

## A quick look back, then a look ahead

by Doug Staller

The Roman god Janus was the god of gates, doors, beginnings and endings. That's where we get the name for the first month of our calendar, January, so it's an ideal time to reflect on the year that was and the year that will be. How does that old saying go? "Yesterday is history and tomorrow is a mystery."

Personally my year on the Refuge didn't start until June when I transferred to Soldotna from the treeless tundra of Yukon Delta Refuge. The longer I'm here, the more I am coming to appreciate the stunning landscapes and amazing wildlife of this place.

In January we presented a cooperative study on wildlife mitigation and human safety for Sterling Highway (Mile 58 - 79), Kenai National Wildlife Refuge, Alaska, at the 2007 International Conference on Ecology and Transportation. The conference theme was "bridging gaps naturally" and the Kenai presentation reported on our studies directed at reducing wildlife/vehicle collisions on a portion of the Sterling Highway scheduled for reconstruction that will likely increase traffic speed.

By using radio telemetry studies of collared moose and caribou, researchers have been able to map high density crossing areas that deserve special attention in highway construction to mitigate potential impacts to both wildlife and highway travelers. Refuge Biologist Rick Ernst was the primary author of the study and publication. Contributors include staff from the Alaska Department of Fish and Game, Alaska Department of Transportation, the Federal Highways Administration, Alaska Moose Federation, and the Alaska Department of Public Safety.

In February we held an open house and Winter Fun Day at the Refuge headquarters and the Environmental Education cabin. The 119 people participating had opportunities indoors to engage in family-oriented activities and watch the movie "Stranger in the Woods," as well as to venture outside for a guided snowshoe hike.

In March the five-mile Wolf Lake natural gas pipeline corridor was judged to have achieved its primary habitat restoration goals. The pipeline connects areas of the Refuge roughly between the Swanson River and Beaver Creek Oil and Gas Leases, and ac-

cesses subsurface gas resources held by Cook Inlet Region, Inc. Natural revegetation occurred in most places after construction, but special attention was given to stream crossings and hill tops. The final areas restored required planting of natural vegetation and fertilization. The width of the right-of-way is now decreased from the 50-foot wide construction corridor to a 6-foot wide pipeline operational corridor which will facilitate additional natural restoration. As winter came to a close, nearly 800 students had participated in field trips to the refuge.

In April the Refuge hosted a workshop for maintenance staff from refuges across Alaska and nearly 100 home-school students came for a bear education day.

In May, Refuge staff featured Invasive Weeds and Bear Awareness at the Sports Show and the Home Show. We also celebrated ten years of Refuge Notebook articles, with more than 450 articles, all available at <http://www.fws.gov/refuge/kenai/>.

I'd like to say that summer months blended together but it was more like a blur. Some of the highlights (in addition to learning how to pronounce the name of Bottinintnin Lake and becoming a full-fledged member of AARP) included a quiet one on the fire front locally, due to cool weather. This was fortunate because our crews were needed in Nevada and California where the fire conditions were severe. Refuge Officer Chris Johnson was recognized as Refuge Officer of the year for Alaska. A new cabin was built a Pincher Creek. A large culvert was installed on Skilak Loop Road for better salmon passage. Oil field operators added several significantly more environmentally friendly facilities. We also held public meetings on the draft Environmental Impact Statement and Comprehensive Conservation Plan.

In September we held our annual open house and Fall Fun day with a scavenger hunt, slide shows, and four hikes of various lengths for all ages.

As fall deepened and winter approached most of us retreated inside for the annual round of proposal writing, budget planning, and taking some annual leave to visit friends and families in warmer places.

So that's our look back on the old year; what about the look ahead? A new Federal administration is com-

ing in, so leadership of the Department of the Interior and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service will no doubt undergo some changes. We hope to finish the comprehensive planning process in the coming year, and we will continue to work with our friends and partners to conserve the unique resources that make this

a special place to live.

*Doug Staller is the new deputy refuge manager at the Kenai National Wildlife Refuge. Previous Refuge Previous Refuge Notebook columns can be viewed on the Web at <http://www.fws.gov/refuge/kenai/>.*