to recycle with our new partner, **Net Your Problem!** We began working with Net Your Problem in 2019 to ensure that the Net Recycling Program could find sustainable buyers for Cordova's huge supply of fishing nets.

Net Your Problem is a female-owned and operated for-profit company with a mission to create an economically viable pathway to recycle fishing gear at the end of its life, improve waste management and contribute to the circular economy. Net Your Problem is a company that really cares about what happens to the nets and not just the bottom line.

Net Your Problem bridged the gap between CRWP and companies that recycle fishing nets into a regenerated material, like Econyl. Econyl turns nets and carpet into nylon fiber which is now being used to make nylon products by companies like Grundens, Adidas, and even luxury brands like Gucci!

According to Econyl, their nylon fiber made from recycled fishing nets is making a splash with an appearance on the Miss Universe pageant stage. "Harnaaz Kaur Sandhu, a young, smart, and stunning 21-year-old from Gurdaspur in Punjab, India, was crowned Miss Universe on December 12, 2021, wearing a beautiful Verandah swimsuit made with ECONYL® regenerated nylon."

The list of products being made from recycled fishing nets grows every day as more nets start to flow into the circular economy. If you are in the market for a new swimsuit, a pair of sunglasses, tennis shoes, or even a new puffy coat make sure to do a google search for "products using recycled fishing nets" and you might just end up wearing a fishing net from Cordova, AK!

Last summer we ramped-up recycling efforts with three recycling events and by the end of October we had enough nets to send a 40 foot container of recyclable, baled material! The container had 10 bales of gillnet, 7 large seine net piles, and 6 bales of aluminum cans for 16,000 pounds of recyclable material. Combined with the nets from Haines, Net Your Problem received 24,264 pounds of nets from our two communities to send to a recycler in Portugal. A thank you and shout out to the City of Cordova Refuse Department for collecting and baling the aluminum cans and partnering with us in our fishing web recycling efforts! The City donated the aluminum cans to CRWP to ship with our nets. We were able to sell the aluminum cans in Seattle and the revenue earned from the cans was used to help offset costs to recycle the nets.

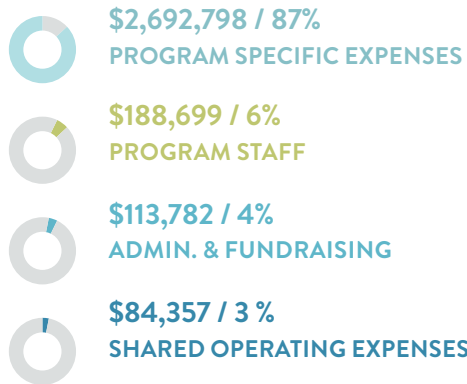
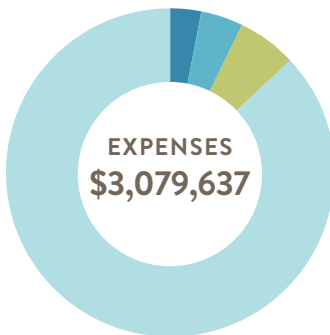
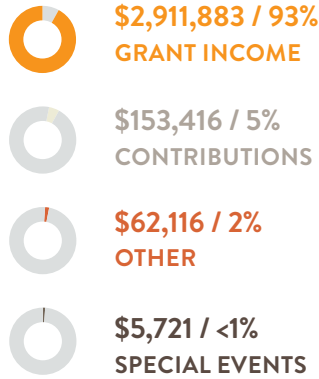
All this has been made possible thanks to our many hardworking volunteers, the City of Cordova Refuse Department, and our funders: the Copper River/Prince William Sound Marketing Association, Eyak Corporation, and the Cordova Community Foundation.

Now we are looking forward to the Spring season and we are excited to start collecting and baling nets again. This season we have the goal of sending a full 40-ft container by the end of October 2022.

**Learn more about the Fishing Web Recycling program and how you can recycle nets in Cordova by visiting our website at [copperriver.org/programs/recycling/fishing-web-recycling/](https://copperriver.org/programs/recycling/fishing-web-recycling/) or email Shae Bowman at [info@copperriver.org](mailto:info@copperriver.org)**

Live outside of Cordova but want to know more about starting a recycling program? **Visit [netyourproblem.com](https://netyourproblem.com)**

# 2021 ANNUAL REPORT



## ASSETS

### Current Assets

|                      |            |
|----------------------|------------|
| Checking/Savings     | 208,928.83 |
| Accounts Receivable  | 81,468.37  |
| Other Current Assets | 4,293.00   |

**Total Current Assets** 294,690.20

Fixed Assets -771.79

Prepaid Worker's Comp. 85,176.89

Investment Reserve 87,503.58

**TOTAL ASSETS** \$ 466,598.88

## LIABILITIES & EQUITY

### Liabilities

|                     |          |
|---------------------|----------|
| Current Liabilities |          |
| Accounts Payable    | 6,740.17 |
| Credit Card         | 41.99    |

