2011 Science Leadership Award

Jeff Williams

Jeff Williams is an extraordinary science leader for Alaska Maritime National Wildlife Refuge. He is responsible for inventory, monitoring, and research on the 3.3 million acre Aleutian Islands Unit of the Alaska Maritime National Wildlife Refuge. Stretching over 1,000 miles west of mainland Alaska, and with over 200 named islands, the Aleutian Islands support several million breeding seabirds, various endemic species, and contain multiple volcanoes. Jeff is also the chief scientist aboard the largest research vessel in the Fish and Wildlife Service fleet, *M/V Tiĝlax̂*, and has collaborated with an incredible array of scientists investigating the marine and terrestrial resources around the Aleutian Islands.

In 2008, the long-dormant volcano on Kasatochi Island erupted violently, completely covering the island in a thick layer of ash and other volcanic material. Fortuitously, Kasatochi had been a biological monitoring site for the refuge for many years; Jeff had extensive pre-eruption data on birds, plants, marine mammals, and arthropods. Jeff immediately recognized the astonishingly rare opportunity afforded by the Kasatochi eruption to study recolonization of a seemingly sterile island for which extensive pre-eruption biological data existed. He pulled together a team of researchers to study the island post-eruption. With volcanologists, botanists, soil scientists, entomologists, and seabird biologists, the team could take a comprehensive look at island recovery following a major volcanic eruption. Jeff's team has learned much about island recovery and has documented the return of plants, arthropods, marine mammals, and breeding birds to this rugged island, demonstrating that the eruption, with its resulting moonscape island appearance, was merely a natural disturbance on a continuum of intense biological activity on Kasatochi Island. The initial phase of science culminated in publication of 10 papers about the Kasatochi eruption published in a special edition of Arctic, Antarctic, and Alpine Research.

Jeff also provides exceptional scientific support for staff. Each year, he hires and leads several teams of field biologists working on refuge annual monitoring sites and other science projects in the Aleutian Islands unit. He finds employees to work in conditions unimaginable to most: four months of continuous extreme isolation, rugged weather, and primitive living conditions. Jeff coaches the employees through the process, always emphasizing safe operations and effective science. He has instituted a model of "expedition behavior" to ensure that his small crews living together for months at a time on a remote field camp not only survive, but thrive. He carefully instructs employees on data collection, radio operations, watercraft safety, the dangers of unexploded ordinance, preserving cultural resources, and more. Jeff doesn't merely direct work; he does the work. He spends extensive time in the field so he knows the conditions under which his crews work and the tasks he asks them to perform.

For his exemplary leadership in applying science to complex conservation issues and creating a supportive scientific workspace for staff, Jeff Williams is hereby granted the 2011 Science Leadership Award.