

# FRONTIERS

News about Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Managed Public Lands in Alaska • Issue 123 • Summer 2015

## Abundance of Summer



BLM

Alaska



Hiker holding a salmonberry  
by Kim Mincer



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@BLMAlaska

rules to play by

### The Doggy Doo Dilemma...

Thriving E. coli or fecal coliform bacteria, salmonella and giardia, and high nitrogen levels in canine feces are polluting our public lands. Even a single gram of dog waste can contain 23 million fecal coliform bacteria, which can cause cramps, diarrhea, intestinal illness, and serious kidney disorders in humans. The Environmental Protection Agency ranks dog feces in the same category as herbicides and insecticides; oil, grease, toxic chemicals; and acid drainage from abandoned mines. The U.S. Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) says pet droppings can contribute to zoonoses — diseases animals pass to humans. Fecal parasite larvae lingers in the soil on our public lands for years, and can infect humans or animals who come in contact with it. Children playing in dirt are vulnerable.

### What to Doo?

Pick up after your dog. Scoop the poop. Bag the doo. Do not assume it eventually goes away or will decay into fertilizer. If you always scoop, then it won't matter that areas like the BLM Campbell Tract have strict scoop the poop rules and others do not. It isn't the rules, it's the reason behind them. So remember, the cycle begins and ends with you. There are even special flushable bags and biodegradable bags for pet waste disposal. That's 'what to doo.'



Kim Mincer

Dog waste disposal bags are provided at trails on Campbell Tract.



Alaska Fire Service

Tanana River fire.

## Welcome to Frontiers!

This issue focuses on summer's abundance in snapshots, stories, and snippets from what BLM Alaska does. During the summer of 2015, the Alaska fire situation dominated our news, affected people statewide, and prompted closures of some of our public lands. With the challenges, my respect continues to grow for our Alaska firefighters and what they do.

In this issue, we are replacing the calendar with "Rules to Play By," full of information about the many uses of our public lands. Also in this issue, we look at Alaska berries, roadhouses, a visit to the community of Lower Kalskag, news flashes from around the state, and eyes on the Arctic.

If you haven't done so, check out BLM Alaska's social media sites. It's a way to keep what you love about BLM Alaska *FRONTIERS* going on a daily basis.

We hope you enjoy this issue of BLM Alaska *FRONTIERS*.

Karen J. Laubenstein  
Editor

### Social Media Update



Vanessa Rathbun

Alaska experiences an abundance of daylight during the summer, especially around the summer solstice (June 21). All of Alaska near and north of the Arctic Circle gets 24 hours of daylight, while the rest of the state enjoys 12 hours or more throughout the summer. This means you can enjoy long days of hiking, mountain biking, fishing, rafting, wildlife viewing, camping, picnicking, sightseeing, gold panning, riding ATVs, and other recreation.

Having more daylight also increases visibility for the wildland fire fighting crews to battle our record-breaking fire season.

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# Summer of Smoke and Flames



Phillip Spor

Firefighters conduct a burn operation to protect the Trans-Alaska Pipeline from the Aggie Creek Fire.

Alaska's 2015 fire season was shaping up to be a season of extremes, measured in millions of acres burned and miles of hose deployed.

After a winter with record low snowfall in portions of the state, fire managers at the BLM Alaska Fire Service (AFS) were prepared for an earlier-than-normal fire season. They scheduled an early start of training for smokejumpers and firefighters and brought on aircraft a month earlier than normal.

But, while fire managers were ready, no one could have anticipated the magnitude of Alaska's fire season. Thunderstorms brought more than 46,000 lightning strikes to much of Alaska and western Canada during a four-day period in late June. The extraordinary burst of lightning came after weeks of hot, dry weather and quickly ignited hundreds of wildland fires throughout the state.

"The number of starts, and their proximity to communities and allotments, was more than many of us were anticipating after a very slow start to the fire season," said AFS Manager Kent Slaughter.

In just a few days, all of Alaska's available firefighting resources were hard at work and firefighting crews, incident management teams, and support personnel from the Lower 48 quickly headed north.



