FRONTIERS

News about Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Managed Public Lands in Alaska • Issue 124 • Fall 2015

BLM

Alaska

Fall in Love with Your Trails

Dog sled team enjoying the groomed trails of the White Mountains National Recreation Area

by Jodi Bailey

ISSUE: 124

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Fall foliage and snow-capped mountains near Tangle Lakes along the Denali Highway.

Welcome to Frontiers!

Love your Alaska trails! Fall in Alaska is unlike anywhere else – the bright purple fireweed and blueberry bushes evolve into vivid reds, birch and aspen and cottonwood leaves turn golden, spruce keep their dark greens, and white "termination dust" coats the mountain peaks, the snow accumulating in bright contrast to the foliage below.

In Issue #124, we are featuring sled dog mushing in the White Mountains National Recreation Area and our thoughts are turning to the planned January BLM Alaska IditaChat, featuring sled dogs answering questions submitted in advance from schoolchildren. The National Weather Service says the Alaska winter will experience strong El Niño conditions with warmer temperatures. If there is again lack of snow throughout Southcentral Alaska, the BLM White Mountains National Recreation Area may be one of the best places to train for sled dog races.

We also look back at the 2015 fire season, teachers developing climate change curricula, interns gaining experience through the BLM, and how Alaskans can get a permit to gather firewood or cut their Christmas tree. We hope you enjoy this glimpse into our Alaska and Issue #124 of Frontiers.

Karen

Karen J. Laubenstein
Editor

@BLMAlaska

Social Media Event

Caroline Brown

2016 #BLMIditaChat
Involve your schools and youth! Iditarod/Yukon Quest/competitive and recreational mushers will choose one of their dogs to answer questions about mushing and life as a sled dog. The #BLMIditaChat takes place online on **January 20, 2016, from 9 a.m. until 11 a.m. Alaska time (1-3 p.m. Eastern Time)**. Write to klaubens@blm.gov to learn how your school and youth can participate.

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rules to play by

Public lands can provide warmth and holiday cheer

Many Alaskans use wood-burning stoves or fireplaces to heat their homes. Did you know that you can gather firewood or cut a Christmas tree from some areas on public lands? With BLM Alaska's permit, you can harvest timber for firewood, fencing, building, or for other domestic purposes, or cut a Christmas tree (a nominal permit fee may apply and varies by location), in certain areas on BLM-managed public lands.

1. Landowners – Know who manages the lands where you want to gather firewood or cut a Christmas tree.
2. Permits – If it is on BLM-managed public lands, contact the nearest BLM field office to apply for a permit, or learn where you can do this on BLM-managed public lands.
3. Christmas trees – Stop by a BLM field office. Permits for personal or commercial use may have a nominal cost (varies by location).
4. The permits do not allow selling, bartering, trading, or exporting the Christmas trees or firewood.

Reminders:

- Plan ahead. Know land ownership for all harvesting activities. Be respectful of private property. Carry a map, your permit, and be prepared for Alaska's unpredictable fast-moving weather systems.
- Stay on designated trails and easements.
- Cut trees 50 feet away from the trail or road.
- You do not need a permit to gather dead wood for immediate campfire use, except where posted.
- Do not top a tree – be sure stumps are six inches or less from the ground.

Other public lands also require permits and may charge nominal fees – State of Alaska Division of Forestry and Alaska State Parks, U.S. Forest Service-Alaska Region, or U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service-Alaska Region manage public lands and may have areas that allow you to cut Christmas trees or collect firewood. Check sdms.ak.blm.gov for land status.

– Eric Geisler,
BLM Alaska forester,
contributed to this story

ALASKA REALITY TV

BEHIND-THE-SCENES WITH THE BLM

Lisa Shon Jodwalis

Commercial film crew filming a feature movie.

In recent years, Alaska has hosted innumerable film crews, many of them tied to the current craze of reality TV shows based in the state (A partial list includes "Life Below Zero," "Yukon Men," "Bering Sea Gold," "Deadliest Catch," Slednecks," "Flying Wild Alaska," and the "Ultimate Survival Alaska"). Did you know that the BLM issues commercial filming permits for shows like these, as well as for more traditional documentary film productions and commercial photography and video projects? The BLM uses the permit and its rules to protect resources as authorized under Section 302(b) of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act and in Title 43 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) part 2920, Leases, Permits, and Easements.