### Other Current Liabilities

|                     |           |
|---------------------|-----------|
| Deferred Revenue    | 11,005.50 |
| Payroll Liabilities | 12,611.02 |
| Sales Tax Payable   | 634.52    |
| Vacation Accrual    | 18,063.80 |

**Total Liabilities** 49,097.00

### Equity

|                             |            |
|-----------------------------|------------|
| Retained Earnings           | 303,668.78 |
| TR Net Assets Contributions | 51,302.18  |
| Net Income                  | 62,530.92  |

**Total Equity** 417,501.88

**TOTAL LIABILITIES & EQUITY** \$466,598.88

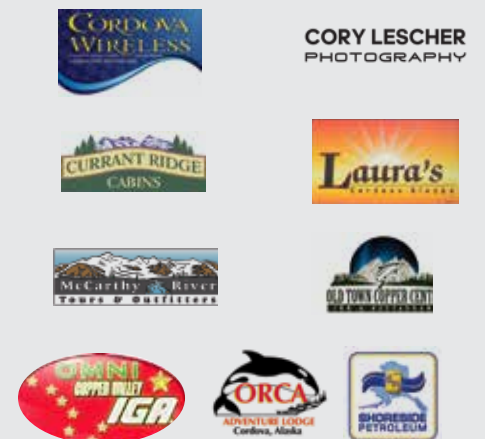
## ANCESTORS' LEGACY, \$1000+



## WATERSHED STEWARDS, \$500 - 999



## TRIBUTARIES, \$250 - 499





# MEMBERS

EVERYTHING starts HERE!



# PARTNERS

Help us to accomplish LARGER GOALS



**\$100** — BECOMES —> **\$2500**  
IN MEMBERSHIPS IN FEDERAL FUNDING

In 2021, for every dollar donated to the CRWP, our team was able to leverage that **25x** in additional funding for services to the region.



2021 FUNDERS: Ahtna Intertribal Resource Commission • Alaska Department of Transportation • Alaska Sustainable Salmon Fund • Bureau of Land Management • Exxon Valdez Oil Spill Trustee Council • National Fish & Wildlife Foundation • National Oceanic & Atmospheric Administration • Prince William Sound College • Prince William Sound Economic Development District • Prince William Sound Regional Citizens Advisory Council • U.S.D.A. Farm to School Grant Program • United States Fish & Wildlife Service • U.S.F.S. Merchandise Partnership Program • U.S.D.A. Rural Business Development • U.S.F.S. Cordova Ranger District • U.S.F.S. Secure Rural Schools, Title II funding • Western Native Trout Initiative • WISE

## 2021 IMPACTS



### FOUR TANK SET-UPS IN SCHOOLS

800 number of salmon fry in the four tanks set-up in schools in the Copper River watershed in 2021, cared for by 65 students.



### RECYCLING FISHING GILLNET

14,232 lbs of gillnet and seine web recycled responsibly. Diverted from the landfill. Increasing aluminum can recycling in 2022!

**7.1 ACRES**

### INVASIVE PLANT PROGRAM

With partners; surveyed 57.9 acres and pulled or treated 7.1 acres of highly invasive plants that threaten salmon habitat and water quality.



### AQUATIC HABITAT RESTORATION PROJECTS IN COPPER BASIN

\$8.04 million raised from partners through Natural Resource Conservation Service's Regional Conservation Partnership Program.

# MORE IMPACT

COMPLETED and FUTURE projects in the works

## NEW to the CRWP TEAM



AMANDA  
WILLIAMS

Amanda Williams joins the Copper River Watershed Project, in partnership with NOAA, as the new Aquatics Resource Management Assistant member via the VetsWork Environment, AmeriCorps program. Amanda, born and raised in sunny California, is a Navy veteran who served during Operation Iraqi Freedom, from 2005-2009. She has successfully completed a first term of VetsWork Environment and joins the CRWP for

another 11-month adventure in Alaska. Amanda will be assisting the CRWP with a plethora of projects this year, including habitat restoration, project outreach, create hands-on educational experiences for youth, and collecting data in the field to support various studies, such as fisheries and water quality.

## New Copper Basin Board Members

"We are excited to welcome two new board members, Lishaw and Tenley, starting at the end of April this year! Many thanks to Nik Merlino for the 6+ years of valuable experience and contributions to the CRWP. Nik completed two back to back terms serving as a board member and as Board Chair. Thank you Nik! You will be missed."

I grew up in southern coastal Maine and moved to the Chitina River Valley in May of 2002. Over the past 20 years, I have worked various seasonal jobs in both McCarthy and Chitina, become a mom to two (currently 12 and 15 years old), started a market garden business, and fully engaged in our hybrid subsistence/homesteading lifestyle. I enjoy learning about regenerative agriculture (beyond organic), soil health, changing climate, and local insects especially pollinators and applying what I learn to the living practice of producing food in the subarctic boreal forest.



