

Get outdoors and connect with the Refuge this summer!

by Michelle Ostrowski



Visitor enjoying a view of Skilak Lake. Photo Credit: Sarha Siefken

The Kenai Peninsula is often referred to as “Alaska in Miniature” since it has many of the fantastic outdoor things Alaska has to offer in an easily accessible location. Unfortunately those of us who live in Alaska sometimes take for granted that this playland is in our own backyards. There is a national trend that adults and children are spending more and more time indoors, and less and less time outdoors. With this decrease in outdoor time, there is a disconnect between the American people and nature.

The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service is expanding its efforts to connect people with the natural world in such a way that they’ll care about and thus care for America’s natural resources. The service has adopted a program called “Connecting People with Nature: Ensuring the Future of Conservation” as one of its six national priorities. USFWS Director Dale Hall has stated, “If we want conservation in the future, we have to have future conservationists.”

Being outdoors is important to our development—intellectually, emotionally, socially, spiritually, and physically. Refuges across the United States are making efforts to find new and creative ways to draw people of all ages back to the outdoors and the Kenai Refuge is no exception. We are expanding our efforts to connect our community with the outdoors. We invite you to join us for the following free Refuge-

sponsored outdoor events and activities this summer. Please note some require pre-registration.

Whistles and Backpacks on the Keen-Eye Trail: This is a Trail Explorer program for ages four and up at the Refuge headquarters in Soldotna. Participants fill out a trail worksheet while learning about boreal forest and wetland habitats and receive a whistle upon completion. Two themed backpacks (“Introduction to Birding” and “Get A Closer Look”) will also be available for family checkout during normal visitor center hours, everyday June through August, to explore the surrounding trails.

Celebrate Wildflower Fun Day (June 20) and Wild Berry Fun Day (August 15): These two community special events take place at the Environmental Education Center. These events will be from 11am to 3pm and will include displays, games, craft activities, theme inspired snacks, and guided ½ mile wildflower or wild berry identification walks on the Keen-Eye trail. Pre-registration is required for the guided walks.

Guided Fitness Walks: Join us for 1 ½ hour walks on the 2-mile Centennial Trail located at our headquarters in Soldotna. Walks start at 2pm on June 26, July 15, and August 19 and pre-registration is required. These walks will combine topics such as plant and berry identification, trail fitness, orienteering, and more.

Get Outside and Get Dirty Summer Camp: For the first time, the Refuge is offering a weeklong summer camp July 28 through August 1 from 9am-3pm each day. For this trial summer, it will only be available to students going into 4th or 5th grade this fall. The majority of the week will be spent outdoors learning about orienteering, plants and animals, and habitats. Through trail exploration, crafts, science experiments, digital photography, journaling and more, we hope to inspire kids to learn about nature’s wonders. There will be a required supply fee and pre-registration.

Campfire Programs: Held at Hidden Lake Campground Fridays and Saturdays beginning June 20 and lasting through the end of July, and also the first three Saturdays in August. Natural history programs start at 8pm at the amphitheatre.

Discovery Hikes with a Park Ranger: Held on Burney's Trail at Hidden Lake Campground at 1pm on June 28, July 12, and August 2. These hikes are moderate (1.2 miles). Call Jetta Minerva at 260-2811 to pre-register for these hikes.

Borrow a Fishing Pole for Free: The Kenai Fish & Wildlife Field Office, Kenai Community Library, and Trustworthy Hardware have created a Fishing Rod Loan Program. The Program is for kids aged 16 and under, and will provide fishing rods (for trout and salmon) that can be checked out from the Kenai library—just like checking out a library book! All you need to do is complete a registration form at the library, have a parent or legal guardian sign for the rod and head out to go fishing.

For directions, pre-registration, or additional program information please call Michelle Ostrowski at

260-2839 or e-mail michelle_ostrowski@fws.gov. You can also e-mail Michelle to be added to our event notification list. Special youth group programs (scouts, boys and girls club, daycares, etc) are available upon request. Call for more information.

It's time to start planning your outdoor summer fun We invite you to join us for a refuge sponsored event or get out on your own to camp, fish, hike or watch wildlife on your National Wildlife Refuge.

Michelle Ostrowski is the education specialist at the Refuge and has assisted with educational school groups and outreach since 1997. She is one of 10 Alaska Refuge Employees on the national USFWS Connecting People With Nature Working Group which seeks to get more people outdoors. Previous Refuge Previous Refuge Notebook columns can be viewed on the Web at <http://www.fws.gov/refuge/kenai/>.