



Kk'oonootne Tene

Kanuti National Wildlife Refuge

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During May, when this photo was taken, almost all caribou that still have antlers are pregnant females. (USFWS)

First Caribou Calving in the Refuge

“Will I see caribou on Kanuti Refuge?” This was one of the many questions English volunteer, Dylan Smith, asked Wildlife Biologist Chris Harwood the first day they arrived at Kanuti cabin during breakup in early May 2012. He had to tell Dylan “very unlikely” because in his previous four springs studying shorebirds there, the crew had only seen one caribou (in 2011). After all, caribou are primarily an animal of the tundra and Kanuti Refuge is primarily boreal forest and wetlands. Still, most winters we occasionally see small numbers of caribou wander onto the Refuge from the small Ray Mountains Herd to the south, and perhaps once or twice a decade we see larger groups from the Western Arctic Herd wintering in the Refuge. Indeed, the winter of 2011–2012 was just such a year when at least 2,000 caribou arrived from the north in late fall, foraged on lichens in the old growth black spruce woodlands, and departed in early spring.

Smith observed a group of three caribou, including one with antlers. During May, almost all caribou that still have antlers are pregnant females. One week later they saw two separate groups of two caribou each with antlers (likely all pregnant females). Finally, for a week beginning in late May, they observed a female with a tiny calf beside her near the bird study area. This is the first time Refuge personnel have documented calving by caribou in the Refuge!

In addition to the many beaver and muskrat that live near the cabin, Dylan went on to see all of the other big mammals that reside within the Refuge: moose, black and brown bears, lynx, river otter, and even a curious wolf that approached within twenty yards of him. Observing these animals for the first time was a special treat for Dylan and for Harwood, too.

Are you aware of any caribou calving on the refuge? If so, refuge staff would love to hear about your observations and stories. 🐾

Only four days into their two-month stay at Kanuti Lake cabin, Harwood and

New Friendships and Fond Memories are Formed at Saagedlekkakk'et Science Camp

The sight of aquatic nets swishing and swashing in the waters of Saagedlekkakk'et (the mouth of Henshaw Creek) combined with the sound of constant laughter in the background, from both students and instructors, is a fond memory I have from camp. As the camp coordinator for the Saagedlekkakk'et Science Camp, I had for months been planning and preparing, eagerly anticipating teaching another group of excited students at the annual camp. These sights and sounds were the reward for my efforts and patience! Dressed in chest waders and grouped into teams, students raced against one another to collect and identify as many different species of aquatic insects as they could. Monitoring aquatic bugs, catching dragonflies, and sampling salmon were among the many activities students experienced at the 6th annual Henshaw Creek Science Camp hosted by Kanuti National Wildlife Refuge in partnership with Tanana Chiefs Conference (TCC), The Watershed School, and Friends of Alaska National Wildlife Refuges (Friends). Held the third week of July, the camp welcomed nine 6th-12th grade students from Allakaket, Huslia, and new this year, The Watershed School in Fairbanks.

The week-long camp is held at a fish monitoring weir managed by TCC and funded by the Fish and Wildlife Service Office of Subsistence Management. Henshaw Creek is a beautiful location with abundant natural resources that provide experiential learning opportunities for students. As an outdoor classroom, the camp teaches western science while also instilling traditional knowledge from local Native elders. Four long-time residents and elders from the community of Allakaket, Pollock and Julia Simon, and Kenneth and Elsie Bergman, shared their invaluable knowledge and taught traditional subsistence techniques such as setting a fish net, building a fish-drying rack, cutting fish, and Athabascan-style beading. When asked which camp activity was his favorite, Allakaket student Oscar Penn commented "setting the fishnet, because I could learn how to set it when I grow up." Each evening we gathered around the campfire, with

a cup of hot cocoa in hand. Elders shared traditional stories that left lasting thoughts in our minds just in time for bedtime in our tents.