Sam Harrel

A C-5M Super Galaxy arrives at Eielson Airforce Base, Alaska, with more than 127,000 pounds of supplies for Alaska firefighting crews.

By mid-July, 689 fires had burned approximately 4.77 million acres and the 2015 Alaska fire season was on track to challenge the record set in 2004. That's when 701 fires burned 6.59 million acres.

AFS employees quickly rose to the challenges of outfitting, transporting and feeding thousands of firefighters sent to fires far from Alaska's road system. When heavy smoke grounded flights, boats, barges and even a hovercraft were used to get crews and supplies to their destinations.



Ken Frederick

Fairbanks was engulfed in smoke from near by fires. The smoke was so bad one day in July, air quality levels were "hazardous" and people were advised to stay indoors.

"It's always gratifying to see how the AFS staff works through those logistical hurdles and comes up with creative workarounds," Slaughter said.

By mid-July, an enormous volume of supplies had been sent out by the BLM AFS Cache. The numbers were staggering:

- 78,000 MRE meals
- 4,500 canteens
- 3,000 pairs of fire pants
- 450 chainsaws
- 550 high-pressure pumps
- 20,000 100-foot lengths of hose (about 390 miles)
- 2,500 Pulaski firefighting tools

And, before the fire season is over, most of that gear will be returned to the warehouse. Long after the firefighters have gone home and the fires are out cold, AFS employees will be repairing, cleaning and refurbishing the tools and equipment and storing it away for the next fire season.

— Maureen Clark  
Alaska State Office  
Public Affairs Specialist



Check us out on Twitter and Facebook!  
@BLM\_AFS @BLMAFS

## In Action with Team Rubicon on the Aggie Creek Fire



About 20 firefighters and I, traveling through several airports on our way to the fire lines of Alaska, all experienced similar reactions from members of the public – an overwhelming sense of gratitude and awe with the work we were about to undertake. All of us – with our BLM or Team Rubicon T-shirts, fire-resistant clothing, fire packs and other necessary gear – prepared for what was, for many of us, our first wildland fire experience.

While my normal day job is with BLM's National Office of New Media in the nation's capital, my heart lies in the field (after all my dad has spent 25 years working for the Idaho Falls District and many of those fighting fire). So after taking firefighter training in 2014, I jumped at the chance to combine my social media background with my Firefighter Type II qualifications and head to the last frontier to highlight a new partnership between Team Rubicon and the BLM.

Throughout the week, BLM's social media accounts provided "real-time coverage" of the crew's experience to promote this impressive partnership and shed light on what it's like to be a wildland firefighter. This provided an opportunity to share the veterans' point-of-view about the transition from military service to firefighter.

"I think our presence here is a natural evolution from our [Team Rubicon] mission," said Marc Gonzalez, a Navy reservist who lives in Colorado Springs, CO. "Veterans have a unique skillset, unique training, and a unique way to be able to manage diverse situations that require a lot of on-your-feet training."

Team Rubicon's mission was a perfect fit for the BLM fire program, providing an opportunity for veterans to acquire jobs, gain skills, and develop interests in careers with the BLM or other federal agencies in fire, or even other land management areas.



Samantha Storms

Team Rubicon Region 8 veterans and crew members from the BLM Wyoming Wind River/ Big Horn Basin and High Plains Districts.

BLM Wyoming firefighters made up the majority of crew leadership, and by the time they reported to Fairbanks, Alaska on June 26 to mobilize for the Aggie Creek Fire, it had already burned over 14,000 acres. It took only hours after reaching the fire for Team Rubicon Region 8 veterans and BLM Wyoming crew members to learn there were major differences between fighting fire in Alaska and in the Lower 48. However, with the help of other agency, state, and Alaska Native fire crews, this assignment provided an opportunity to tackle unfamiliar Alaskan terrain and put their wildland firefighting training to work.

"It's obvious to see that these vets come from a mission driven culture, where teamwork is necessary to achieve a common goal," said Beau Kidd, Forest Service Assistant Fire Management Officer for the Bighorn National Forest (crew representative for Team Rubicon and BLM). "This is an important skill-set to have in wildland fire."