TENLEY  
NELSON

Ntse' do'tae? (*How are you all?*) I am Udziyu (Caribou clan) of the 'Atna' koht'aene (*Copper River people*) from Tl'aticae'e (*Native Village of Kluti-kaah*). I've lived off the Copper River all my life. My mother has a fish camp, the same fish camp that my late Great-grandparents Tony & Mary Jackson used for over 60 years ago, where we harvest salmon. This is the same spot that we've gathered from for generations. When I first heard of CRWP, in Mentasta back in 98-99, and learned about

the watershed, my first thoughts were how to protect the waters – mainly the Fish Creek in Mentasta and my family fish camp along the Copper River (well, all the Copper River). Over the years I've worked with MSTC and Native Village of Gakona as an Environmental Assistant and have learned ways to protect and do outreach to the communities for the preservation of the Copper River watershed.



LISHAW  
LINCOLN

5.7M

## REPLACING THE FAILING EYAK LAKE WEIR

\$5.7 million for Eyak Lake Weir replacement from the Exxon Valdez Oil Spill Trustee Council protecting important salmon and trout habitat



## CONVENING

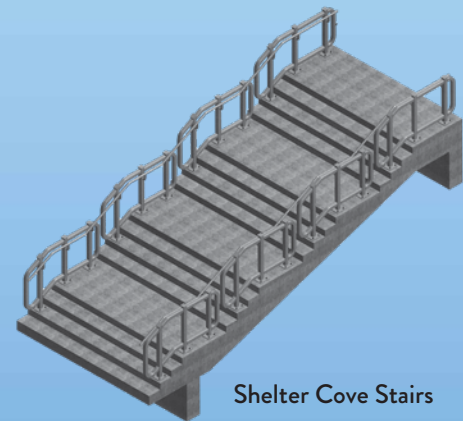
Beginning to plan the second Copper Basin Symposium; Science, Stewardship and Tradition.

# RECREATIONAL ACCESS SPARKS OPPORTUNITY

BY LISA DOCKEN, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

If you build it, they will come. Perhaps even to swim! Completed in 2021, after years of planning and development, the newly constructed Shelter Cove stairs meant fishermen and recreational enthusiasts no longer had to maneuver the slippery concrete pillows to gain access to the intertidal mudflats. Recently, these new stairs were used for something we never thought of...swimming! I worked with friend and neighbor Ann Harding to coordinate a fundraiser for Doctors without Borders to support the millions of Ukrainian refugees -and how did we raise the money? An Ocean Dip and Donate! Cordova residents gathered at high tide on March 21, bringing in the Spring season by jumping into 3.7 degree Celsius water to raise money for a good cause. The Shelter Cove recreational access stairs were a perfect, safe point for the close to 50 people who joined to brave a cold water swim. Afterwards, participants and their families and friends enjoyed hot beverages and treats on the ramp leading to the stairs.

You never know what continuous benefits restoration efforts and recreational access infrastructure can do to bring people together. A huge thank you to our local community businesses that helped us close the gap on this project when the price tag exceeded our funding! Without the generous support of Alaska Department of Fish & Game, Alyeska Pipeline Service Company, City of Cordova, Cordova Telephone Cooperative, Lynden Transport, Native Village of Eyak, Wilson Construction and the U.S. Forest Service, this project would not have happened. Who knows, maybe we make this an annual Spring Equinox tradition ... See you there?



Shelter Cove Stairs







# HAVE YOU DIVERSIFIED YOUR WATER PORTFOLIO?

BY KATE MORSE, PROGRAM DIRECTOR

There is no denying that salmon are a cold-water species. While their life stage development is tied to the accumulation of temperature units, with warmer temperatures increasing the rate of development, there is a threshold at which warm water turns lethal. If evidence is needed, look back no further than 2019, where record warm water temperatures resulted in pre-spawning die-offs in salmon populations across Alaska. Warm streams were choked with returning adults where they quickly depleted dissolved oxygen and died before they could spawn. With reduced spawning success, there are likely to be smaller returns from the 2019 brood-stock.

Fortunately, the news isn't all bad for Copper River salmon when it comes to water temperature, as they have a diversified water portfolio. The Copper River watershed is home to a range of hydrologic regimes, including dynamic glacial-fed and precipitation-driven systems, and more stable spring-fed systems. For example, the Klutina River runs silty to its confluence with the Copper River, fed by the Klutina Glacier and with peak flow during high melting events. However the Gulkana River emerges year-round from underground springs in its headwaters that stay at a more constant temperature and flow rate.