Each morning, students engaged in an outdoor yoga session to get their creative minds flowing. Fluent in the local Athabascan dialect, Denaakk'e, Susan Paskvan, Native Language Coordinator for the Yukon Koyukuk School District (YKSD), instructed daily lessons and games in the Koyukon language. Everyone had fun practicing their new traditional Athabascan words with each other. Students learned about the role of the water cycle on the land using numerous hands-on models taught by The Watershed School teacher and Friends volunteer, Moira O'Malley. Moira also incorporated a variety of art activities into the curriculum including Zentangle drawings, dragonfly earrings, and handmade nature journals. Fish and Wildlife Service biologist, also affectionately known around camp as "The Dragonfly Expert," John Hudson, and volunteer Kim Frangos of Juneau brought a variety of nets and guide books to teach students about the life cycle, adaptations and roles of aquatic insects in the Alaskan ecosystem.



Saagedlekkakk'et Science Camp student Megan Henry prepares to release a chum salmon she has just measured at the weir. Students learned how to sex, measure and take scale samples from salmon as they pass through the weir on their way to spawn upstream. Scale samples are used to determine the age of the fish. (USFWS)

Students participated in a dragonfly survey and assisted in documenting results to help monitor species distribution and diversity. Of the sixteen national wildlife refuges located in Alaska, Kanuti has the highest documented dragonfly diversity, making it a prime spot to catch these fast yet dazzling creatures.



Saagedlekkakk'et Science Camp elders, instructors, students, and volunteers show off their fish print t-shirts. The shirts have become a yearly science camp tradition. (USFWS)

New Friendships and Fond memories (continued)

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Located at the mouth of Henshaw Creek, the science camp teaches all participants about these unique resources in an environment that creates new friendships and lasting memories. While the creek is only about 30 miles long and 100 feet wide at the camp, Henshaw Creek hosts up to a quarter million spawning chum salmon in summer. It's the nursery for a major contribution to Alaska's salmon resource, and the base of an intricate food chain extending from dragonfly larvae to grizzly bears. This makes it an excellent location for an outdoor classroom.

To foster positive cross-cultural interactions between Native students from bush villages that are accessible only by aircraft and urban students living in Fairbanks, we partnered with The Watershed School in Fairbanks for the first time this year. Watershed is a charter school, and differs from other public schools in Fairbanks in that significant emphasis is placed on combining classroom science lessons with outdoor explorations and studies with direct connection to the community, the environment and culture. Seventh grade students at the school were asked to write

an essay about why they were interested in attending the camp, and the two winning essay writers were selected to attend the camp. They embarked on a once in a lifetime opportunity to absorb and experience Athabascan culture and make new friends from villages located far from Fairbanks. When departing Henshaw Creek on the last day, Watershed School student Jolie Magelky said, "Going to bed was sad because we had stop to learning for the day. I wish camp was longer because camp was so much more than I ever would have expected." Her classmate, Hudson Smith added, "I learned a lot about my favorite subjects, science and biology, this week. But the best things I'm taking away from camp are the new friendships I made. We live far away from each other, in very different communities, but we'll always be friends now!"

The Kanuti Refuge staff is glad to be the catalyst that each year brings together an enduring partnership involving multiple cooperators, talented teachers and dedicated fisheries biologists. Henshaw Creek Science Camp provides a unique opportunity for students, staff, biologists and elders to share and learn.

[Written by Allyssa Gabriel, Visitor Services Intern for Kanuti Refuge.]



Allakaket elders Kenneth and Elsie Bergman attend the Saagedlekkakk'et Science Camp primarily to share and pass on their traditional knowledge about subsistence resources, but they participate in all of the camp activities, taking advantage of the opportunity to learn more about the natural resources they care for and rely on. (USFWS)



Students learn how to bead traditional Athabascan floral patterns. (USFWS)



Students Grace Moses, Jolie Magelky and Oscar Penn collect, sort, and identify aquatic samples. (USFWS)

A Closer Look at the Allakaket Fire



Within a quarter mile of the village, The Allakaket fire eventually burned 2,642 acres, an area roughly four and a half miles long by a mile wide. No homes or other structures were lost, though one allotment did burn.

The June 20 forecast was for high fire danger in the upper Koyukuk valley with very high fire spread potential due to winds. Agencies had prepositioned two CL-215 water scooping aircrafts known as “Ducks” were pre-positioned in Bettles to prepare for any fire threats to area communities. By midafternoon, west winds exceeding the forecast were felt in Allakaket. At around 4 PM a fire that had been burning in the Allakaket landfill escaped into the wildlands and spread quickly to the east.

