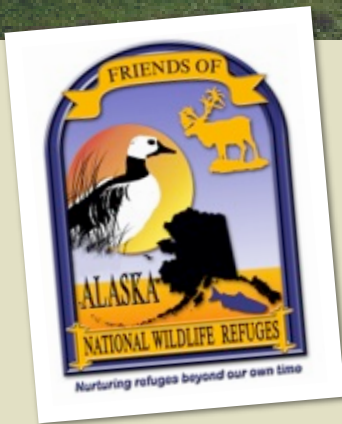


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The Alaska Refuge Friends Newsletter



Join, renew your membership, or make a donation by clicking here

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Header Photo by Jerry
 McDonnell

Friends of Alaska National Wildlife Refuges

...is an independent, non-profit 501(c)(3) organization dedicated to promoting the conservation of the natural resources of all the Alaska National Wildlife Refuges. The Friends promote understanding and appreciation of these refuges and assist the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in meeting its mandates.

Letter from our President - David Raskin

The 2009 year has witnessed terrific growth of our membership and great accomplishments in our partnership with the US Fish and Wildlife Service. Membership has grown over 30%, and our cooperative grants and projects with the Fish and Wildlife Service continue to flourish. Our hard-working and dedicated volunteers have continued to assist in efforts to halt the advance of invasive species into the Alaska refuges. They have also contributed their expertise as teachers in science and culture camps, working with FWS personnel to bring valuable lessons and experiences to local youth who live in remote of our great state. We have expanded our reach by sending members to establish and invigorate active groups in Unalaska, Sitka, and Bethel and to help the FWS to spread the word at festivals and other events in Anchorage, Bethel, Fairbanks, Homer, Sitka, and Tok. Substantial efforts by Friends and the FWS are continuing to facilitate the possibility of purchasing private land parcels located in and adjoining the Beluga Slough wetlands that are an important and visible habitat below the Maritime Refuge Islands and Ocean Visitor Center. All of these activities and more are described in detail elsewhere in this issue.

Our annual meeting in September was generously hosted by the Kenai Refuge in Soldotna. More than 30 Friends and FWS personnel from the Regional Office and the Arctic, Kenai, Maritime, Selawik,

Tetlin, and Yukon Delta Refuges helped to make this an outstanding meeting. We had several presentations by FWS staff, highlighted by an extremely interesting and informative lecture by Kenai Refuge Ecologist Dr. Ed Berg, who treated us to a tour de force overview of his many years of research on the effects of climate change and global warming. His findings and insights concerning the historical and developing effects of climate change on the landscapes, habitats, and wildlife in the refuges provided a fascinating and sobering view of past and predicted impacts. I am sure his work will motivate all of us to become even more actively involved in planning and public participation in efforts to cope with the challenges ahead.

Another notable aspect of our annual meeting was the opportunity for many members to meet and work with Kristen Gilbert, our wonderful new Friends volunteer liaison and grants coordinator in the Regional Office. When Kristen arrived in the spring to replace Maeve Taylor, she hit the ground running with great energy, speed, and talent. After thoroughly reviewing and studying the entire written history of Friends, Kristen organized an excellent session of discussion and strategic planning that will provide the blueprint for the next year. After the excellent guidance and assistance we received from Maeve, we are indeed fortunate that the Alaska Region was able to recruit such an able, energetic, and personable replacement. Although we lost Greg Siekaniec and Will Meeks to the DC Headquarters, we had the good fortune to receive an outstanding new Regional Director Geoff Haskett, who preceded Greg as the Chief of the National Wildlife Refuge System. We are also very pleased to have Steve Delahanty, who came from Minnesota to replace Greg as the new Manager of the Maritime Refuge. He was joined by Rebekah Jones, who replaced Nikki Hinds as Volunteer Coordinator and will soon be joined by the new Deputy Manager Marc Webber. We also bid farewell to long-time Kenai Refuge Manager Robin West who moved to his home state of Oregon to take the position of refuge supervisor in the Portland regional office. As of this writing, Deputy Manager Doug Staller is serving as the acting manager. The present array of talent and forward-looking personnel in the Alaska Region bodes well for the future management of all of Alaska's 16 National Wildlife Refuges.

We held elections for the officers whose terms expired. Earlier in the year, Christina Whiting volunteered to take on the position of secretary to replace Patricia Wood, who had served so admirably and continues to handle a number of responsibilities in spite of a full load of work and college

studies. Sharon Baur generously agreed to serve another term, having devoted her boundless energy and expertise to so many projects during the past year. We were also happy that Wendy Loya volunteered to take over the job of treasurer, replacing Ginny Harris who has performed that job so admirably since the establishment of Alaska Friends. Elisa Russ joined the board and has taken over the job of outreach coordinator with amazing energy and resourcefulness, replacing Sue Hazlett whose time has become limited by the demands of her academic program.