Reality TV shows, documentaries, and film productions require filming permits and associated fees. These permit applications can take from 3-6 months, as the BLM must comply with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) before issuing a permit. The NEPA analysis gauges the proposed activity's effect on the environment and natural resources.

FACTOID: During this past year, the BLM Glennallen Field Office received eight inquiries or applications regarding permitting for reality TV shows, an increase from past years.

Commercial filming is the use of motion picture, videotaping, sound recording, or other moving image or audio recording equipment on public lands that involves the advertisement of a product or service, the sale of a creation of a product (film, videotape, TV broadcast, or documentary), or the use of actors, models, sets, or props, but not including activities associated with broadcasts for news programs.

You do not need to apply for a film permit for casual use activities (such as still photography or recreational videotaping) on BLM-managed public lands. Most professional and amateur photography does not require a permit, unless you use professional models, sets or props that are not part of the site's natural or cultural resources or administration facilities, or when the photo session takes place in locations or nonpublic areas or that incur additional administrative costs for the BLM.

The BLM may deny a film permit application if there is a likelihood of resource damage or if the activity may disrupt long-term regular use or poses a safety or health risk for the public. Some applications require bonding or other fees associated with the permit. Sometimes the BLM will make a site visit or open a 30-day public comment period before issuing a permit. Once the BLM issues a permit, the BLM monitors the permitted areas before and after use.

Permit stipulations may include:

- Only uses of public lands as described in the permit application.
- Do not take mineral or vegetative materials, artifacts or fossils, or disturb archaeological or historical sites (such as graves and remains of cabins).
- Immediately report any cultural or paleontological resource discoveries to the BLM.
- Do not damage or disturb fish, wildlife, migratory birds, vegetation, or subsistence activities.
- Get written authorization for new access trails or roads from the BLM.
- Placing signs or structures on roads or trails used by the public are not allowed, unless permitted.
- Placement of fuel storage containers is restricted.
- Flying restrictions (such as maintaining altitude at 1,000 ft or more between Oct. 15-March 31 for moose; May 1-June 15 for caribou calving areas, and April 1-August 31 within 1/2 mile of bald eagle nests).
- Repair any damaged or disturbed areas to the BLM's satisfaction.
- Keep areas clean; remove and dispose of all generated waste.

Remember that when reality TV shows appear to be on public lands, in reality the producers may have spliced images together with video clips filmed on private lands. Don't believe everything you see!

Tim Mowry, Alaska Division of Forestry

PUTTING OUT FIRES; PAYING BACK FAVORS

Type 2 Emergency Firefighting crews board a jet bound for the Lower 48 at the Alaska Fire Service.

Steve Theisen

The 2015 fire season was one of Alaska's busiest, with crews from throughout the Lower 48 and Canada providing assistance to fight hundreds of wildland fires. As Alaska's fire season wound down and fires in the Pacific Northwest and California ramped up, hundreds of Alaska firefighting personnel headed south to reciprocate.

As of October 13, 770 fires burned 5.15 million acres in Alaska, making it the second largest fire season in Alaska in terms of acreage burned. It is surpassed only by 2004, when 701 fires burned 6.59 million acres. Nine fires were each over 100,000 acres and the three largest, Big Creek Two, Sushgitit Hills, and Holtnakatna totaled almost 800,000 acres. Of the 770 fires, the BLM Alaska Fire Service managed 263 fires covering over 4 million acres this past summer.

— Maureen Clark, Alaska State Office

Steve Theisen

(above and right) The Allakaket Type 2 Crew working on the Clearwater Complex near Kamiah, Idaho. The Clearwater complex consisted of three fires in the Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forests totaling an estimated 39,200 acres.

Mushing in

Musher Deke and his dog team at BLM's Moose Creek public use cabin in the White Mountains National Recreation Area.

