



# Yukon Flats National Wildlife Refuge

*Newsletter - Winter 2008/2009*

## Proposed Land Exchange

The draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) was released for public review in January 2008, and the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (Service) accepted public comments through May 19. More than 100,000 comments were received. In February and March, the Service also held public hearings in each village in or near the Yukon Flats Refuge, Fairbanks, and Anchorage. The Service also held government-to-government meetings with Alakanuk, Arctic Village, Chalkyitsik, Fort Yukon, Mountain Village, Ruby, Stebbins, Stevens Village, and Venetie in May and June.

The projected date for a decision on the proposed land exchange has been delayed from fall 2008 to fall 2009. This delay reflects the additional time needed to complete the appraisal process and obtain the final land appraisals. The appraisals are needed in the EIS to assure that the exchange is an equal value exchange. For more information contact Refuge Manager Rob Jess at 800/531-0676 or <[robert\\_jess@fws.gov](mailto:robert_jess@fws.gov)>. For background information on the proposed exchange or updated project schedule visit: <<http://yukonflatseis.ensr.com>>. 📌

## Refuge Biology Program Review

In late March 2009 a panel of over 20 scientists, land managers and local Yukon Flats residents to review the Refuge Biological Program. The purpose of the review is to provide direction for the biological program for the next 10 years.

With participation from this diverse group of individuals, will assist in producing a sound Refuge biological management plan. For more information contact Wildlife Biologist, Mark Bertram at 800/531-0676 or <[mark\\_bertram@fws.gov](mailto:mark_bertram@fws.gov)>. 📌



Nancy Pfeiffer/ORIGIN

*Earth Work Quest intern Gabe Simple (right) guides “clients” and Refuge Staff Barry Whitehill and Paul Williams, Sr. down the Chandalar River.*

## Interns Receive Outdoor Training

This past summer four Earth Work Quest interns had the opportunity to learn from members of Outdoor Recreation Institute of Guiding for American Indians and Native Alaskans (ORIGIN) while floating the remote east fork of the Chandalar River.

David Peter, Elias Saylor, Gabe Simple, and Warren Fredson participated in the 10-day trip. This unique opportunity was made possible by Eddie Frank, Venetie Tribal Administrator; Joanne Ahlfs, Arctic Refuge Community Liaison/Refuge Ranger; Barry Whitehill and Paul William Sr., with Yukon Flats Refuge, and ORIGIN members Becky Hanson and Nancy Pfeiffer.

ORIGIN is a nonprofit group dedicated to providing training for young adults and youth on or near tribal lands in outdoor leadership skills, wilderness guiding, first aid, and technical skills. Ultimately their goal is to provide graduates of this program internships with local guide companies, jobs, and eventual business ownership possibilities. Also ORIGIN hopes graduates will mentor youth from their communities in leadership skills, self confidence and building their connection with nature. For more information about ORIGIN go to <<http://www.origin-institute.com>>. 📌

*Yukon Flats National Wildlife Refuge is pleased to bring you this newsletter and we value your feedback. If you have comments or suggestions about this newsletter please contact Wildlife Refuge Specialist Nicole Gustine at 800/531-0676 or <[nicole\\_gustine@fws.gov](mailto:nicole_gustine@fws.gov)>.*



## Students Monitor Backyard Lakes

Students from the villages of Chalkyitsik and Venetie worked with the Refuge to conduct baseline studies of Ohtig and Venetie lakes. Each of these lakes provide quality waterfowl habitat for local residents and offer a stopover point for waterfowl migrating through the Yukon Flats.

For five years the Refuge has partnered with the Chalkyitsik Tribal Council and Tsuk Taih School to provide educational opportunities for local students to study science and increasing outreach and education opportunities in the community. In 2008 the Refuge expanded the program and partnered with the Venetie Village Council and students from John Fredson School. In both programs students inventoried the lakes for presence of fish, took water quality measurements, collected invertebrates, and counted ducks. Students also learned how to use global positioning system and radio-telemetry equipment. At Ohtig Lake students observed several thousand molting ducks daily and at Venetie Lake 19 broods of ducks were observed. Although no fish were found in either lake the waters were teeming with invertebrates which are an important food source for waterfowl.

