



Eagle River Nature Center News

No. 43 Member Newsletter ~October/November 2009 ~ Connecting People with Nature

Word from the Director

Asta Spurgis

In spite of the economic challenges many face today, I'm seeing that individuals are continuing to make contributions to the organizations they love. Corporations may be cutting back on their non-profit sector support, but many individuals and families are not. In fact, they are the ones to step forward to help in times of need. Not only do Alaskans volunteer more than others in the nation, they also understand how critical it is to give financially so that our community remains a vibrant one.

So this year and into the next, I invite those of you who are able to make a contribution to match Dick Griffith's dollar for dollar challenge (see page 7 for details) or to stop by at the Nature Center and take a look at our "wish list ornaments" decorating our tree in December. Our new winter caretakers, Gail and Paul Pelley, came to me within days of arrival from Florida, with dozens of suggestions of how people can help the Nature Center. After their daughter donated a flat screen television to replace our old broken one in the main lobby, Paul good-heartedly "reprimanded" me that many people would donate if they knew what it was we needed.


Our "2009 Wishing Tree" will include items which range from just a few dollars to more than a few. If you find something that you'd like to purchase or fund, just write your name and phone number on the ornament and bring it up to the front desk. As always, no amount is too small.

On the following pages you will find an update of our master planning efforts, winter bird feeding, our new winter curriculum offerings, and some kudos from a former resident volunteer. In our efforts to keep you informed, we launched a new website (www.ernc.org) which will help you stay up-to-date on our planning process and progress, our program policies and descriptions, rentals and trails. We've included as much information as we can, so that it contains an answer to most of your questions. However, if we've failed to cover something, please let me know.

In closing, on behalf of the Board of Directors and our staff, I'd like to wish all of you – our members, a very lovely fall and holiday season. Don't forget to put our annual Solstice Lantern Walk on December 19th on your calendars. You don't want to miss this very special evening that has become a tradition for many.



Our generous sponsors include:

 **bp** Rasmuson Foundation * REI * Totem Ocean Trailer Express, Inc. **ExxonMobil** ConocoPhillips
Cruz Construction * Perkins Coie LLP * Brown Jug, Inc. * PRA * ERA Helicopters * Key Bank
Peak Oilfield Service Co. * Lifetime Adventures * Thomas, Head & Greisen, CPA * Wells Fargo
and the BP Foundation, Inc. * Northrim Bank * Doyon Drilling * Alaska Airlines * Colville, Inc.
CIRI * Spenard Builders Supply * First National Bank of AK * Lee's Custom Designs, Inc. * CMI, Inc. * K2 Aviation



Board of Directors

- Carl Lundgren, *Chairman*
- Bill Barron
- Kevin Dee
- Bob Fisher
- Eric Fjelstad
- Scott Girard
- Dan McDonough
- Al Meiners
- Gail Raymond
- Rob Sackerson
- Keith Sanders
- Julie Saupe
- Susan Spyker

- Sarah Wright, *Treasurer*
- Patricia Jordan, *Secretary*

Staff

Asta Spurgis
Director

Ute Olsson
Chief Naturalist

Doris Ivory
Naturalist/Manager

NEWS & APPRECIATION



Kim Wynns and Dave Grassbaugh of BP dig some holes!

We are grateful to **Rhonda and Tim Snider** of Eagle River for their very generous donation of \$5000 in September and for their warm wishes to everyone involved with the Nature Center. The Sniders have been generous donors for the past 3 years. We have dedicated two leaves on our new Giving Tree in memory of their fathers, **William Snider and William Juster**.

Thank you to **BP and the BP Foundation** for their very generous donation of \$10,000 to support our school education program. We wish **Carla Beam**, BP Community Relations Director, congratulations on her retirement and extend our thanks to her for her work to help our community's non-profits.

Thank you to **Totem Ocean Trailer Express, Inc.** and to **First National Bank of Alaska** for their \$500 contributions. We appreciate their continued investment as corporate sponsors.

Thank you to the **BP Projects Directorate Team** and **Gary Boubel and Dave Grassbaugh** for donating funds and time

to erect a new trailhead kiosk. Many thanks for digging the holes for the fence and for the many hours the team spent repairing sections of the trails. Also, thanks to **Andy Bickford** for building the fence around the new kiosk and to **Spenard Builders Supply** for donating the materials. Lastly, thank you to **Lee Raymond** for designing and building the kiosk. It looks great!