Land exchange and oil development issues affecting Alaska refuges occupied much time and effort by Nicole Whittington-Evans and me. Due in great part to Nicole's outstanding leadership and dedication, the proposed Yukon Flats-Doyon Land Exchange appears to have been defeated. The Alaska Regional Office has announced that the the final EIS to be issued in the next couple of months will adopt the "no action" alternative. This is a major victory for the combined efforts of the Alaska Native villages in the Yukon Flats region, the Alaska Friends, The Wilderness Society (TWS), the National Wildlife Refuge Association (NWRA), Defenders of Wildlife, and other organizations and individuals who made important contributions to protect our Nation's third largest refuge from the ravages of oil exploration and development. However, we must remain vigilant as Doyon Corporation develops alternative plans to develop oil on their land holdings within and adjoining the Refuge.

The status of the proposed Izembek Land Exchange and disastrous road through the heart of the congressionally-designated Izembek Wilderness is not as pleasant. Despite valiant efforts by Alaska Friends, the NWRA, other Friends groups, Defenders of Wildlife, TWS, and the Izembek Coalition, Senator Murkowski succeeded in having that unnecessary and potentially damaging land exchange included in the Omnibus Public Lands Bill that was signed into law this year. However, the battle to save Izembek is not over as the FWS undertakes the full environmental review that was inserted as a requirement in the legislation. We are hopeful that this process will clearly demonstrate the folly of this proposed exchange and road and will result in a recommendation that the Secretary of Interior declare that the proposed land exchange and road are not in the public interest.

Our other major advocacy continues our support of increased budget for the National Wildlife Refuge System. Alaska Friends joined with the NWRA and CARES in

testifying before Representative Norm Dicks' Committee on Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies. Nicole ably presented testimony that we jointly prepared, and NWRA and Friends' helped to secure another increase of \$40 million for the Refuge System. Are pleased and proud to have contributed to the important and continuing efforts to restore necessary funding for our refuges after many years of inadequate support.

The highlight of the year was our heavy involvement in the centennial celebrations of the establishment of the Maritime and Yukon Delta Refuges. This has been a wonderful and highly successful cooperation between the FWS and Friends. A series of heavily attended events were held in Anchorage, Bethel, Homer, Unalaska, and Sitka. Friends outstanding photographers Tom Collopy and Mary Frisch devoted endless hours to create the stunning photographic displays. Douglas Brinkley, noted historian, writer, and author of the recent acclaimed book The Wilderness Warrior treated us to fascinating and inspiring lectures in Anchorage and Homer. These beautiful photo essays and Brinkley's words and insights about Roosevelt and his establishment of our magnificent refuge system were an inspiration to the many hundreds who had the opportunity to experience them. They remind us of the wonderful heritage we enjoy and motivate us to work ever harder to protect and enhance their values.

We continue our participation in planning for the 50th anniversary of the Arctic Refuge. This year-long celebration envisions an outstanding series of projects and public events, including a documentary film, a play about Mardy and Olaus Murie, and major events in Alaska and many other states. Friends will play a major role in helping to increase public awareness and appreciation of the values and critical importance of this magnificent jewel and all of the units of the National Wildlife Refuge System. We also hope to send representatives around the country to expand knowledge about the role and programs of Friends organizations and increase national membership in the Alaska Friends. We are working with the USFWS and the NWRA to bring this all to fruition.

I express our appreciation of the truly amazing work and dedication of our tireless volunteers and our terrific partnerships with the USFWS, the NWRA, and the many other organizations that work toward these noble goals. I have very much enjoyed working with all of you and look forward to another great year!
David



by Sharon
Baur

2009 Sitka Whale Festival



What an

incredible week! I assisted Lisa Matlock, Educational Specialist for Alaska Maritime. Lisa taught two days at Mt. Edgecombe High School and two days at the Sitka High School. Monday and Tuesday November 2-3 were at Mt. Edgecombe and Wednesday and Thursday were at the Sitka high School. Lisa's preparation in teaching these classes was truly inspirational, the classes focused on Alaska Maritimes work with Seabirds and Shorebirds, and the work they do on St. Lazaria Island which is just off the coast of Sitka. The children were really engaged when it came to the interactive program on how biologists count birds. The program was timed and students worked as a team to count as quickly as they could with an only 5% error margin before the birds, caribou or whatever disappeared. She also taught climate change effects on Seabirds and Shorebirds and how this is connected to all the life in the ocean.