— Samantha Storms  
Public Affairs Specialist  
BLM Headquarters



## SCRUMPTIOUSLY EXTRAORDINARY:

# Wildberries of Alaska

It's a wildberry lover's dream – with nearly 50 types of mostly edible wildberries growing all over Alaska, berry collecting can easily become an annual habit and delight to your palate and culinary efforts. From mid-to-late summers and up to the first frosts, berries become part of the Alaska landscape and many are available for picking for free on BLM-managed public lands around the state. Berry hot spots are often well-guarded secrets by local berry pickers, but there are often ways to find your own places.

Always be aware that bears love berries, and stay alert for them. Make sure you make a lot of noise to alert the bears of your presence and know how to handle an encounter with ease. Know Bear Aware tips and stay safe.

Before you go, do a little research. Not all of BLM Alaska-managed public lands are open to berry

picking or collecting other things that grow wild in Alaska. There is a permit (5450-24) required for a minimal cost if you are collecting berries for commercial use or more than five gallons of a species of berries in a year for personal use. A permit costs \$20 to collect up to 10 gallons under the rules of the permit, and \$2 per gallon above the 10. You can get your permit after you know where you want to collect berries through a BLM field or district office, or the Alaska State Office in downtown Anchorage, either in person or by mail.

Berries are a “special forest product” and subject to management and regulations by the BLM Forestry program.

Berries are:

- Naturally low in fat, sodium, and calories.
- Cholesterol free.
- Source of many essential nutrients, including dietary fiber, vitamin C and folate (folic acid).

If you find white berries in Alaska, do not eat them. The most poisonous berry in Alaska is Baneberry and it is sometimes white or red. Baneberry can look a lot like high-bush cranberries. There are guides to Alaska berries published by the Cooperative Extension Service at the University of Alaska-Fairbanks, with color and important information. You can also buy commercial berry guides at bookstores.

*Clockwise from top left:* Cloudberry grows low to the ground compared to salmon berries, on a plant 2-8 inches high in boggy, open tundra and forest. Photo by Carol Scott, ARCUS. All smiles after feasting on fresh Alaskan blueberries. Photo by Craig McCaa. Crowberries look like blueberries but have different needle-like leaves and are common in bogs and alpine meadows. Photo by National Park Service. Lingonberries are red, and tart. Found low to the ground in woods, thickets, mountain slopes and tundra. Photo by U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.



### Berry Berry Healthy...

Researchers discovered extraordinarily high levels of antioxidants in Alaska's blueberries, cranberries, raspberries, lingonberries, and a basket of other wild fruits Alaskans commonly gather as late summer cools. The berries are an excellent source of vitamin C, niacin, manganese, natural sugars, and fiber.

Many of Alaska's berries have higher oxygen-radical absorption capacity (antioxidants) than commercial fruits studied. Anything over 40 is considered very high. Lower 48 wild blueberries, for example, score 61 for antioxidants. Alaska blueberries score 111 and bog blueberries 77, with high bush cranberries and lingonberries a whopping 172.

### Berry, Berry GOOD!

- Blueberry
- Bunchberry (dogwood)
- Cloudberry
- Cranberry (highbush)
- Crowberry
- Currants
- Elderberry
- Gooseberry
- Huckleberry (Red)
- Lingonberry (lowbush cranberries)
- Nagoonberry (Arctic raspberry or Arctic bramble)
- Raspberry
- Salmonberry (also low-bush salmonberry, aqpiq, baked apple berry, and cloudberry)
- Serviceberry
- Strawberry
- Watermelon Berry



### Berry, Berry BAD!

Know before you go. Avoid all white berries in Alaska – they're all poisonous. Teach children to stay away from all berries unless with an adult.

The most infamous poisonous berry in Alaska is the **baneberry**, which has white or red berries—look for a black spot on the red berry. Baneberries look like highbush cranberries, but the little seed is crescent-shaped, while highbush cranberry seeds are a flattened stone shape.



Berries sometimes contain the immature or resting life stage of insects. Often, affected berries are wrinkled or distorted. Pick through and discard these berries. Another option is to make a brine solution of ½ teaspoon salt to 1 gallon tepid water. Add berries and let stand for one hour. The worms will escape from the berries into the water. Drain and rinse berries.