The Refuge is grateful to Chalkyitsik and Venetie Village Councils for assisting in organizing these projects, which provide the Refuge an opportunity to more effectively monitor resources on private lands within the Refuge and work with village residents. 🇺🇸



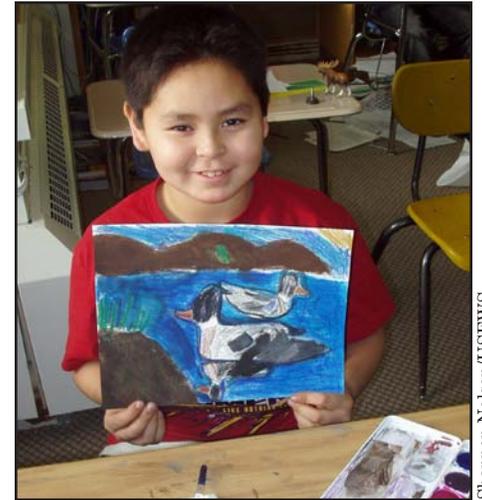
Venetie students (left to right) Tiliisia Sisto, Corrine Tritt, and Emma Simple baiting a minnow trap at Venetie Lake to determine the presence of fish.

## Beaver Honors Founder Frank Yasuda

Fifty years after his death, the village of Beaver hosted a memorial potlatch in celebration of its founder, “Frank” Kyosuke Yasuda. The idea for the potlatch originated with the late Margaret Ann Fisher and a young Japanese man, Ryo Satomi. This memorial potlatch was the climax of a cultural exchange between Beaver and the city of Ishinomaki, Japan. Over 200 guests attended, including several Yasuda descendents and 35 Japanese visitors, many from Frank Yasuda’s hometown of Ishinomaki.

The three day event was conducted in three languages. Performances included traditional Athabascan and traditional Japanese dances and songs, and Taiko Drum. The potlatch concluded with a grave-side ceremony to pay respect to Frank and his wife Nevelo Yasuda. Deputy Manager Barry Whitehill and Biologist Sheila Dufford were honored to be a part of this wonderful event while representing the Refuge. 🇺🇸

## Junior Duck Stamp Update



Shannon Nelson/USFWS

Jordan Billy of Beaver showing his artwork of two red-breasted mergansers.

The Junior Duck Stamp Program is a K-12 conservation education program that combines art and science to teach about waterfowl and wetlands. The annual art contest selects 100 winners from each state to receive recognition and various prizes.

During the 2007-2008 school year, 16 students from Beaver and Fort Yukon entered the contest and earned several honorable mentions and a second place. For more information about the program visit <<http://alaska.fws.gov/jrduck/>>. To request a school visit contact Education Specialist Shannon Nelson at 800/531-0676 or <[shannon\\_nelson@fws.gov](mailto:shannon_nelson@fws.gov)>. 🇺🇸

## Chipping Away at the Past

Large Interior Alaska fires in recent years have helped archaeologists by removing the top organic layer and exposing various artifacts and signs of human activity. Many sites were just a scatter of microscopic rock flakes left after finishing touches were applied to stone tools. But even these tell an interesting story, especially those made from the volcanic glass, obsidian. Each source of obsidian has a unique chemical structure.

National Park Service archaeologist Jeff Rasic has found only obsidian in Alaska that originated from the Koyukuk River country. Jeff suspects another obsidian source may be somewhere to the east, perhaps in Canada, as he continues to collect samples of obsidian flakes. 🇺🇸

## Earth Work Quest

“Tenika is an intelligent and motivated individual. I have been impressed with the mission of Earth Work Quest and the potential for future generations of rural residents to inspire new pathways for resource management professionalism.” Those were thoughts shared by Rich Ackerman, Park Ranger with the Fairbanks Alaska Public Lands Information Center about his experience working with Earth Work Quest intern, Tenika Peter, over the past two summers.

Tenika Peter, with family ties to Beaver, was just one of seventeen interns this summer who gained experience from the Earth Work Quest Internship Program. The program’s primary goal is to introduce rural Alaska youth (ages 14-21) to natural resource careers, traditional ecological knowledge, and consensus building skills through positive hands-on experiences. Many natural resource organizations benefited from the interns, including the Alaska Bird Observatory, Fairbanks Alaska Public Lands Information Center, Fairbanks Fish & Wildlife Office, Friends of Creamer’s Field, ORIGIN, University of Alaska Fairbanks School of Fisheries and Ocean Sciences, and the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service.