On Thursday, the 5th, we had a free Pizza Party sponsored by "Friends". I showed the DVD that Kristen made, we talked about Friends and then about the upcoming project for St. Lazaria Island, (to resurrect the Bird Cam, and also build new ladder/walks on the island, the ladders are for walking on so as not to crush the Storm Petrel burrows. They have become very dangerous and weathered. Some other maintenance will also need to be done on the cabin the biologists use during the season. We will begin to write a CCS grant for this project, and submit it by mid December. This meeting was well attended: 33 came to enjoy pizza, with 5 joining Friends. Great enthusiasm and excitement. We advertised with press releases, flyers, an ad and a radio interview on Raven Radio.

Book review: The Ice Master

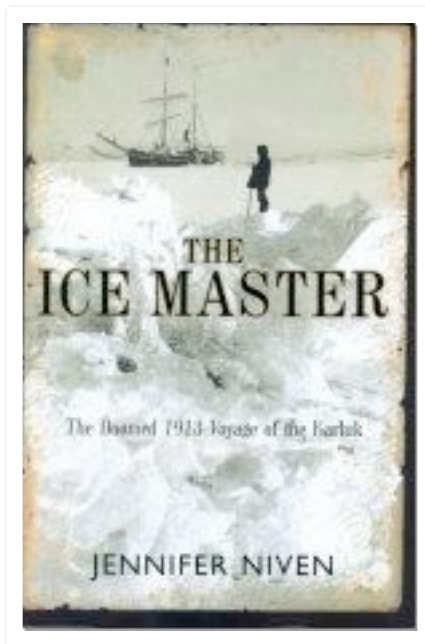
by Jennifer Niven

"Once Stefansson and his party disappeared over the snow and ice, into the vast, white landscape, the twenty-two men, one woman, and two children who had been left behind were helpless to do anything but wait for their return. . . . 'Away 20 miles in the distance we see him and his party like small black specks against the everlasting white of the Alaskan hills.'" (pg. 51) And thus begins the challenge for the crew and scientists aboard the H.M.C.S. Karluk, which, along with its sister ships, the Alaska and the Mary Sachs, would comprise "the Canadian Arctic Expedition". Hastily organized in the spring of 1913 by the young, but already world famous, arctic explorer Vilhjalmur Stefansson, it was meant to be ". . . the grandest and most elaborate Arctic expedition in history" . . . as well as "the most comprehensive scientific attack on the Arctic of all time"! (pg.8) For the passengers and crew of the Karluk, it instead turned into an incredible and unbelievably harrowing ordeal, leaving them stranded on remote Wrangel Island, north of Siberia and northwest of Alaska, and lasting until September 7th of 1914, when the surviving twelve members of the party were finally rescued by a small whaling schooner, the King and Winge.

The "Ice Master" of the book's title actually refers to Bob Bartlett, a name familiar to all Alaskans, who was selected by Stefansson to be the captain of the Karluk when he was but thirty-six years old. Bartlett had already made a name for

himself by serving with Admiral Robert Peary on his quest for the North Pole in 1909. However, the bulk of the book is based on the actual diaries of the crew and scientific staff, primarily the writings and memories of young William Laird McKinlay, who at the age of twenty-four, was hired on as the ship's magnetician and meteorologist. The month-by-month format of the book, including many actual excerpts from the diaries, really makes accessible to the reader Ms. Niven's extensive research, and makes you feel very much "there" with all of them throughout the experience.

Although Jennifer Niven has many accolades as a screen writer, she had no history or experience with Alaska, Siberia, or the Arctic, so I must admit that I approached this book with trepidation, thinking it might be a bit hackneyed, or even inaccurate. However, her storytelling skills are honed to perfection and this was definitely a story begging to be told. Put the two together, and I found that once I finally started this intense and gripping story, I really "couldn't put it down" (as the saying goes) and several very late nights were spent until I could find out how the ordeal ended! In addition, I was so taken with Ms. Niven's personalization, through the use of the protagonists' actual diaries, and her warm and realistic characterizations of them, that I am now reading the sequel to The Ice Master, a book titled Ada Blackjack: A true story of survival in the Arctic, also by Jennifer Niven.



