

Kenai Refuge gets stimulated

by Scott Slavik

During the summer of 2009, the Kenai National Wildlife Refuge used funding from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act to expand opportunities for youth and young adults to become engaged in conservation work. As a result of Recovery funding, the refuge was able to hire additional personnel to complete “shovel ready” resource management and conservation projects that enhanced and expanded a variety of programs, projects and departments at the Kenai Refuge.

The Kenai Refuge’s long running and locally-based Youth Conservation Corps (YCC) received stimulus dollars that funded an Assistant Crew Leader position for the program. Christa Kennedy, resident of Soldotna currently attending college in New Mexico and a veteran two-year YCC participant returned to co-lead the program this past summer. She directed the work of eight local high school students completing a significant trail enhancement project on the Skyline Trail and assisted in the construction on the new Kelly Lake public use cabin. YCC is perhaps the refuge’s most successful program offering young adults job training and an introduction to careers in conservation and natural resource management. Christa’s leadership, made possible by stimulus funding, was a key factor to the success of this past summer’s program.

The refuge’s fire program also benefited from Recovery funding by being able to hire five additional fire fighters. These college students, both local and from the Lower 48, were a contributing force in the suppression efforts of wildfires across the state and closer to home, the Shantatalik Creek Fire. When not actively fighting fire, the crew completed habitat enhancement projects, prepared plots and constructed hand lines in

preparation for future prescribed burns. Additionally, the extra personnel allowed adequate staffing of engines necessary during times of high fire danger. The students gained extensive “hands-on” experience and valuable training in wildland fire fighting and natural resource management as well as some extra cash to help pay for school.

The public use cabins of the Kenai Refuge continue to gain in popularity and regular users will notice some improvements that have also been made possible by stimulus funding. Specifically, increased maintenance and project work has been completed on Doroshin Bay, Big Indian, and Caribou Island cabins, all of which are available for public use and are on a fee-based reservation system. Most notable is the re-opening of the airstrip used to support fly-in access to Big Indian Cabin.

The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act funds received by the Kenai Refuge have and will continue to have direct and indirect benefits to local residents as well as our “outside” visitors. Additional employment opportunities were created and refuge resources have been protected, enhanced and upgraded allowing continuing enjoyment of our public lands and the availability of quality recreational opportunities on Kenai National Wildlife Refuge.

For more information regarding the Youth Conservation Corps, employment opportunities or Kenai NWR public use cabin program, please contact the refuge at 262-7021. Scott Slavik is a Backcountry Ranger on the Kenai National Wildlife Refuge. Previous Refuge Previous Refuge Notebook columns can be viewed on the Web at <http://www.fws.gov/refuge/kenai/>.