Iditarod and Yukon Quest veteran mushers Jodi Bailey and Dan Kaduce, and BLM Alaska outdoor recreation planner Deke Naaktgeboren and his wife Loraine, have kennels close to BLM's one-million-acre White Mountains National Recreation Area. Both musher couples love having "the Whites" as their backyard and for training sled dogs.

"I'm … emotionally attached to [the Whites] because we live so close to it, and have for so long, that I really enjoy watching the seasons changing there. We're up there in the summer berry picking and hiking," Jodi explains.

Jodi and husband Dan run Dew Claw Kennels in Chatanika. These seasoned mushers started as recreational skijorers and graduated to competitive distance mushing. Jodi is the first rookie to complete both the Iditarod and Yukon Quest races in the same year!

Courtesy of Jodi Bailey

Jodi Bailey mushing on the trails in the White Mountains NRA.

The Naaktgeboren's Nautique Sky Kennel began in 2013 with 12 sled dogs. A few more dogs and recent litter of seven puppies brings the total to 21 dogs. The kennel is named after Deke's Siberian Husky, Nautique. Deke began mushing in Sweden as a dog handler in 2009. In 2014, he started the Yukon Quest 300, but had to scratch.

The mushers say varied terrain, conditions, and miles of groomed trails in the Whites are awesome for running dogs. Deke mushes from home "about 18 miles" on poorly maintained trails, and is always relieved when the team arrives on the White's groomed winter trail system.

"Sometimes you're down on the rivers or running through the trees," Jodi says. "Then you'll be high above tree-line in big, open, windswept areas and look around 360-degrees and it's just glorious – assuming the weather's good! During winter storms, you can get extreme whiteout conditions or significant snowfall. We get cold up there that other parts of the state probably don't have to deal with." She adds, "But that makes great training for a long-distance musher."

Deke describes the Whites as Interior Alaska, with a twist. "The western Whites are big, rolling hills stretching as far as you can see, but once you drop into Beaver Creek, you start seeing really rugged stuff. Big Bend bluffs and cliffs. Windy Arch, jagged limestone cliffs, and peaks."

When there isn't enough snow, Jodi drives her dog truck to U.S. Creek and Nome Creek roads and runs her dogs off the front of the truck. She says the roads are nice for that, though she waits until after moose season.

Deke says the Whites give mushers diversity – flat land, very hilly, creek crossings, overflow ice, glare ice, hard-packed wind-blown sections, trees, no trees – all sorts of good training conditions. He especially likes the hills and glare ice and overflow near Windy Gap.

Jodi says when far enough out, she sees many wolf tracks. Wildlife in the Whites has less exposure to dog teams than many other places. "[Wildlife] see a pack of really energetic, wolf-like-looking things [coming], and they're pretty inclined to leave," Jodi points out.

The mushers do overnight and day runs in the Whites. They love seeing northern lights (aurora borealis). "For the type of racing we do – we're getting ready to run the Iditarod – we're training 5-6 days a week. We can do day

Photo Courtesy of Deke Naaktgeboren

runs… but we definitely do a lot of camping up there."

Jodi and Dan usually run alone, although they have enough dogs to run together. Jodi explains, "Long distance mushing is kind of a solo sport. You need to be able to run your team at [an appropriate] pace for them, so you don't often [run] in big groups. When we're out there, we tend to be training." When the trails are good and she can set a brake safely, Jodi usually runs 12 dogs, often the team she's training for a particular race.

Deke runs 8 to 12 dogs. He often rents BLM public use cabins, and brings his wife and/or friends along for "fun runs." The cabins are about 10 miles apart, and provide warm places in case of emergencies. Jodi says she and Dan rarely use the cabins because of part of the training is camping out along the trail.

Deke also tries to mimic race conditions for training. This is difficult, he says, because "I'm a new musher and have only run one race. I reserve one or two BLM cabins and always let someone know that I'm going [so they] plan not to hear from me for 2-3 days." On training runs, he alternates runs and rests, not always resting at the reserved cabin. Deke admits, "It's good for the dogs and maybe even better for me to get accustomed to staying warm during rest, without the benefit of a warm cabin."