The Ice Master was last year's pick for our Tetlin National Wildlife Refuge Winter Reading Group. To start off this year, we will be reading The Spill: Personal stories from the Exxon Valdez disaster by Alaskan author Sharon Bushell, who was also the recipient of the 2003 Alaska Governor's Award for the Arts and Humanities. All of the books are readily available both at local bookstores and on-line. Any of these three books would be a great read to curl up by the woodstove with, and make us all feel very thankful that we are safe, well-fed, and warm as we experience our Alaskan winters. Happy winter reading!

Michelle Y. Stout

Tok, Alaska
November, 2009

Annual Meeting Report: Strategic Planning Ain't All Bad

By Kristen Gilbert

It was a hectic rush up to the second week of September 2009 as I prepared for the most momentous part of my job to date, the Friends of Alaska National Wildlife Refuges Annual Meeting in Soldotna. I wanted the meeting to be productive, inclusive and fun. It would be the first time I would be meeting some of you, as well as seeing Kenai National Wildlife Refuge, and meeting some Refuge managers face to face. I was feeling the pressure.

To prepare I dug into my predecessor's files on the Friends. I read meeting minutes, by-laws, ideas from brainstorming sessions and anything I could get my hands on. This research focused my planning and inspired the direction the meeting should take.

If organization and direction are the first hallmarks of a good meeting, a close third is good refreshments. Luckily, the annual meeting planning committee, Patricia Wood, Ginny Harris, Betty Siegel and Sharon Baur were aware of this important hallmark. We planned lunches, a group dinner and snacks for the meeting before we left for Soldotna. With all the pieces in place and the Anchorage van loaded to the gills, we headed to Soldotna on Friday afternoon. With the help of board members and the some great volunteers we set up for the open house on Friday night.

Doug Staller, Acting Project Leader at Kenai National Wildlife Refuge welcomed Friends members and the public to the open house. We premiered a 4 minute Alaska Refuge and Alaska Friends commercial designed to inspire people to

get involved with the Friends group. The evening was a great success measured in multiple new memberships. We recruited some local Soldotans and even attended the meeting the next day.

The agenda for Saturday covered a presentation on climate change on the Kenai Peninsula, reports about 2009 Friends activities and my favorite part, strategic planning. I can almost hear the audible groans from the newsletter readership as I write that last item, but I think it was the most important things we did at the meeting.

From all my research and participating in a couple board meeting and monthly membership meetings, I deduced that "Membership" was an important concern for the group that needed addressing.

Using Logic models I outlined a way for us to divide and conquer this multi-faceted issue. Divided into four small groups we did some targeted brainstorming and outcome development. In one and half hours, as a group of 35 new and old Friends members and refuge staff coalesced a 2010 Strategic Plan on Membership Development.

We broke into four groups to examine how to increase active membership by improving outreach, monthly meetings, refuge support programs, and the volunteer program. The group came up with creative ideas compiled into the 2010 Friends Strategic Plan which I hope to have ready to post on the website in the near future.

Outreach Kits

Some of the ideas have already been translated into action. With our 2009 Challenge Cost Share Grant from the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service the Friends have purchased supplies for three outreach kits, to be used by members to educate and inspire fellow Alaskans to care about Alaska's National Wildlife Refuges. The kits include: supplies to conduct presentations, an LCD projector, a netbook computer loaded with the four minute Friends commercial, images, and Power Point Slide show; promotional items, stickers, stainless steel water bottles, brochures; a tabletop display and/or pop display for a booth at festivals and conferences. These three kits will be assembled this winter and available for check-out from Anchorage, Homer and Fairbanks.

Monthly Membership Meeting

Another idea is revamped monthly membership meetings changes. At the new and improved meetings we will continue hosting a guest refuge manager, we will get regular "Field Reports" from members traveling to work on Refuge projects, and the last component will be a 10-15 minute presentation by an expert on different topics important to Alaska Refuges for example: climate change, environmental education techniques, tundra ecology, bear safety, etc. Membership meetings are held the third Tuesday each month via teleconference. You can join in by calling 866-556-2149 code 816-9747 #.

These were just a few of the ideas that came out of the two hour session. We would love to hear your ideas as well. I love getting to know Friends members, don't hesitate to call or contact me at Kristen_Gilbert@fws.gov or 907-786-3391.