It's likely that these different hydrologic regimes have influenced life history strategies of salmon living in sub-watersheds. In Cordova, there are local populations of salmon spawning late into the winter, while Long Lake salmon in the interior have been observed spawning as late as April! It's the diversity between these sub-populations of salmon that will hopefully help to buffer changes experienced by Copper River salmon into the future.

The Copper River Watershed Project is working with partners to coordinate and expand temperature monitoring in the watershed. An improved understanding of thermal regimes in the watershed will help identify cold-water refugia important for sustaining salmon during warm weather events. It will also help track how different hydrologic regimes change with a warming climate and how sub-populations of salmon respond to these changes. Supported by a diversified water portfolio, we're hopeful that Copper River salmon are sustained into the uncertain future.



A researcher from Prince William Sound Science Center downloads a temperature data logger deployed in a pink salmon stream.

Image Courtesy Dave Janka, Auklet Charters

To learn more about temperature monitoring in the Copper River watershed, contact  
Kate Morse, [kate@copperriver.org](mailto:kate@copperriver.org),  
(907)424-3334.

# ALASKA'S INVASIVE PLANT MINI-GRANT PROGRAM

To help organizations control invasive plant species throughout Alaska, the Copper River Watershed Project in partnership with State and Private Forestry, and the U.S. Forest Service began the Alaska Invasive Plant Mini-Grant Program in 2017. Funds from the U.S. Forest Service are distributed by the Copper River Watershed Project to non-federal organizations. The Mini-Grant Program provides small grants up to \$20,000 to organizations throughout the State for invasive plant control. Mini-Grant funds can be used for invasive plant treatments, education and outreach, and supply purchases. Projects are submitted to and reviewed by staff at the University of Alaska Fairbanks (UAF) and Copper River Watershed Invasive Plant Program to ensure they follow proposal requirements.

Since its creation, the Mini-Grant program has distributed over \$500,000 to 11 different organizations. With the funding from the last four years, organizations were able to treat over 720 acres of 33 different invasive plant species across Alaska. In 2022, we are administering over \$150,000 to 9 environmental organizations. These 9 different organizations will be treating over 20 different species of invasive plants through manual and chemical treatments. The organizations span across the state, ranging from Kodiak to Prince of Wales Island, and as far north as Fairbanks.

As plants begin emerging this spring, keep an eye out for invasive plants and talk with your local organizations about the Invasive Plant Mini-Grant Program. We hope to continue distributing funds in 2023 to help control invasive plants and see more grants from non-federal organizations that have or want to start invasive plant programs in Alaska.

If you are interested in learning more about the Invasive Plant Mini-Grant Program, contact us at [invasives@copperriver.org](mailto:invasives@copperriver.org).



## 5 MOST COMMONLY TREATED PLANTS BY MINI-GRANTEES



Reed Canary Grass



White Sweetclover



Bird Vetch



Knotweed



Orange Hawkweed

IN FIVE YEARS

**\$500K** FUNDS DISTRIBUTED

**11** DIFFERENT ORGANIZATIONS

**720** TREATED ACRES

**33** UNIQUE TREATED SPECIES

**Fairbanks Soil & Water Conservation District**

**28** TREATED ACRES | **6** UNIQUE SPECIES TREATED

**Salcha-Delta Soil & Water Conservation District**

**22** TREATED ACRES | **2** UNIQUE SPECIES TREATED

**Copper River Watershed Project**

**177** TREATED ACRES | **6** UNIQUE SPECIES TREATED

**Southeast Alaska Watershed Coaliton**

**7** TREATED ACRES | **9** UNIQUE SPECIES TREATED

**Kodiak Soil & Water Conservation**

**6** TREATED ACRES | **14** UNIQUE SPECIES TREATED

**Ketchikan CWMA**

**17** TREATED ACRES | **1** UNIQUE SPECIES TREATED

**Metlakatla**

**21** TREATED ACRES | **3** UNIQUE SPECIES TREATED

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**COPPER RIVER  
WATERSHED PROJECT**



# Newsletter SPRING 2022



- \* Finding Traction
- \* Recycling Gillnets
- \* 2021 Annual Report
- \* Water Temperature
- \* Invasive Plant Grants

TO



## CRWP MISSION

*The Copper River Watershed Project promotes a salmon-rich, intact watershed and culturally diverse communities by forming partnerships for watershed-scale planning and projects.*

## PARTNER THANK YOU

In appreciation for all our partners; we can't say it often enough, thank you for all that you do to help our communities and the watershed. We recently lost a cherished partner, Kenny Steck. Kenny did so much for our youth and for the watershed. In remembrance and with heartfelt appreciation for those partners we have and have had within the Copper River watershed; you make this world a better place.



Teaching Forestry at Earth Discovery Day 2021  
Photo Paul Boos/WISE



Boats with Kenny and Russ  
Photo Copper River Stewardship Program