Musher Deke's sled dogs Mia and Nemo at Caribou Bluff public use cabin.

Deke Naaktgeboren

The mushers prepare carefully for runs to ensure safety and supplies if the worst happens. They wear GPS spotters so others can check on them on the internet.

Deke packs only essentials – dog and human foods/cooker, sleeping bag, booties, axe, tent, first aid, and road flare for fire starter. His dog first aid kit includes nail clippers, vet wrap, gauze, muscle and antibiotic liniments for dogs, jackets, etc., and "tons of booties." He packs essential gear on his person in case he breaks the golden rule of letting go of his sled. "Dogs don't stop if the musher falls off," he explains.

Jodi adds, "You need to be prepared out here, don't let its closeness to [Fairbanks] fool you."

— Deke Naaktgeboren and Craig McCaa contributed to this article

Read more about Dew Claw Kennel at http://www.dewclawkennel.com and the Nautique Sky Kennel at https://www.facebook.com/musherdeke.

Look for these mushers at the BLM Alaska's 2016 #BLMIditaChat (Twitter tweetchat) January 20, 2016, from 9 a.m. until 11 a.m. Alaska time (1-3 p.m. Eastern time).

PARTNERING FOR PUBLIC ACCESS

Editor's note: *Alaska's few roads and millions of acres of BLM-managed lands sometimes mean providing a way for people to reach public lands across privately owned lands. Creating public access easements/trails across private lands are possible in Alaska through Section 17(b) of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA).*

The BLM Glennallen Field Office manages nearly 200 17(b) public access easement trails and sites across Alaska Native private lands. It can be challenging to manage high-use easements with inadequate highway access and/or parking, poor terrain, repeated use impacts, and varying use requirements. To create easement solutions and help people understand 17(b) easement access rules or any permit requirements, the field office partnered with the Alaska departments of Natural Resources and Transportation, Ahtna, Inc., AmeriCorps, a local horse user group, and the Student Conservation Association.

Partnerships require significant effort and energy but provide long-lasting benefits. Youth volunteers get natural resources management exposure, land managers collaborate for creative problem solving, and people get better access to public lands.

Gulkana River Easements

A project improved Gulkana River access on 17(b) easements along the Richardson Highway through a BLM partnership with the Wrangell Institute for Science and Environment and AmeriCorps. A young adult crew worked to brush the trails and install easement signs. In the process, the crew had an opportunity to see Alaska and benefit the nation's public lands.

Cory Larson

The difference after a year's work on the Jack River Trail easement. There is trail braiding, ruts, mud, and trail damage before installing porous grid system trail stabilizers.

Jack River Easement

In 2014, 10 youth from across the nation volunteered more than 800 labor-intensive hours to install porous grid system trail stabilizer and reduce trail braiding on the popular two-mile Jack River easement near Cantwell along the Denali Highway. Their efforts helped protect nearly 230 acres of wetland habitat. A Federal Highway Administration, Western Federal Lands Highway Division grant helped fund the project. Today, backcountry enthusiasts and Alaska hunters enjoy improved trail and access to public lands, and trespass occurrences on Ahtna, Inc. ANCSA corporation private land are resolved.

Yanert River/Pyramid Mountain Trail Easement

Last summer, a partnership made it possible to construct a new trailhead/parking area for the Yanert River/Pyramid Mountain Trail easement along the Parks Highway near Carlo Creek. The Alaska Department of Fish & Game initiated the project and partnered with the BLM Glennallen Field Office, Ahtna Inc., a local horse user group, and the Alaska Department of Transportation. State funds and resources paid for constructing a new trailhead/parking area. The field office facilitated relocating the easement and installed trailhead signs and easement markers. The local horse user group brushed new sections of the trail.

Cory Larson

AmeriCorps members remove brush along ANCSA 17(b) easements.

Today, the trailhead is on more sustainable terrain, has greatly improved highway access and parking, and avoids a neighboring gravel pit operation where people previously parked to access the Yanert River/Pyramid Mountain trail easement.