CENTENNIAL CELEBRATION

2009 marked the 100th birthday of two Alaska National Wildlife Refuges, the Alaska Maritime and Yukon Delta. President Theodore Roosevelt, with his amazing foresight, established several Alaskan wildlife refuges in 1909. He designated the Bogoslof Island, Pribilof Islands, Bering Sea, St. Lazaria, and Tuxedni Refuges, which were later combined with other lands (including 6 other Refuges) into today's Alaska Maritime NWR. The foresight of Teddy Roosevelt also led him to set aside lands in the Yukon Delta NWR in 1909. President Roosevelt's contributions to conservation were momentous and Friends commemorated these achievements with several Centennial Celebrations in 2009. Events were held in Anchorage, Homer, Sitka, Unalaska, and Bethel. These communities hosted Tom Collopy and Mary Frische's exhibit, Wings Over Wild Lands: A Photographic Celebration of the Alaska Maritime and Yukon Delta National Wildlife Refuges. Douglas Brinkley, author of [The Wilderness Warrior, Theodore Roosevelt and The Crusade for America](#) detailing the former President's incredible life and contributions to conservation, visited Homer and Anchorage and gave scintillating lectures for the culmination of the Centennial Celebration. Friends helped Refuge staff to organize these events which included opening receptions, outdoor adventure, educational programs, and informative presentations.

written by Elisa Russ

Noted Author, Historian and Media Pundit Highlights Centennial Events



The man the Chicago Times has dubbed “the new past master”, Douglas Brinkley, spoke on his most recent work, Wilderness Warrior: Theodore Roosevelt and the Crusade for America, at centennial events co-sponsored by Friends, the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service and the University of Alaska Anchorage in Anchorage and Homer, October 2 and 3. The Anchorage event, the highlight of the centennial celebrations for Yukon Delta and Alaska Maritime National Wildlife Refuges, included Wings Over Wild Lands: A Photographic Celebration of 100 years of Conserving Alaska’s Wild Lands and Wildlife curated by Friends members Tom Collopy and Mary Frische of

Wild North Photographer. Over 100 stunning images of landscapes and wildlife, many of them also taken by Collopy and Frische, brought the wild grandeur of Alaska’s two centennial refuges to the appreciative crowd of 275 people. Wings Over Wild Lands stayed on exhibit in the lobby of the Wendy Williamson Auditorium at the University for the month of October.

Brinkley was an engaging and dynamic speaker whose talk about Roosevelt’s conservation legacy and the beginnings of the refuge system inspired both audiences. Douglas Brinkley is a professor at Rice University and the author of dozens of books, six of which have been selected as New York Times Notable Books of the Year. Brinkley was also impressed by the Friends dedication and wrote to President David Raskin later, “My admiration for Friends of Alaska National Wildlife Refuges knows no bounds.” We expect to hear shortly that he has become a life member.

Both events included receptions, book signings and Friends outreach all facilitated by members. Friends also hosted a dinner for Brinkley and Deputy Chief of Refuges from D.C, Jim Kurth, in Homer. President Raskin and Vice President Sharon Baur and Kurth accompanied Brinkley on some aspects of Brinkley’s trip. These opportunities to interact one on one with Brinkley inspired all parties with Friends sharing information on Alaskan refuge issues. Brinkley is an enthusiastic fan of refuges and is particularly interested in helping the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge.



*A PROFILE OF ELISA RUSS, OUR NEW OUTREACH COORDINATOR
~ WELCOME ELISA, WE'RE SO HAPPY TO HAVE YOU ON BOARD! ~*

Even as a young girl I was drawn to Alaska...an innate desire to explore that last great wild place way up North. And it became a reality when I was offered a job at a salmon hatchery in Prince William Sound. How lucky was I to fly to Cordova, the first stop on my journey, & then get whisked off to the wilderness in a Cessna floatplane, sighting a black bear before even touching down at this true Alaskan bush locale! The mystique of Alaska's wild places has never worn off for me and I have been lucky enough to live remotely in Southeast & Southwest Alaska too, and in these places have been awestruck by the natural beauty of Alaska. I have enjoyed hiking, wildlife viewing, & camping adventures in five of Alaska's National Wildlife Refuges and I look forward to expanding that list through continued work with Friends.

Environmental advocacy is important to me and I have been involved with non-profit conservation organizations prior to and throughout my time in Alaska. I was also lucky enough to work as an environmental educator in Kachemak Bay for the Center for Alaska Coastal Studies. Finding ways to reach out to the public, network, and give back to community through volunteering has always been important to me.

The Unalaska Centennial Celebration was a labor of love. Although Homer is my home, last year I was living in the Aleutian and Pribilof Islands working as a biologist for Fish & Game during the crab fishery. I attended a community gathering at the Museum of Aleutians hosted by Friends and the Alaska Maritime NWR. What a surprise treat when I arrived and recognized Homer folks, Poppy Benson, from the Maritime Refuge, and my old friend Tom Balland. I enjoyed their presentation, attended the Friends meeting, and decided to join this fabulous group. So, how incredible to have the opportunity to return to Unalaska this summer to celebrate the Refuge Centennial and give back to the community as a Friends volunteer, less than a year after joining!