Thank you to **Major David Elliott** and the pilots of the **USAF 90th FS** and their families for their work on the trail to improve access to the Rapids Camp Yurt.



Non-Profit Tax
ID# 92-0156981

Please pass
this
newsletter
on to
someone.



Photo by Brian Goodman.

Residents weigh in on Nature Center expansion

by Amy Schenck for the ALASKA STAR

What began as a contentious meeting between Eagle River Valley residents and state parks officials ended with both sides coming closer to agreement on how to improve the Eagle River Nature Center. Neighbors gathered at a Sept. 10 open house to hear various options for upgrading the popular facility. But they also wanted parks planners and nature center staff to hear loudly and clearly about their concerns with crowds and disruption of the area's natural state. Residents described the lynx, bears and owls that routinely pass through their front yards - welcomed visitors, as opposed to tourists who pull up to folk's personal residences and get out to take photos, believing they are at the nature center.

"I love the area back here. I like how wild it is. I've been in Eagle River my whole life. I always came to the nature center as a kid. I loved it back here. This is my dream home I have right now. I would hate to see all this development happen back here," Britt Holloway said.

Using a \$145,000 U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development grant secured by Sen. Lisa Murkowski in 2007, the Eagle River Nature Center contracted with the state Division of Parks and Outdoor Recreation to develop a master plan for the outdoor education center located at the end of Eagle River Road.

Known as gateway into Chugach State Park, the nature center hosts an average of 100 to 200 hikers per day during summer months - much more than the parking lot, bathrooms and classrooms at the existing facility can accommodate. And the number of users is expected to grow with major upgrades planned for the 12-mile long Eagle River Road.

About an hour into the two-hour meeting, the tone shifted to a lighter note when Pete Panarese stood up to speak. Panarese is a member of the both the Eagle River Nature Center and the Chugach State Parks Citizens Advisory Board. "It's changed, it's going to keep changing no matter what we do," Panarese said. "So I would say, let's be creative and look forward and there's a lot of opportunity."

Planners presented four potential sites for a new or expanded nature center:

Site A is located a little more than a mile before the current center on Eagle River Road. An access road to the site would need to be constructed and existing trails would need to be extended or relocated.

Site B is the closest of the proposed sites to the present nature center. Located on an area that once was a racetrack, it would allow for the use of existing trails and interpretive programs.

Site C is 1.4 miles beyond the current center on the existing Iditarod Trail, which would need to be converted to a road to make the site feasible.

Site D is 1.9 miles down the Iditarod Trail from the current center, at what is known as Rapids Camp. It could be accessed by making minor improvements to an existing roadway or building a new roadway along the Iditarod Trail.

Paranese went on to point out that the planning process has to start with options, which then can be narrowed down. "Now, my input is, with all of these options out there - although many of them have their strong points and their weak points - the best one is right here on Site B," he said.

Neighbors seemed to agree. In an advisory poll, the meeting's attendees favored the Site B option by a landslide.

After the meeting, the nature center's executive director Asta Spurgis said a lot of valid points were aired, some of which she hadn't heard before. "I think it got the neighbors talking," she said. Ultimately, Spurgis said, the nature center isn't looking to build a grandiose lodge. The nature center staff simply needs a place where it can run interpretative programs, facilitate visits by school groups, conduct business and achieve its mission of getting people of all ages outdoors. The existing nature center facility was originally built as a bar in the 1960s and has been put together "piece meal," Spurgis said.

Once a site is selected for a new nature center, planners will host more public forums to present more detailed plans. Those forums are scheduled for winter 2010. But the site selection and master plan are only the first step. The nature center still needs to secure funding to design and build a structure on the chosen site.

Written comments about the Master Site Planning process can be submitted until Nov. 2 to the Division of Parks and Outdoor Recreation, 550 West 7th Ave., Suite 1340, Anchorage, AK, 99501.

This article was reprinted with permission of Ms. Schenck.

Planning for the Future of the Nature Center: An Update

Visit www.ernc.org for more information and progress.