— Cory Larson contributed to this article

OUR TEACHERS ON THE PUBLIC LANDS

This past summer, BLM Alaska sponsored two "Teachers on the Public Lands" for the Copper River Watershed and the BLM Campbell Tract/Campbell Creek Science Center. The teachers learned about BLM's resources and developed lesson plans for BLM and school use. They also share their experience and projects with their classroom and other audiences.

Climate Change comes to the Science Center

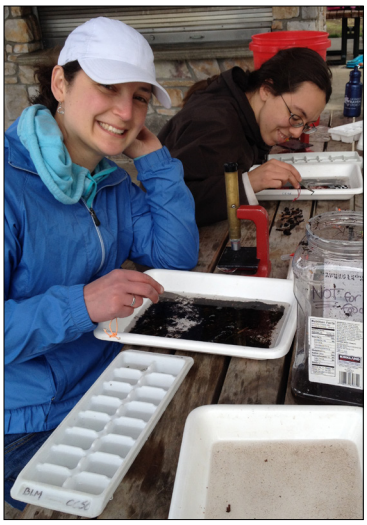
The BLM Campbell Creek Science Center's climate change program for fifth and sixth grade students teaches through science-based activities similar to what climate scientists do when observing and recording scientific data. The program also helps build an understanding of natural processes that govern life on Earth and its atmosphere. The program leads students to answers for two key questions: Why is it important to learn about climate change? and, What should everyone know about climate change?

The climate change program is possible through the exceptional efforts of two "BLM Teachers on the Public Lands" who worked at the Science Center on the climate change curriculum. Fifth grade teacher Rena Michaud from Ravenwood Elementary in Eagle River began the curriculum during her internship during the summer of 2014 at the Science Center. Then last summer, eighth grade science teacher Rebecca King from Begich Middle School in Anchorage finished the curriculum for the Science Center.

During King's time at the Science Center, she:

1. Adjusted the curriculum by applying feedback from Michaud's sixth graders in her 2014 pilot test.
2. Developed classroom activities for teacher use before and after field trips to the Science Center.
3. Prepared a "Climate Change in Alaska" slideshow script for teachers and students.
4. Correlated the program to Next Generation Science Standards and Common Core State Standards.
5. Identified climate change resources for Science Center instructors to deepen their understanding.
6. Developed teacher grading tools for use on related classroom activities, and,
7. Field-tested activity ideas while working with a climate change camp.

To encourage ongoing involvement beyond their time as a Teacher on the Public Land, the Science Center staff invited Michaud to join King and Science Center staff for the annual butterfly count this past summer. The event helped reconnect the school partners and start a long-term monitoring effort. Science Center staff plan to continuing working with King and Michaud on future projects – and, they can't wait to get kids signed up for the Science Center's climate change program.



Luise Woeflein

While working on the climate change curriculum, Rebecca King participated in the bioassessment of Campbell Creek with Science Center staff.

Alaska Teacher On-Board with BLM Partnership

Fran Daly, who teaches at Salcha Elementary School in Fairbanks, spent much of her summer outdoors teaching skills through the "BLM Teacher on the Public Lands" program to help the BLM and partners capture, develop, and improve a high school curriculum for the Copper River Stewardship Project. That project brings students on a 10-day exploratory journey to understand the resources of the Copper River Watershed.

Robben Taylor

Fran Daly, volunteer Teacher on the Public Lands, climbs on board for a 10-day youth exploration of the Copper River Watershed.

Fran helped lead the students through bat inventories, hydrology experiments, vegetation transects, stream surveys, and a variety of outdoor skill and team-building exercises. Fran brings her great experiences back to her classroom, and her curriculum work will help Alaska high school students learn about BLM's land and resource management.

— Luise Woeflein and Marnie Graham contributed to this article

BLM Alaska hosts Northeast National Petroleum Reserve in Alaska (NPR-A) Regional Mitigation Strategy workshop

Lesli Ellis-Wouters

It was a full house at the Barrow NPR-A Mitigation Workshop.