BLM

Gakona Village Youth picking blueberries along the Denali Highway during youth hikes sponsored by the BLM and the Wrangell Institute for Science and Environment.



Craig McCaa

Pack rafter stopping to pick blueberries in the Steese National Conservation Area.

### Don't pick here...

Gathering vegetation (including berries) is not permitted on Campbell Tract in Anchorage and in the Trans-Alaska Pipeline System corridor.



# Listening in Lower Kalskag

## COMMUNITY VOICES CONCERNS ABOUT RED DEVIL MINE

The Anchorage Field Office invites many federally recognized tribes to meet with us each year, but it's rare that we receive such invitations. So it was an honor to be invited to the 2015 Tribal Gathering of the Village of Lower Kalskag.

A brisk wind greeted our small plane as we landed at Kalskag airstrip on June 9. This was our seventh trip in the last five years to this traditional Yup'ik community in Western Alaska's middle Kuskokwim region. Lower Kalskag has proactively participated in the Red Devil Mine public involvement process since 2009, when the BLM began investigating this abandoned mercury mine. Lower Kalskag is 138 river miles downstream of the Red Devil Mine site.

It was good to receive a warm welcome and see familiar faces among the approximately 50 Lower Kalskag community members who attended, including a large number of youth. They listened intently as project manager Mike McCrum explained what's been accomplished at the Red Devil Mine and what's on the horizon as the mine site's Remedial Investigation and Feasibility Study nears completion. McCrum also summarized alternatives for treating contaminants at the Red Devil Mine site as tribal members listened and asked thoughtful questions.

Then it was the BLM's turn to listen.

"You've been investigating that mine for six years, right?" one elder asked. "Why is it taking so long?" McCrum explained that the BLM regraded the mine tailings from Red Devil Creek in summer 2014 to prevent further erosion in the Kuskokwim River. McCrum explained that this a multi-step process



Lower Kalskag Mayor Crim Evan asks BLM Red Devil Mine project manager Mike McCrum about project funding.

that takes a long time to complete. Through the work completed to date, the BLM became aware that the mine tailings from Red Devil Creek were eroding into the Kuskokwim River, the BLM focused over the summer of 2014 on re-grading the pile of mine tailings to prevent further erosion and resolve the issue. The next step in the process is that BLM will develop a proposed plan for long-term remediation of the site and share it with tribes and community leaders.

We heard several tribal members express concerns about whether there would be sufficient funding in the future to complete cleanup of the Red Devil Mine site. One resident asked, "What if you don't get as much funding as you need, do you stop?" Outgoing Tribal Administrator Jackie Levi urged tribal members to run for council office and continue to engage the BLM, other agencies and legislators for the funds to complete the project.

Talking about contaminants like mercury and arsenic isn't easy, but years of meeting with the concerned and engaged members of this small community have created a positive working relationship between the BLM and the Village of Lower Kalskag. After all, we want the same thing: To find the long-term solution for the Red Devil Mine site that's best for Kuskokwim region communities and future generations.