2003 Resident Volunteer Naturalist Honored by Maryland Park Service

Prior to coming to the Eagle River Nature Center in 2003 as a resident volunteer naturalist, **Larry Martin** had zero experience working in a park. His 33-year career was as an information systems security specialist and manager with several different agencies of the federal government. So naturally Larry gives credit to the Eagle River Nature Center for his park service roots, saying "If the Eagle River Nature Center had not accepted my wife, Hilde, and me as resident volunteers that summer, the story would probably end right here."

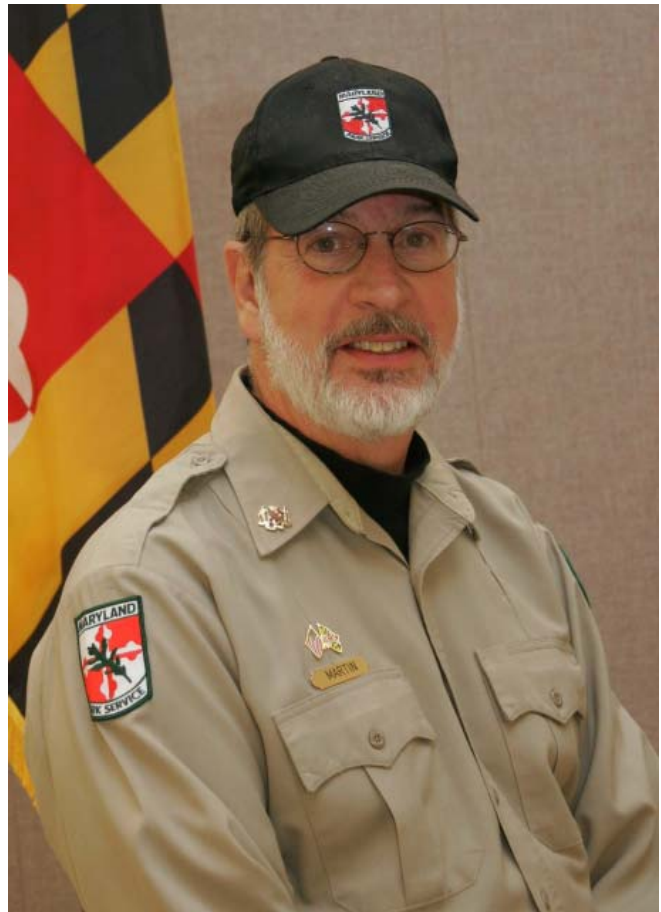
Larry really enjoyed working in a park atmosphere, so in 2004, he applied for a seasonal naturalist position at Patapsco Valley, a state park, close to his home in Maryland and referenced his volunteer experience the previous summer at the Nature Center. He was hired by the park as a seasonal naturalist in the Scales and Tales program, an educational outreach program, and spread the conservation message with birds of prey and reptiles at schools, churches, community centers, nursing homes, summer camps, and the Maryland State Fair.

Quite happy with the seasonal employment that augmented his retirement and still gave him the freedom to travel, he returned to the park in 2005. Over that winter two permanent park staff left and the park manager asked Larry if he would take on a new role as Volunteer Coordinator for the park and the nearby Soldiers Delight Natural Environment Area also under the park's management. He agreed on the condition that he could still maintain some involvement with the Scales and Tales program. So since then he has been coordinating several hundred volunteers of the park and NEA, editing and publishing the park's semi-annual newsletter, and doing owl prowls, campfire programs and working at the Maryland State Fair with the birds of prey and reptiles. This month Larry begins his 6th year as a seasonal park employee.

In early October, Larry attended the annual Maryland Park Service Employee Field Day. It was held at another state park on the shores of the Chesapeake Bay and was attended by hundreds of park service employees from all over the state including at least 20 from his park near Baltimore. It was a day of friendly competition on a variety of park-related operational tasks (backhoe operation, fire suppression, chain-sawing, naturalist activities, etc). Those activities took place in the morning followed by lunch in a huge shelter and then an awards ceremony to recognize the winners. The festivities included the Speaker of the Maryland House of Delegates, the Secretary of the Maryland Department of Natural Resources and many others. To Larry's complete surprise, he was called up to the podium in front of all of those dignitaries and park service employees and was presented a commendation by the Maryland Park Service Superintendent for his work at Patapsco Valley State Park. He became the first seasonal employee of the Maryland Park Service to receive a superintendent's commendation.