BLM Alaska hosted its second public workshop Sept. 24-25 in Barrow to consider strategies to address impacts from the proposed Greater Mooses Tooth One (GMT1) project and future oil and gas developments in the Northeast NPR-A. Participants included oil industry representatives, federal and state government staff, Alaska Native interests, North Slope community members, conservation groups, and other interested stakeholders. At the workshop, BLM presented the draft elements of a Regional Mitigation Strategy for public consideration.

"This stakeholder driven process will provide a mitigation framework that will increase consistency, predictability, and certainty for future oil and gas development, while providing for environmentally responsible development of resources within the northeast NPR-A," said BLM State Director Bud Cribley. "It will also ensure the sustainability of natural resources in the Arctic, including important subsistence wildlife populations."

BLM Alaska hosted the first Regional Mitigation Strategy workshop in Fairbanks March 30 and April 1. On May 30, the BLM hosted a listening session in the village of Nuiqsut that included presentation of the Regional Mitigation Strategy process. ConocoPhillips Alaska Inc. has contributed $1 million so far to develop a mitigation fund for the project. For more information, visit the BLM Alaska website at http://www.blm.gov/ak.

Greater Mooses Tooth Unit 2 Application for Permit to Drill

ConocoPhillips Alaska, Inc. submitted an Application for Permit to Drill (APD) to BLM Alaska for the Greater Mooses Tooth oil and gas Unit 2 project within the National Petroleum Reserve in Alaska (NPR-A). The application proposes an almost 15-acre pad, up to 48 wells, a pipeline and the building of an eight-mile road to connect with the existing roadway between the Colville River Delta 5 and Greater Mooses Tooth Unit 1 projects. The APD was authorized on Oct. 22, and a right-of-way offered the same day for supporting infrastructure.

Preliminary Eastern Interior Resource Management Plan Expected Soon

BLM Alaska is readying a preliminary Proposed Resource Management Plan/Final Environmental Impact Statement that covers 6.7 million acres of public land. The Eastern Interior planning area includes the White Mountains National Recreation Area, Steese National Conservation Area, Fortymile area, upper Black River, and greater Fairbanks area not currently included in existing land use plans. The preliminary proposed plan will be published later this year for public review. These land use plans form the basis for every action and approved use on the public lands. For more information on the Eastern Interior planning process, visit http://www.blm.gov/ak/st/en/prog/planning/east_int_rmp.html.

Bering Sea-Western Interior Resource Management Plan comment summary available

The Bering Sea-Western Interior Preliminary Alternatives Comment Summary Report contains 893 oral and written comments received during the Preliminary Alternatives outreach period that ended June 2015. Many comments address subsistence issues and proposed Areas of Critical Environmental Concern in the planning area. The BSWI planning area encompasses 62.3 million acres of land, including 13.4 million acres managed by the BLM. The BLM anticipates release of the Draft RMP/EIS in spring of 2016. For more information on this plan, visit http://www.blm.gov/ak/st/en/prog/planning/bering_sea_western.html

BLM current land use plans are in ePlanning where you can find documents and reports, contact information, timelines, issues, news, how to get involved, maps, links, and FAQs. You can find links to ePlanning at the main BLM Alaska planning pages.

North Slope Rapid Ecoregional Assessment report

A final report presenting methods, results, limitations, and data gaps for the North Slope Rapid Ecological Assessment (REA) has been delivered to the BLM for final approval. The assessment includes the Beaufort Coastal Plain, the Brooks Foothills, and north of the crest of the Brooks Range. The report synthesizes the best available scientific knowledge about the ecoregion and ways the landscape and its dependent species and habitats may change in the future for the North Slope. A University of Alaska team including the Alaska Natural Heritage Program, the Institute of Social and Economic Research, and the Scenarios Network for Alaska Planning delivered the North Slope REA Report to the BLM for final approvals in August. You can find a copy of the report at http://aknhp.uaa.alaska.edu/landscape-ecology/north-slope-rea/final-report/

National Petroleum Reserve in Alaska (NPR-A) Oil and Gas Lease Sale

The Nov. 18 sale will include 143 tracts covering approximately 1.5 million acres. In 2011, President Obama directed the Department of the Interior to conduct annual oil and gas lease sales in the NPR-A. Eleven prior lease sales generated more than $261 million, half of which is shared with the State of Alaska. There are currently 212 authorized leases in the NPR-A covering more than 1.75 million acres. The sale will occur in Anchorage.

