

Breakup means it's time for refuge crews to gear up for summer projects

by Bill Kent

We are seeing more and more of the sun, temperatures are rising and snow piles are shrinking. Everyone on the Kenai Peninsula is eagerly anticipating another Alaska summer. For the staff at the Kenai National Wildlife Refuge, this is the time of year when we begin to get very specific about summer work projects.

The visitor service division's summer plans are what I want to share with you this week. All of the other divisions (biology, fire, maintenance and administration) also are making plans for the summer, but I'll let those divisions speak for themselves.

Visitor services is preparing information and education materials for the more than 500,000 visitors who will use refuge facilities. Providing visitors with the most current information about refuge and peninsula opportunities makes a visit more enjoyable and offers an opening for each visitor to learn more about the mission of the Kenai National Wildlife Refuge. Plans for interpretive programs in our campgrounds and at the visitor center on Ski Hill Road are underway. These programs grow in popularity every year, primarily due (in my opinion) to the prep work that is done at this time of year.

My staff also is planning for a major effort on trails this summer. Congress generously provided funds for the rehabilitation of access areas, trail heads and trails along the Swanson River and Swan Lake roads. D & L Construction of Soldotna began work on the trail heads last fall and the trails will be worked on by that company and by Student Conservation Association (SCA) high school trail crews during the summer.

Trails in the Skilak and Tustumena lakes areas also will receive more attention, thanks again to specific funding from Congress. We will recruit a three- to five-person trail crew to supplement the usual backcountry crew, which consists of a ranger and three

SCA resource assistants. We anticipate the announcement of the application period for the new crew will come soon. If you, or someone you know, possess the skills needed for trail work, call Refuge Headquarters and ask for Scott Slavik, who will lead the trail crews this summer.

The refuge cabin crew is preparing for another busy summer. They rehabilitated several cabins last year and already have begun to transport materials to other cabins scheduled for repairs or rehabilitation this year. For more information about cabin projects, call and ask for Gary Titus.

Last, but certainly not least, our law enforcement officers are planning their summer coverage of the refuge. We anticipate the usual crowds in the Russian River Ferry area, as well as full campgrounds. Cooperation with the Alaska State Troopers, Alaska State Parks, and the U.S. Forest Service is vital in their planning efforts to keep the visiting public safe and to ensure protection of natural resources.

The overwhelming majority of our visitors make every effort to abide by refuge and state laws and regulations. However, it seems that a few law breakers can spoil an experience for others, as well as jeopardize public safety. Our law enforcement officers encourage you to report violators to them or other enforcement personnel as soon as possible.

I hope I have provided you with some insight into the planning efforts we undertake each year to make your visit to the Kenai refuge is enjoyable and safe. Have a great summer!

Bill Kent is the supervisory park ranger for Kenai refuge. He and his family live in Sterling. Previous Refuge Notebook columns can be viewed on the Web at <http://www.fws.gov/refuge/kenai/>.