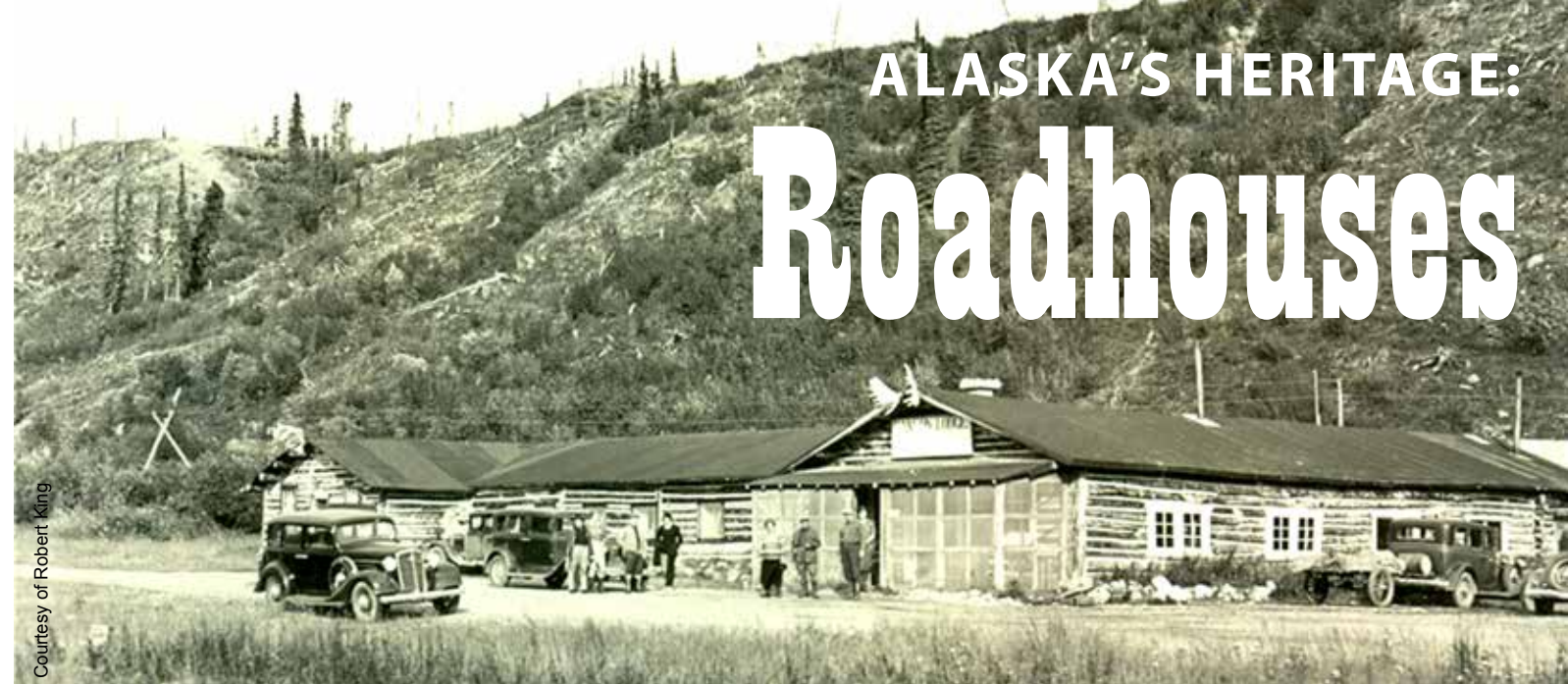
— Teresa McPherson,  
Anchorage Field Office

For more information about the Red Devil Mine project, visit [www.blm.gov/ak/red\\_devil\\_mine](http://www.blm.gov/ak/red_devil_mine).

Teresa McPherson

Courtesy of Robert King

# ALASKA'S HERITAGE: Roadhouses



Paxson Roadhouse along the Richardson Highway. Photo by Dann Fairbanks.

Starting in the later 1800s, travelers in Alaska relied on privately built establishments called roadhouses for vital lodging, food, and accommodation for their horses or dog teams. Such places were needed year round and were life-saving in the harsh Alaskan winter. Roadhouses were typically spaced about 20 miles apart, roughly a day's travel, with some later becoming community hubs, including those at Copper Center, Gulkana, Paxson, and elsewhere.

Roadhouses ranged from makeshift tents, sometimes pitched only temporarily on ice and snow, to more permanent log and frame structures in later years. By the first two decades of the 20th century, roadhouses were found along most Alaska trails and primitive roads, including the 386-mile Valdez-Fairbanks Trail.

Today's Richardson Highway follows the original trail. At least 30 roadhouses operated along this route in past years, with most gone now due to fire, abandonment, or realignment of the highway. Of those roadhouses that remain from the early years, Rika's Roadhouse at Alaska's Big Delta State Historical Park, 87 miles south of Fairbanks, is the most visited. It began as federal land that was claimed as a homestead.

Early postcards sold as souvenirs charmingly depicted many of these now-vanished roadhouses that accommodated travelers from the port of Valdez to the interior gold rush town of Fairbanks.