FLASHES

News from around the state and our field offices

Youth Outdoors Projects

Water Discovery Days brings Anchorage fourth graders to BLM's Campbell Tract

Kate Trubeau

On Sept. 9-11, about 800 fourth graders attended the BLM Campbell Creek Science Center's Water Discovery Days along the banks of Campbell Creek. The students explored connections between aquatic insects, salmon, and people, and learned how life depends on healthy streams and oceans to survive. The event supported the "Every Kid in a Park" national initiative and received transportation funding for underserved youth from the National Park Foundation. Other partners included the National Park Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Alaska Department of Fish and Game, Anchorage School District, University of Alaska Fairbanks Cooperative Extension Service, and Anchorage Waterways Council.

Copper River Watershed teaches students about "Changing Seasons," a Hands On the Land program

In mid-September, the BLM Glennallen Field Office again partnered "Changing Seasons" for second and third grade students from the Copper River watershed. Four outdoor learning stations offered students ways to examine winter's approach and how seasonal changes affect us and the natural world. Partners include the National Park Service, State of Alaska agencies, Wrangell Institute for Science and Environment, Copper River School District, and local nonprofits.

Barbara Wallace, WISE

BLM employee Marnie Graham teaches students how to observe the fine details and characteristics of natural objects through the use of microscopes.

Building Connections: Mount Prindle National Conservation Lands service project at Nome Creek

To celebrate the 15th anniversary of National Conservation Lands and 2015 National Public Lands Day, on August 29 volunteers worked to improve trail access from the boundary of the White Mountains National Recreation Area to the Mount Prindle Research Natural Area and the Steese National Conservation Area by constructing a stone trail crossing across Nome Creek. The Nome Creek trail leads from a BLM-managed campground through a non-motorized area to the alpine Mount Prindle Research Natural Area. The BLM Eastern Interior Field Office joined the Northern Alaska Environmental Center and the Conservation Lands Foundation to host this service day.

Chel Ethun

Hiker at site for stone trail crossing across Nome Creek.

Chel Ethun

Volunteers carrying carefully selected stones along the trail to the crossing site.

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Mushing Moments

When asked about memorable mushing moments, Deke Naaktgeboren described Thanksgiving morning 2013. His team of 12 dogs had just finished a nice 80-mile overnight run in the White Mountains National Recreation Area. They reached the Elliott Highway at the Wickersham Dome Trailhead along the western boundary of the Whites. Instead of crossing the highway to run on the pipeline road trail for the last 15 miles to his house, his leaders decided that running on the paved highway was easier.

The leaders turned left and headed downhill on the Elliott Highway towards Fox and Fairbanks, the same route used by truckers to and from the Dalton Highway. The Dalton is the only road link to the Alaska oil rigs of the arctic north. Deke could not deter his dogs, and for the next three miles, they dropped 1,500 feet in elevation. Deke stood with one foot on the claw brake and the other on the drag, sparks flying from the pavement all around him, and doing whatever he could to slow the dogs down.

"You can't stop a dog sled if your snow hooks or brakes don't have any snow for them to grab. I used the road flare that I pack in my parka pocket as an emergency fire starter, and I lit it when I saw the first 18-wheeler truck coming so he could see us. I hoped the driver would use his CB radio to tell all his trucker buddies that this crazy musher was mushing on the Elliott Highway at 5 a.m. on Thanksgiving morning. My flare eventually burned out, but it seemed the word had gotten out to watch out for me on the highway."

Courtesy of Jodi Bailey

Check out more about mushing in the BLM White Mountains National Recreation Area on pages 6 and 7.

"It was still a bit intimidating for my dogs and I to get passed by 60 mph semi-trucks… but good training, right? An Alaska Department of Transportation worker from Livengood followed me with his hazards on for nearly half of the 15 miles it took us to get back home. We made it safely though, and gave thanks on Thanksgiving for my 15-mile Elliott Highway mush."