

## Let the school times roll!

by Nicole Johnson



Photo of Nicole Johnson & Leah Rigal. USFWS/Robin West.

Local youth are groaning and it is music to my ears! Why? Not because I am a mean person, but as the Education Specialist at the Kenai National Wildlife Refuge, I look forward to this time of year for many reasons. However, this fall is especially near and dear to my heart.

After years of planning and construction, we will be holding our first field trip season based out of our Environmental Education Center! If you have walked the Keen Eye trail or been in the parking lot at our Visitor Center, you may have noticed signs of construction during the last year. Now we have a new sign and it says we are open and ready to teach! The new building is constructed of large logs and is a beautiful work of art.

While the majority of the staff is catching their

breath from our busy summer season, our busy season is just beginning. Last fall in only 21 days we had 1,179 contacts with local youth! No wonder we are always catching our breath in October.

This year we hope to see the same number of students if not more. We currently have six environmental education programs for youth ranging from kindergarten to sixth grade. If your children came on a field trip once each year while in elementary school, they would learn about “Animals and Their Senses” (kindergarten), “Amazing Animals” (first grade), “Habitat Is Where It Is At” (second grade), “Role of Predators” (third grade), and we don’t stop there. When they are in fourth grade they would learn about “Wetlands and Wildlife.” And before they went to middle school, they would also learn about “Fire Ecology” (fourth or fifth grade) and “Leave No Trace” (fifth or sixth grade).

Over the years we have worked hard to provide high quality, hands-on environmental education programs to local schoolteachers and their students. Many teachers return year after year even when they change the grade they are teaching. However, I know there are teachers that still do not know about us and what we have to offer.

So, if you have come in the past, are new to the area as a teacher, or have never checked us out, you are in luck. It is as easy as a phone call. To schedule a field trip please contact the Kenai National Wildlife Refuge’s Environmental Education Center at 262-7021. Let the school times roll!

*Nicole Johnson is the Education Specialist at the Kenai National Wildlife Refuge. Previous Refuge Notebook columns can be viewed on the Web at <http://www.usfws.gov/refuge/kenai/>.*