I am so impressed by FANWR members in their dedication and tireless service. I feel privileged to be part of this wonderful team and am honored to have been elected to the Board as the new Outreach Coordinator.

SELAWIK BOUND

by Vera Stein

Late this past summer I visited Selawik, as a Friends volunteer. The village is part of the Selawik National Wildlife Refuge. I went as an art instructor, and led nature-based art activities with Susan Georgette, the Volunteer Coordinator for the Refuge.

We arrived in Selawik, and parked ourselves in the Refuge headquarters. We then walked over to the school, where we met with the Principal, who gave us some direction and allowed us to work in the school. We held art classes in the elementary school as well as in the high school. The kids made origami animals, painted frames, beaded animals and fish, and made plaster cast projects, using natural materials, such as stones, and feathers.

We had the opportunity to sit in on one of Norma Ballot's classes. She taught Inupiat culture and history, among other things. It was incredibly interesting to hear her talk about her childhood and the history of Selawik.



One afternoon we met with Hannah Loon, and talked about many things. She had just returned from a hunting trip, and we had some of her freshly slaughtered moose, which she fried. There were vegetables in the garden which we enjoyed at dinner along with the moose.

She told us about her schooling, and about completing a Master's Degree. She also discussed her work and her life. It was so nice to meet her and hear her stories.

We stayed with Emma Ramoth and her family. Ralph Ramoth was there one evening, and we talked about caribou hunting and his grandchildren. Emma's daughters went hunting while we were there, and had a successful hunt. They arrived one evening while we were at Emma's. Emma fed us well. We had fresh fish, cranberries in seal oil, and caribou. In addition, she sent Susan and I home with fresh caribou meat. Family members would drop in, and it was nice to meet them all. I am very thankful for her hospitality and warm welcome.



One sunny evening we went by boat to pick cranberries, north of the village. We came back with bucketfuls of cranberries !! On the way there we saw fish camps set up along the river. It was a memorable evening.

I also had the chance to reconnect with Sunii Jackson, and had a chance to meet her husband. We met the year before at Camp Sivu, a fish camp outside of Noorvik, and kept in touch. She told me about her childhood in Selawik.

New roads were being built while we were there, and were nearly complete. The roads are now wider than before: and it is much easier to get around. The roads are not for cars, but are great for four-wheelers, bicycles, and pedestrians.

People were whizzing by on their four-wheelers and bicycles, and it was fun to watch.

Many thanks to Susan Georgette and Lee Anne Ayres. I am truly grateful for the experience, and glad I had the chance to meet such wonderful people.

Vera Stein

Friends Volunteer

Anchorage, Alaska

Looking for news about National Refuges and Events?
You've got to check out REFUGE WATCH and sign up for their blog updates at:

<http://www.refugewatch.org>

Yukon Delta National Wildlife Refuge 100th Anniversary Celebration

Friends' Board members Christina Whiting and Carla Stanley coordinated the Yukon Delta National Wildlife Refuge 100th Anniversary celebration which took place in Bethel on November 13th and 14th. The celebration included activities for the entire family as well as a welcome reception for Wings Over Wild Lands, a photography exhibit,

featuring images by Tom Collopy, Mary Frische, Ted Swem and Jan van de Kam. These large photos of the refuge lands and wildlife highlight the vast watery world of the Yukon and Kuskokwim deltas. Together, these two rivers make up the premier waterbird breeding site on the continent: the Yukon Delta National Wildlife Refuge.