If receiving the award was not enough, he was nominated by his park manager and selected by a committee to teach a session entitled "Working with Volunteers" at the 2009 Maryland Park Service Ranger School, a month long training offered several times during the year to certify park rangers from all over the state. Another very rare honor indeed for a seasonal employee. In April 2009, the Maryland Park Service superintendent appointed Larry as the state-wide volunteer coordinator with responsibility for restructuring, redeveloping and maintaining the Volunteer Program for the Maryland Park Service.

Larry is grateful to the Eagle River Nature Center and its staff & volunteers for providing the opportunity and example that started him down the path to his new "mini-career."



Feeding Birds in Winter

By Doris Ivory, *Naturalist*

Winter in Alaska is not an easy time for birds. Snow and ice limit natural food sources. Cold temperatures require a high energy output to stay warm. Most birds cannot find enough food and are not adapted to dealing with frigid temperatures. A majority of the approximately 470 summer resident birds here migrate south to warmer climates for the winter.

There are some hardy, well adapted species of birds that are permanent, year round Alaskan residents. Diverse in form, color and habits, Alaska's winter birds are fascinating and fun to watch. But their secretive habits and low numbers during the short, frigid winter days make outdoor winter bird watching difficult. Cold binoculars and frozen fingers don't work very well either. There is a better way to enjoy many of our winter resident birds. Bird feeding is a delightful and effective way of attracting winter birds to areas where their beauty and activities can be enjoyed at close range. With some effort, money, and fore thought, you can enjoy the birds of winter in the comfort of your home.

Before you start winter bird feeding, ask yourself if you are willing to make the commitment of effort and money for the whole winter. Consider the cost of bird feed. Check out bird feed prices and calculate how much you want to spend per month and how involved you want to be so you will be prepared. Once you start feeding birds and get them accustomed to finding food at your feeders, you must continue to feed them until spring. They will come to rely on the feed you provide. Particularly during harsh weather, forcing birds to expend energy searching out other areas of food can be a death sentence for them. Once you have established a feeder, be sure to fill it regularly and have someone fill it for you if you are away.

Bird feeders can be bought or made at home. A large variety of small to large feeders can be purchased at variety stores such as WalMart or Fred Meyer. A homemade feeder can be as simple as a tray cut from a milk carton or large plastic bottle with string or wire attached to hang from a tree. Lots of designs, from simple to complex, can be found in books or on the Internet. Or you can come up with your own design. Use your imagination to design feeders that match the landscape and architecture of your home.

When deciding what to feed, remember that birds need fat, carbohydrates, and proteins. But winter Alaskan birds primarily need fat. One gram of fat has twice the calories of either proteins or carbohydrates. The most desirable three sources of fats for our birds are suet, peanut butter, and sunflower seeds. You can buy pre-prepared suet blocks that fit neatly into



hanging wire holders. Or you can purchase animal fat suet for a minimal cost at grocery stores. Place this in wire or mesh type holder or bag. The plastic mesh bags that potatoes, fruits, and onions come in work well. Peanut butter's sticky consistency

...ask yourself if you're willing to make the commitment...

occasionally causes problems for birds, so it should be mixed with other feed such as cornmeal, rolled oats, grits, nuts, seeds, crushed egg shells, or pieces of fruit. For seed feeding, buy Black Oil sunflower seeds. Alaskan birds love them. They are high in fat and protein, easy to crack open, and the best seeds nutritionally to feed birds in the frigid north. Don't buy bags of pre-mixed birdseed. They contain a lot of filler, such as millet, which has no fat. Pieces of fruit, cracked peanuts, grains, nuts and seeds are good supplemental feed for birds also. Birds use grit in their digestion since they don't have teeth, so some coarse sand or gravel added to feeders will attract birds in need of this. To watch a wide variety of birds, put out multiple feeders in your backyard filled with different seeds, fruits, and suet. Bird feeders do need to be cleaned periodically with a 5 to 10 percent solution of chlorine bleach water. Rinse thoroughly and wait till they are dry to refill. Keep your bird feed dry and free of mold.