The Ducks from Bettles and airtankers from Fairbanks responded immediately, followed shortly by smokejumpers and crews. Firefighters focused on preventing the fire from spreading north into the village and by the end of the day had secured two miles of line between the fire and the New Site subdivision. Contingency structure protection for New Site homes was aided by fuels reduction work completed in 2003 under a cooperative agreement between the Village and the Kanuti Refuge.

An incident command post was established in the Allakaket School and a helibase was set up by the Koyukuk River. Fixed-wing staging areas were set up at the Allakaket and Bettles airports to support the fire organization. Over the next several days fourteen crews, including Allakaket #1 and #2, were assigned to the fire. By June 23 over 300 people were assigned to the incident. Rudy Moses, a crewboss qualified local resident, served as a liaison between the fire organization and the Village. The Kanuti Refuge supported the fire suppression effort with overhead personnel and logistical support in Bettles.

Objectives for the Type 3 fire organization included:

1. Provide firefighter and public safety.
2. Provide protection for the village of Allakaket and surrounding Native Allotments.

3. Minimize fire growth to the smallest possible acreage

4. Use resources cost-effectively to accomplish incident objectives.

The fire eventually burned 2,642 acres, an area roughly four and a half miles long by a mile wide. No homes or other structures were lost, though one allotment did burn. The fire was contained on June 26, and by the end of June all crews were demobilized. The fire continued to be monitored until it was called out on August 15. It is estimated to have cost nearly three million dollars to suppress.

Despite the fire’s high cost and the tremendous risk it posed to the Village, it will provide some benefits. The fire has created a fuel break that should help protect Allakaket from future fires, and may provide willow browse for moose near to the village in another ten to thirty years.

Perhaps the greatest benefit of this fire is its reminder to all of us that fire is a powerful force that must be treated with respect. Those of us who live in Interior Alaska must understand that managing risk from wildland fire is a personal responsibility. We must be careful with fire and be prepared for local fire conditions. By practicing “Firewise” principles, we can reduce the risk to our property, homes, communities, and, most importantly, our people. 🐾

For more Firewise information visit the State of Alaska Firewise website at:

<http://forestry.alaska.gov/fire/firewise.htm>

Refuge Welcomes New Maintenance Worker

In June, Kanuti Refuge staff welcomed Brad Storm as the new Maintenance Worker for the Bettles Field Station.

Brad arrived in Bettles with more than 33 years of experience with the National Wildlife Refuge System, mostly with Modoc Refuge in California. Previously, Brad worked at Trempealeau Refuge in Wisconsin and Ruby Lake Refuge in Nevada. He has traveled extensively for the Service, performing maintenance details at some of the remote Pacific Islands Refuges, as well as past details in Alaska to Bettles and Cold Bay.

Brad likes working in remote areas like Kanuti Refuge. He is a skilled carpenter, mechanic, and heavy equipment operator. When he's not performing refuge maintenance work, instructing folks on heavy equipment operation, or remodeling buildings, Brad enjoys hunting, fishing, paintball, gardening, and being involved in Boy Scouts. He and his wife Cathy also enjoy international travel. 🐾



New Maintenance Worker Brad Storm enjoys spending time outdoors. (USFWS)

Upcoming Event: Trapper Clinic in Allakaket

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Allakaket resident PJ Simon present a three day event focusing on the manufacture of traditional snares. Learn how to trap wolf, lynx, and beaver or attend to share your knowledge.

October 22-24, 2012

Topics to be covered:

- Traditional snare making
- Trapping techniques
- Regulations
- Trapper responsibilities

For more information contact:
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Allakaket resident Pollock Simon teaches traditional trapping techniques at Saagedlekkakk'et Science Camp. (USFWS)

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Have you ever seen a marten like this?

Marten are quite variable in appearance. However, this marten's coloration is quite unusual. The white head and black mask is very uncommon. Marten are common on Kanuti Refuge, based on tracks seen in winter.

(USFWS/Ronan Dugan)