- We had around 150 visitors to the exhibit opening (Wings Over Wild Lands) and open house (125 people signed the guest book, and I'm sure we missed some; 150 door prize tickets were entered, and I'm sure we had a few duplicates! I'd bet we had some people wander in who neither signed in nor entered the raffle). Several staff members, including Deputy Manager Shaun Sanchez, Fisheries Biologist Dan Gillikin, Head Interpreter Louie Andrew, and Senior Waterfowl Biologist Mike Wege spent long hours at the exhibit on Friday evening and/or Saturday to visit with, and answer questions from, the public.
- We had five Friends of Alaska NWR work with us, four from Homer (Mary Frische, Tom Collopy, Carla Stanley, and Christina Whiting) and one from Bethel (Ed Klem). The four Homerites worked Thursday, Friday, and Saturday on all aspects of the open house (e.g., cleaning, transporting gear, hanging the exhibit, food prep and presentation, greeting visitors, etc.), as well as a formal Friends presentation by Carla the night of the opening, and Tom and Mary's digital photography workshop on Saturday. Carla was a cleaning dynamo at the bunkhouse, despite having only one functional arm (the other's in a sling awaiting major surgery), and Christina was wrestling with a virus the whole time. On Saturday, Bethel Friend Ed Klem assisted Christine McCaffery all day at the nature craft table for kids, which was busy from opening at 0900 to closing at 1500.
- Six door prizes were given away, including three matted and wrapped prints from Tom and Mary (red fox, brown bear, bald eagle), a Friends T-shirt, a Yukon Delta NWR ballcap, and a Nat Geo migratory bird poster.
- Left-over hors d'oeuvres, sherbert, and sheet cake were donated to The Tundra Women's Coalition (our local battered women's shelter). A selection of the exhibits photos will be donated to adorn the walls of TWC's soon-to-open new facility.
- New staff biologists Kristine Sowl and Melissa Gabrielson stood out in the 15 degree weather for 6 hours on Saturday, watching birds and chatting with visitors to our outdoor birding station overlooking the Kuskokwim River across the street from the exhibit. Species observed included Northern Goshawk, Common Raven, Black-billed Magpie, Black-capped Chickadee, Pine Grosbeak, and redpolls. I took one group of birders to a few local feeders, where we got great views of grosbeaks (including a few stunning males) and chickadees.
- Deputy Manager Shaun Sanchez transported his own propane grill down to the birding station, where he cooked and passed out grilled hot dogs and bags of chips to dozens of visitors over a 3-hour period during the middle of the day. Of the 80 hot dogs he purchased, only 6 were left at the end of the day.
- Our memorial table honored all refuge employees who have passed away, and specifically remembered the following with framed photos and printed tributes: Richard Davis, Chuck Hunt, Cal Lensink, John Morgart, Jack Paniyak, and Charles Strickland.
- Perhaps the most rewarding comment from the visitor log was "Thank you so much for bringing these beautiful photos to Bethel!" Another special element of the celebration was the visit from some of the young residents at the McCann Center (providing recovery therapy for young inhalant abusers). They visited on Friday afternoon before we were officially open, and so they had the gallery to themselves for about an hour. They were impressively engaged with all of the stunning photographs from the Delta, and seemed to really appreciate the visit.

Bullet points submitted by Brian McCaffery, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Unalaska's Centennial Celebration

The Unalaska Centennial Celebration started off with the usual jitters as weather threatened to prevent the two Friends volunteers, Tom Balland & myself, from even making it to the island. After a detour to King Salmon & back to Anchorage for the night, we successfully made it to Unalaska on Friday evening, in the nick of time, with a full schedule of events beginning the next morning. Thankfully, Poppy Benson, our fearless leader from the Alaska Maritime Refuge, played it safe and arrived on Wednesday. By the time Tom & I arrived at the Grand Aleutian Hotel, Poppy and Carolyn Reed, a local artist who volunteered to help hang the exhibit, had that project nearly complete. It was time to get some dinner and recharge for the coming activities.

Saturday morning, Tom, Poppy, and I headed out to Summer Bay and met up with our excited group of 15 participants at the Agamgik Bay trailhead, who were ready to explore their local Refuge. A light sprinkling of rain soon gave way to pleasant conditions, while Suzi Golodoff, Friends member &

author of "Unalaska Island Wildflowers" guided our group and discussed the flora. Mary Schwenzfeier, new Friends member, and Suzi put together a wonderful printed plant guide, using Suzi's photos, which really added to the experience. Brenda Tellman participated in the hike and added her knowledge of traditional plant uses. A few folks, including myself, forged ahead across the island to Agamgik Bay, while the majority of the group took their time exploring the plants and hiked to a beautiful vantage point before turning back. Mary had printed out 50 guides, which allowed us to give copies out at our other Friends events, which was a huge hit and allowed us to share a little piece of this wonderful experience with others in the community.

After the hike, most of the group headed over to Humpty Cove beach for a storytelling campfire and cookout. Local folks really helped out by bringing firewood to the site including a flatbed load of pallets thanks to Andy Pillon from PacSteve. Safeway donated hot dogs, buns, & lemonade. Jeff Hancock

brought his grill so that we could cook in style. The special treat was when Rufina Shaisnikoff arrived with elders Nick Galaktionoff and her mother, Maria Turnpaugh, who shared moving and interesting stories of their experiences on Unalaska Island. We had 33 people turn out for this family friendly event and a wonderful time was had by all.