A large part of bird feeding success is determined by where you locate your feeder. You should put feeders where the birds can easily be seen and enjoyed. Before you decide where to place your feeders, remember that birds need protection from wind and predators, and perches to use while eating. A feeder with no trees, shrubs or plants around rarely has birds on it, because it offers no escape cover

(continued on next page)

from aerial or mammal predators. Cover vegetation should be located close enough (within 15 to 20 feet) to bird feeders to provide quick protection, yet far enough away so they do not provide “ambush sites” for cats and other predators. Trees, particularly dense spruce trees, also provide a good night time nesting spot with easy access to food in daylight. If your feeder is near a window, alter the appearance of the glass to help reduce window collisions. Birds fly into the window because they see the reflection of the trees or vegetation. To help break up the reflection, try putting hawk silhouettes or other decals on the window, painting a scene on the windows exterior with soap, covering windows with a fine plastic garden netting, or hanging a wind chime or strips of aluminum foil or colored ribbon outside the window. If you find a bird has hit a window, carefully pick it up and put it in a box or large paper bag. Put it in a dark, quiet corner of your house for an hour or so. If the bird recovers, take the bag or box outside and just let it go. If the bird comes to, but seems injured, call the Bird Treatment and Learning Center at 562-4852 for help.

Alaskans have realized in recent years that bird feeders are serious bear attractants. Wildlife biologists recommend people quit feeding birds in mid April, as bears are starting to emerge from their dens. Bears will eat anything birds will eat at a feeder. Put feeders away and thoroughly clean up bird feeding areas. No matter how high or protected you may think your feeder is, a bear will almost always find a way to get into it. Bears don't just like to eat things; they like to investigate and manipulate things. They'll tear down an empty feeder and investigate empty boxes. If they do find food, it's a reward and increases the chances they'll return and become a dangerous problem. Besides, it's not necessary to feed birds in the spring, summer, and early fall as they have plenty of natural foods available. Replacing feeders with nest boxes and birdbaths is a good way to enjoy birds during the warmer months. In the fall, wait until early November to begin feeding again.

When starting a feeder program, be patient. It may take as long as several weeks before birds discover your feeders. By setting up bird feeders in winter, you are providing a generous, reliable source of food. The birds will gladly come and help themselves where it is convenient to watch and enjoy them. Once you have discovered the joys and wonder of birds, we hope you will consider joining in the fun of observing and counting birds in the Chugiak-Eagle River area during the Audubon Annual Bird Count on Sunday December 27. This annual event provides scientists with valuable data on the health of bird populations and our ecosystems. Check the program schedule at our website www.ernc.org or call 694-2108 for more information.

Kudos to Our Local Volunteers

Special Congratulations to our 2009 Volunteers of the Year - Liza Sanden and Dean Davidson, for their many years of volunteerism.

A special round of applause goes to **Dick Griffith**, who has been named **Volunteer of the Decade**. Dick will be presented with this honor on November 1, 2009 at 2pm. We invite friends, family and fans to attend.

To **Jeannie Woodring** who has been sending out our public service announcements to the media since 1995.

To **Susan Walker** for designing and entering our visitor survey responses into a database. Over 600 visitors who came to the Nature Center in 2008 responded to this survey to help us better understand how our visitors use the facilities, programs and trails.

To **Brian Goodman and Pete Panarese** for helping pass out visitor surveys at the trailhead.

To special program presenters: Beth Baker, Colin Tyler Bogucki, Dominique Collet, Michael Engelhard, Ginamaria Javurek, Ann and Bob Fisher, Ruth Fitzpatrick, Scott Girard, Lilly Goodman, Dick Griffith, Michael “Gus” Gustafson, Libby Hatton, Kevin Keeler, Chris Maack, Dani Mazzotta, Michael Paoletti, Richard Pellessier, Diane Pleninger, Liza Sanden, Ben Schneider, Sandy Skaggs, and Bill Streever.

To **Kris and John Stohner** for organizing three Eagle Scout projects at the Nature Center in 2009.

To all our donors, members and volunteers near and wide who make/have made the Eagle River Nature Center a great place!

