

# Refuge budget is lean and mean

by Pam Ables

Happy New Year! Uncle Sam celebrates October 1<sup>st</sup> as the beginning of a new fiscal year. This is the time of the year when the bean counters evaluate what the Refuge did with taxpayer money and report that information to Washington, D.C.

Washington is on record as proud of the streamlined budget of the National Wildlife Refuge System. One Washingtonian back east was reported to brag, “The Refuge System is Lean and Mean,” when it comes to getting lots of work done with so little.

The National Wildlife Refuge System operates on approximately 1/10<sup>th</sup> the cost of other land management agencies. The Kenai Refuge cost \$2.27 an acre to operate in fiscal year 2003. This is quite a bargain when you consider that nearly 2 million acres is managed for so many recreational opportunities.

As I prepare the Refuge’s Comprehensive Accomplishment Report for the past fiscal year, I am amazed at the local community’s selfless support of the Kenai Refuge and the employee’s altruistic dedication to getting the work done at little or no additional cost.

This is a landmark year for the Kenai Refuge in many ways. Although nothing so obvious as the 2003 Centennial Celebration, I record many accomplishments that others don’t normally see. Here are a few little known but impressive facts about the Kenai Refuge from my 2003 report.

- The Kenai Refuge had 106 permanent and seasonal employees and volunteers this summer (May – August).
- The Refuge volunteer staff contributed 14,317 hours of service in 2003. Volunteer staff helped with wildlife surveys, visitor information and, campground and trail maintenance, just to name a few.
- The Refuge volunteers saved taxpayers \$360,200 with their work for fiscal year 2003.
- This year 546,300 people visited the Kenai Refuge. Refuge uses include guided fishing,

hunting, camping and field trips, just to name a few. I can only imagine the number of visitors we have, if it were actually possible to count each individual person using the refuge. I speculate that we would meet or exceed Denali National Park for use.

- Our Law Enforcement officers wrote more than 450 Notice of Violations for 2003.

This year was special to the staff at the Kenai Refuge. As you may have heard, it marks 100 years of the National Wildlife Refuge System. The staff and others took a lot of time contemplating what to put in the time capsule buried at the Centennial Trail head this past Friday. A century from now, the capsule will be opened and hopefully our careful contemplation of its contents will have communicated our intentions.

As the Information Technology Specialist here at the Refuge it was especially hard for me to think of something to contribute to the time capsule. Currently, much of technology is outdated after 6 months. How do you consider what format to leave a video, or other media so that 100 years from now it can still be viewed? Try to find someone who can get data off the old 5.25” inch floppies of a decade ago—impossible! Needless to say, I hope I made the right choices.

The new fiscal year is here. We have no idea what is in store for this fiscal year as Congress has yet to pass a budget. Will we have to cut programs? Will we get new programs? Who knows...? 2004 will not have the pomp and circumstance of the Centennial year, but with the continued support of our community volunteers and seasonal staff, I am confident that we’ll mark another record success when I prepare the 2004 Accomplishment Report next year.

*Pam Ables has worked for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in Alaska for 18 years. She lives in Kenai with her husband, Myke, daughter, Destiny and son, Levi. Previous Refuge Notebook columns can be viewed on the Web at <http://kenai.fws.gov>.*