The main event, the Bogoslof Birthday Bash, began at 2 pm on Sunday, and even though it was a rare sunny day in Unalaska, 35 people attended. The celebration began with an opening reception for Tom Collopy & Mary Frische's incredible photo exhibit, Islands in Time. After folks had time to view the stunning photographs while nibbling on yummy food catered by the Grand Aleutian, four presenters took the stage. Poppy kicked off the show with "Birds & Beasts of Bogoslof", which elicited oohs & aahs with beautiful images of wildlife & wilderness. Then Debbie Corbett, USFWS archaeologist, described the history of the Alaska Maritime Refuge, including the beginning of the conservation movement, the

Harriman Expedition, and creation of the Refuge system by Teddy Roosevelt. Next, Jennifer Reynolds, volcanologist and UAF professor, presented “Explosive Bogoslof” showing how the volcanic island has changed shape over the last century through building and removal of substrate by eruption and erosion cycles. Sue Schulmeister from USFWS closed the show with an informative discussion of the “Lands & Trails of Unalaska” and the role of local residents in establishing easements. It seemed apparent that many Unalaska residents were unaware that over half million acres of Refuge lands are located on the island.

On Monday, our group had an opportunity for some R&R during the day and many of us hiked through Refuge lands again, this time crossing the island on the beautiful Peace of Mind trail. This was extra special for me since I had been unable to hike this trail during my time on the island last year, and really wanted to, & finally got the chance!

Monday evening we held a Friends meeting at the library and Jeff Hancock presented

“Hiking the Wild Refuge”, an incredible journey where he & two friends spent a week hiking from the abandoned village of Chernofski back to Unalaska through extreme weather & terrain across rarely visited Refuge lands. There was a big turnout of 20 participants and Jeff Williams, USFWS biologist, gave a status update of the Aleutian Islands Unit of the Maritime Refuge, after which we brainstormed potential future projects and direction for the group.

The Centennial Celebration culminated with a cooperative event with the National Park Service. The Elder Send-Off Ceremony to the Lost Villages featured a performance by Nawan Alaxsxa Axanan, the Unalaska Island dancers, led by Laresa Syverson, followed by a presentation by Rachel Mason, an anthropologist with NPS. The successful event was held at the Unalaska Senior Center with 60 attendees, many of whom had just flown in for the journey to come. Rachel would be taking a group of original inhabitants & descendants to the lost villages of Makushin and Kashega aboard the USFWS M/V Tiglax. During Rachel’s presentation, she had

old photographs where members of the audience helped her identify people and places in the photographs. It was incredibly special to be present for the reunion of these lost villagers.

The last contribution that Friends made to the community of Unalaska was donating Tom & Mary’s photo exhibit to the City of Unalaska and then installing the display in the Port of Dutch Harbor airport, just flying out of the community.

Poppy stayed on another day to greet Steve Delahanty, the new Alaska Maritime Refuge manager, when he arrived on the M/V Tiglax. The local Unalaska Friends members held a meeting with Steve to get to know each other and discuss the unique way that Friends and the Refuge benefit each other.

by Elisa Russ

Thank you

Refuge Friends in Homer for your hospitality, friendship and special hosting skills. It was wonderful to meet you all last November and be able to share a glimpse of our Nowitna NWR with you...please don’t hesitate to stop by if you’re on the Yukon River!

Tamara

FRIENDS OF ALASKA *National Wildlife Refuges*
DIRECTORY OF BOARD MEMBERS AND COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN

President..... David Raskin.....davidcraskin@yahoo.com
Vice President....Sharon Baur.....sharon.baur@yahoo.com
Secretary....Christina Whiting.....alaskachristina@gmail.com
Treasurer..... Wendy Loyawendy.loya@yahoo.com
Finance....Joe Cannon
Outreach...Elisa Russ.....elisa.russ@alaska.gov
Education...Carla Stanley.....4rdog24@gmail.com
Sets up projects throughout our 16 refuges
Representative Coordinator...Nicole Whittington–Evans.....nicolewe@tws.org
Volunteer Coordinator... Betty Siegel.....betty.siegel@alaska.net
Membership.....Ginny Harris.....ginny@eaglestation.com
Information/Website Designer.....Jason Sodergren ...Jason@taiga.com
Newsletter...Tamara Clark.....tamaraclark49@gmail.com
US Fish & Wildlife Service...Kristen Gilbert....kristen_gilbert@fws.gov

FRIENDS OF ALASKA
National Wildlife Refuges

2440 E. Tudor Road, PMB 283
Anchorage AK 99507

phone: (907) 786-3391

email: akrefugefriends@gmail.com

And don't forget to visit us online at:
www.alaskarefugefriends.org