THE GRIFFITH CHALLENGE

Dick Griffith Challenges

Eagle River Nature Center Trail Users (again!) to Match His Contribution in 2009-2010

Eagle River Nature Center “Patron of the trails” and legendary Alaskan adventurer will match up to \$5500 of your donation dollar for dollar in support of Friends of Eagle River Nature Center’s mission to provide connections to nature through excellence in education, resource protection and outdoor opportunities. Dick has become a legend by trekking across Alaska’s most remote wilderness areas - places without trails and places without handrails. But here in Chugach State Park, Dick has worked hard for decades to keep trails free from obstructions for the enjoyment of all hikers. We are indebted to him for his volunteerism.



Take the challenge. Every dollar is important, so no donation is too small. **Every donor** will be included in a door prize drawing on February 27, 2009 at 2pm. The lucky person will have the privilege of **releasing a rehabilitated eagle** in the spring of 2010. Thanks to the **Bird Treatment and Learning Center**, this person will be able to coordinate a date with BTLC for this private release. We will also share a portion of the donations received with the BTLC.

Donors who contribute \$500 will receive special recognition on our “**Giving Tree**”. The tree will produce more “leaves” with each **\$500 contribution**. You may choose to dedicate your leaf to someone special or in memory of a family member or friend.



Name(s) _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone _____ Email _____

Amount of donation _____ Check # _____

Credit Card # _____ Exp Date _____

If you are donating \$500 or more, please include the name(s) of the person(s) you wish to include on your Giving Tree leaf. Please keep dedications to less than 10 words please:

Mail this completed page with your check to: Eagle River Nature Center, The Griffith Challenge, 32750 Eagle River Road, Eagle River, AK 99577. Please make checks payable to the Eagle River Nature Center. If you would prefer to make a donation with a credit card, you may call us at 907-694-2108 Fridays through Sundays or use our secure online donation form on our website at www.ernc.org



EAGLE RIVER NATURE CENTER
 October/November 2009 Member News
 32750 Eagle River Road
 Eagle River, AK 99577
 907-694-2108 Fax: 90-694-2119
www.ernc.org
 ID #92-0156981

Non-profit
 Organization
 U.S. Postage Paid
 Anchorage, AK
 Permit No. 69



October -December Hours:
 Friday-Sunday, 10am-5pm or by
 appointment. The building will be
 closed on Friday, December 25th.

The **DICK GRIFFITH CHALLENGE** is
 underway. Look inside for details.

IS MY MEMBERSHIP CURRENT?
 Just look at the address label above for
 your expiration date. You can renew
 online, by phone or by mail.

New Winter Curriculum for the Eagle River Nature Center

By Ute Olsson, *Chief Naturalist*

The Eagle River Nature Center is a popular destination for fieldtrips during spring and fall – thousands of school children learn hands-on about plants, animals, and earth sciences. In fact, we sometimes have a difficult time accommodating all the classes that want to visit during the last month of school! But once the snow starts falling, it’s beautiful and quiet on our trails, and we would like more school children to have a chance to experience the magic of the winter landscape.

Winter is a perfect time for a fieldtrip to the Nature Center – it offers students some unique learning opportunities, including the value of getting outdoors. Thanks to a generous grant by REI, we now have 30 children snowshoes available to allow an entire school class to get outside and enjoy winter.

Our newest curriculum is entitled “Animal Winter Adaptations”, and was written by APU Master of Environmental Education graduate Kristen Metzger. She designed and tested it last winter on three classes from Ravenwood Elementary, our partnership school. The new curriculum focuses on limiting factors (i.e. factors required by a species to survive – such as food, water, etc.), a concept taught to all Alaskan 4th and 5th graders as part of their science education. Kristen designed 6 panels to be used along the hike to help students visualize such abstract concepts as avoidance and behavioral and physiological adaptation changes by animals.

The curriculum was written to be flexible: weather conditions may vary, and there may be other constraints on teachers – therefore it can be taught either as half-day or full day program, incorporating snowshoeing, games and journaling. If you are interested and would like to find out more about how this new curriculum might fit your needs, contact Ute Olsson at 694-9255 or email naturalist@ernc.org.