Within today's BLM Sourdough Creek Campground, 215 miles south of Fairbanks off the Richardson Highway, BLM has placed an interpretive sign telling of the remains of fox pens from the 1920s found during an archaeological survey. These pens were associated with the nearby old Sourdough roadhouse that stood from 1903 until burning in the 1990s.



Copper Center Roadhouse along the Richardson Highway.



Munsons Roadhouse along the Fairbanks to Valdez Trail.

In all, archaeological work and historical research done both there and at other roadhouses locations continues to increase our understanding of this important part of Alaska's heritage.

— Robert King, Ph.D.,  
BLM Alaska Archaeologist  
and Historian

Courtesy of Robert King

Courtesy of Robert King



Elder Elena Sergie, whose brother worked at Red Devil Mine, shares her concerns as Tribal President Phyllis Evan and community members listen.

Teresa McPherson



## New District Managers

The BLM Alaska Anchorage and Fairbanks District Offices welcome new District Managers. (Photos by Lesli Ellis-Wouters)



**Mark Spencer** is the new BLM Anchorage District Manager. Spencer comes from BLM Nevada, where he served as Field Manager at BLM's Red Rock Canyon and Sloan Canyon National Conservation Areas. Prior to that, he was Field Manager for the Pahrump (Nevada) Field Office. He also served as State Planning and Environmental Coordinator for BLM New Mexico. Spencer's career has crossed state and federal government levels

in community development, resource planning and management. He is a member of the American Institute of Certified Planners and has a Master of Planning degree from the University of Virginia and a Bachelor of Science degree from George Mason University.



**Geoff Beyersdorf** is the new BLM Fairbanks District Manager. Beyersdorf served most recently as the Lewistown Field Manager in central Montana. He began his BLM career as the Subsistence Biologist for the Anchorage Field Office in 2008 and completed the National Training Center Emerging Leaders Program in 2010. Prior to his time with BLM, Beyersdorf spent 16 years with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in Alaska,

where he served as a Pilot-Biologist. His time in Alaska included work with the subsistence management program, development of tribal partnerships, and rural youth education. Beyersdorf began his federal career in Oregon working as a Biological Technician for the U.S. Forest Service. His graduate studies were conducted at Humboldt State University in Wildlife Biology, with an undergraduate degree from the University of Michigan in Wildlife Research.

Both Spencer and Beyersdorf have extensive planning and natural resource experience which will be integral to BLM Alaska planning efforts. As District Managers they will work closely with local governments, tribes, and communities on federal public lands issues.

## Campbell Creek Science Center hosts "Teachers on the Public Lands" educator

Rebecca King, an eighth grade science teacher at an Anchorage middle school, is working with the science center on a climate change curriculum through the "Teachers on the Public Lands" program. King is revising last year's program after a program field test. Her work includes the final curriculum, field trip activities for teachers, updating the Hands on the Land website, and adapting the program for seventh and eighth grades.

## Artist in Residence



Christine Nguyen

BLM Alaska's Summer Artist in Residence, Christine Nguyen of Long Beach, California, just completed her week-long residency in the Fortymile and Eagle area. Here she creates a cyanotype in front of the mule barn at historic Fort Egbert in Eagle. Cyanotypes are made using a 19th century process where a paper coated with a light-sensitive chemical is exposed to ultraviolet light (in this case, sunlight). Christine uses shadows from found objects (here an animal horn) to block the light in places and create a silhouette effect on the paper. During her trip she enjoyed mostly clear skies — a rarity in this summer of wildfire smoke — and took a refreshing swim in the Yukon River.

## BLM continues the fight against invasives

**Dalton Highway weed pulls:** The Central Yukon Field Office is preparing for another year of pulling invasive species along the Dalton Highway in cooperation with the Kanuti National Wildlife Refuge and the Friends of Refuges organization. The first weed pull was June 22-26, and another scheduled for July 27-31. This year's focus is hand-pulling and weed-whacking white sweetclover and bird vetch around bridge crossings to help prevent downstream transport into unaffected areas.

