

# Plenty of things to be thankful for on Kenai National Wildlife Refuge

by Robin West

Having entered the holiday season, and getting ready to wrap up another year, it is a great time to reflect on all the many things I have to be thankful for.

I am especially reminded of this due to the short notice I just received to prepare this article, in that Dr. Ed Berg, a frequent contributor and the refuge editor for this column, just had an emergency appendectomy earlier this week.

No, I am not thankful that Ed had to have surgery (or that he couldn't write an article this week), but I am thankful that he is recovering well, and most of all I am thankful for the wonders of modern medicine. If Ed had suffered from this ailment 100 years ago ... well, he wouldn't likely have survived. This same scenario applies to me (who had an emergency appendectomy at age 10) as well as the Deputy Refuge Manager Jim Hall (who underwent the same procedure at age six).

I am sure this applies to many others in our community who have benefited specifically from modern medicines and medical techniques.

Of course there is much more to be thankful for. While the economy has taken a hit of late, our country overall has never been richer. We have the relative ease of jet travel; quality opportunities for recreation, education, and personal growth; and the freedom to speak our minds, vote for who we wish to represent our interests, and worship God in a manner we individually choose. It is great to be an American!

I am especially thankful for my family, my community, and the job I have. Yes, I am a "Fed," but I am proud of it. Our government may not be perfect, but it is the best one going, and I am proud to be a part of

it, even in a small way.

I am thankful for the refuge where I work. It is not "my" refuge; it belongs to all Americans. I have only been entrusted for a short time to oversee its management.

To me the refuge represents many things. It provides opportunities to enjoy a quality of life through hiking, camping, hunting, and fishing. It provides a place to get away from the hustle and bustle of our busy lives to enjoy wilderness and wildlife.

It provides a keystone to a large sustainable economy by protecting our salmon spawning and rearing areas and where a large number of local people can make a portion of their living.

The Kenai National Wildlife Refuge celebrates its 61<sup>st</sup> birthday this month, and the National Wildlife Refuge System will turn 100 next March.

I am thankful to live in a country wealthy enough, free enough, and thoughtful enough to have set aside these kind of public lands for all of its people to enjoy.

I am thankful for the staff at the refuge and for all of the support of the local community.

And as the winter season progresses I am at least a little thankful for the warm weather, although I must admit I might be a little more thankful if there was some snow coming our way in the not too distant future...

*Robin West is the Kenai National Wildlife Refuge Manager. For more information about the Refuge, visit the headquarters in Soldotna, call (907) 262-7021. Previous Refuge Notebook columns can be viewed on the Web at <http://kenai.fws.gov>.*