

Finding the meaning of the moose

by Matt Conner



The bronze statue of a bull moose at the Kenai National Wildlife Refuge's new Visitor Center needs a name.

I have a confession. I am terrible with remembering people's names. I can remember the Latin names of trees, insect, animals, and even recite lines from movies that I watched years ago, but I have trouble recalling if the guy that lives down the street is named Kevin or Steve. Perhaps it is because Latin names are consistent. Every black spruce looks (for the most part) like another black spruce. But Scotts, Leahs, Michelles, Garys, and Candaces all look different.

Knowing the common and scientific names of plants and animals is an important part of my job. When I share nature with the public, the most common question I get is, "what is the name of this?" There is power in naming and knowing how to identify things in nature. Once we learn to distinguish species from others, we begin to see that plant or animal, noticing it more often than before. The first time someone showed me what elderberry looked like, I later realized it was in the woods behind my house but I had never noticed it before.

So, my Kenai friends, I need your help with a name. We will be unveiling a new bronze statue at our visitor center opening in May. The life-sized Kenai bull moose sculpture is sure to be a favorite photo opportunity for all visitors and residents to the Kenai area. As this will become a beacon for our visitors and community, we are asking for your help in giving this

statue a name. This is an important moment for the Kenai Peninsula and finding a name that captures just the right sentiment is complicated. Not a name like "Mike the Moose" but something more meaningful like "Spirit of the Refuge" or "Sentinel of Kenai."

Picking the right name can be challenging so let me give you a little history to better prepare you for this assignment. The Kenai National Wildlife Refuge was originally named the Kenai National Moose Range in 1941. But, in 1980, the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA) changed the name and purposes of the refuge to include the conservation of all wildlife (and fish!) populations and habitats in their natural diversity. This expanded purpose is well represented in the new exhibit hall. Just as moose served as early inspiration for land protection here on the Kenai, this statue will inspire future visitors as they begin their exploration of the Kenai National Wildlife Refuge. It represents and signifies the Refuge's history, original purpose and early name before Congress passed ANILCA.

If you are someone who is good with names, email me your suggestions at matt_conner@fws.gov by March 13th. A judging committee will select the winning name from a list of all of the name suggestions. At the grand opening the winner will be announced and awarded a miniature faux bronze statue of the moose as their prize.

Also at the opening in May, Refuge rangers will discuss the design and concept of the new facility and share the story of the creation of the new center. The theme behind the new exhibit hall is "Icefield to Ocean," a nod to the Refuge's broad mix of habitat types. Icefield, tundra, boreal forest, wetlands and rivers are all represented. It's why the Kenai Peninsula is often called "Alaska in Miniature."

There is a newly restored cabin behind the visitor center and the cabin crew will visit with the public about the restoration process and historical significance of the cabin. The Refuge has restored several historic cabins and maintains 16 cabins available for the public to use. The latest restoration behind the visitor center is the Elwell cabin, which was originally located at Upper Russian Lake and was relocated to the

new visitor center as a means to share with the public the significance of the Refuge's cabin program.

Who will find the words that capture the meaning of the moose? The winning name could come from anyone! Perhaps it will be a child, angler, hiker, hunter, nature photographer or maybe even my neigh-

bor Kevin...or was his name Steve?

Matt Conner is the Visitor Services Manager at Kenai National Wildlife Refuge. You can find more information about the Kenai Refuge at <http://kenai.fws.gov> or <http://www.facebook.com/kenainationalwildliferefuge>.