**Anchorage Weed Smackdown 2015:** The Anchorage Field Office was again a partner for this fun and family friendly competition to control invasive plants in Anchorage on July 18 at the Russian Jack Springs Park. This was the fifth annual smackdown in Anchorage.

**Anchorage Field Office installs boot brush stations on Campbell Tract trailheads:** The boot brush stations are yet another weapon in the ongoing battle to help control the spread of invasive species on area trails.



Nathan Rathbun

Boot brush at Campbell Tract.

## BLM Director visits Alaska

Director Neil Kornze traveled to the village of Chicken in Alaska's Interior at the end of May for the Fortymile Miners Board of Trustees meeting. He listened to concerns about placer mining as it relates to federally managed public lands and ongoing land use planning developments. He toured small mining operations along Jack Wade Creek and a BLM Alaska project working to develop new, economical ways of reclaiming lands and provide for healthy ecosystems.



Lesli Ellis-Wouters

BLM Director Neil Kornze in front of "Mr. Eggie," the oversized metal chicken, in this remote Alaska community.

The director also received a warm welcome from the Nuiqsut community within the National Petroleum Reserve in Alaska (NPR-A). He attended a four-hour town hall meeting and potluck. The NPR-A contains vital oil and gas resources that will contribute to the domestic energy supply, but it is also home to Alaska Native villages. The director listened to community concerns and enjoyed a potluck with several traditional Inupiat delicacies such as muktuk (whale skin and blubber), goose soup, and mikigaaq (fermented whale meat).

"It is very important to me that we listen to our communities and develop relationships and understandings that will allow our multiple use and sustained yield mission to continue while also conserving our resources for future generations," said Kornze.



Lesli Ellis-Wouters

BLM staff and residents of the village of Nuiqsut.

## National Trails Day at Campbell Tract 2015



Brad Muir

Don't worry, the spruce saplings were replanted in a better location! This family of volunteers helped with the removal of brush and new growth from the fuel break along the southeast boundary of Campbell Tract during National Trails Day. The BLM created the fuel break in 2001 to help protect the adjoining Far North Bicentennial Park and nearby subdivisions if a wildfire occurs on the 730-acre Campbell Tract.

## National Public Lands Day 2015



Mamie Graham

It was a fine, sunny Saturday for nearly 50 volunteers to pick up marine debris and trash from Yakutat's popular Cannon beach. The volunteers picked up enough trash to fill a pickup and flatbed trailer! The BLM thanks its partners, the U.S. Forest Service, National Park Service, City and Borough of Yakutat, Yakutat Tlingit Tribe, Public Lands Foundation, and Alaska Geographic, for working through numerous logistics to make this a great and successful event!



## Federal subsistence hunting permits

The BLM Glennallen Field Office is issuing the 2015-2016 federal subsistence moose and caribou hunting permits for Unit 13. The BLM issues nearly 3,500 federal subsistence permits annually.





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# Eyes on the Arctic

Since the United States assumed the chair of the Arctic Council in April, Alaska's North Slope is getting a fresh look. Here are facts that you may not have realized about BLM's involvement in the U.S. Arctic:

- BLM Alaska manages the largest tract of land in the U.S. Arctic, the 22.8-million-acre National Petroleum Reserve in Alaska (NPR-A). The area was set aside in 1923 as an emergency oil supply for the U.S. Navy. The BLM has administered the NPR-A since 1976 when oil and gas leasing was authorized in the reserve.
- In addition to oil and gas leasing, BLM Alaska manages a wide variety of activities in the NPR-A including scientific research, infrastructure development, restoration and cleanup, recreation, guided hunting, overland transport, and subsistence.
- The BLM supports the North Slope Science Initiative (NSSI). The NSSI is an intergovernmental effort to increase scientific collaboration among local, state and federal agencies, Alaska Native organizations and others operating on Alaska's North Slope and adjacent seas.
- BLM Alaska and the NSSI represent the U.S. in international arctic science forums and in working groups of the Arctic Council.



Bob Wick

National Petroleum Reserve in Alaska summer aerial photo of lakes and tundra.

For more information about Alaska's Arctic or the NSSI, check out [www.northslope.org](http://www.northslope.org).