Students represented many communities including Allakaket, Arctic Village, Barrow, Beaver, Fairbanks, Grayling, Healy Lake, Huslia, Kaltag, Lake Minchumina, Stevens Village, Tok, and Venetie. For more information regarding the Earth Work Quest Internship Program, please contact Deputy Manager Barry Whitehill at 800/531-0676. 📍



Rich Ackerman/NPS

*Intern Tenika Peter checking the sound at the Fairbanks Alaska Public Lands Information Center.*

## Healthy Walk in the Woods Program Links People, Health, and Nature



Shannon Nelson/USFWS

*Participants in the Healthy Walk in the Woods program wind through a forested section of trail at Creamer’s Field in August.*

A new community partnership in Fairbanks is helping get people out to enjoy nature under an unexpected pretense: improving their health. The Healthy Walk in the Woods program is a collaborative effort between the Alaska Department of Fish and Game, Chief Andrew Isaac Health Center, Friends of Creamer’s Field, and the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service.

Many people know there are physical and mental benefits from regular exercise, and an increasing amount of research shows it is also healthy for adults and children to simply spend time in nature. The Healthy Walk in the Woods program combines these two areas by encouraging individuals and families to walk at Creamer’s Field Migratory Waterfowl Refuge. This past summer two types of backpacks and pedometers were available for individuals or families to use while walking the trails.

Participants are also encouraged to register for the 1049 Mile Fitness Walking Program offered by the Tanana Chiefs Conference Diabetes Program. You’ll receive recognition for walking the equivalent of the Iditarod Trail and receive a prize. If you are in Fairbanks, the trails are always open and are a great place to earn miles toward the 1049 Program.

The pilot program ran through the fall of 2008 and may be offered again and possibly expanded next summer. For more information visit < <http://www.tananachiefs.org/health/diabetes.shtml> > or contact Education Specialist Shannon Nelson at 800/531-0676. 📍

## Wolf and Bear Studies Begin Soon

Refuge staff and the Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G) will be working together on two new projects. In November 2008, 14 wolves from six packs were captured and radio-collared in the western Yukon Flats. The wolves will be radio-tracked daily for up to 30 days in early, middle, and late winter. The purpose of the project is to document the winter kill rate of moose by wolves.

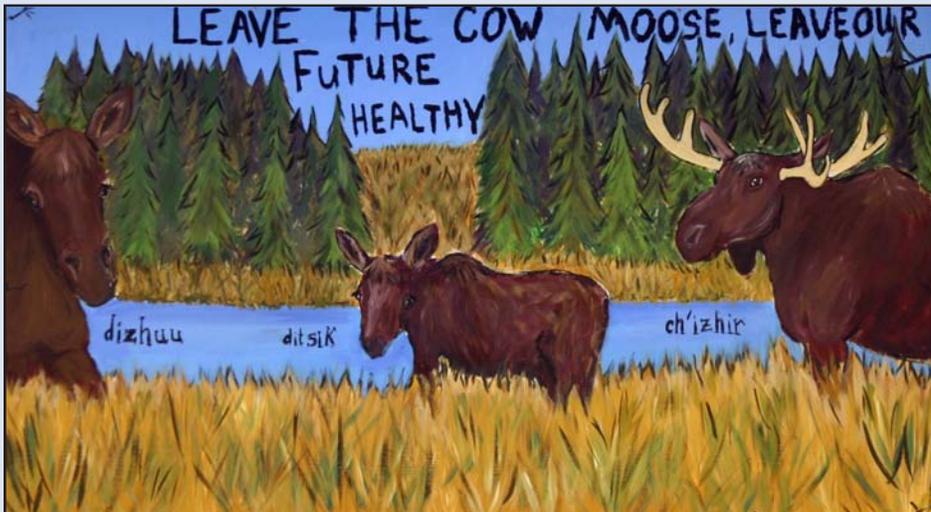
Another study will begin in the spring of 2009 to estimate how many black bears are in the Yukon Flats. Up to 40 black bears will be captured and radio-collared near Beaver. After bears are collared, Refuge and ADF&G crews will fly transects in spring to observe both radio-collared and non-collared bears to determine the number of black bears in the area. Both the wolf and bear projects are action items identified in the 2002 Yukon Flats Moose Management Plan. For more information contact Wildlife Biologist Mark Bertram at 800/531-0676 or < [mark\\_bertram@fws.gov](mailto:mark_bertram@fws.gov) >. 📍

## Fort Yukon Students Create Community Masterpiece

The Council of Athabascan Tribal Governments (CATG), Yukon Flats School District, and the Refuge worked with students and staff from the Fort Yukon School to create a large painted mural about moose. The mural addresses the importance of hunting only bulls and leaving cows so the local moose population can grow and provide for subsistence needs in the future.

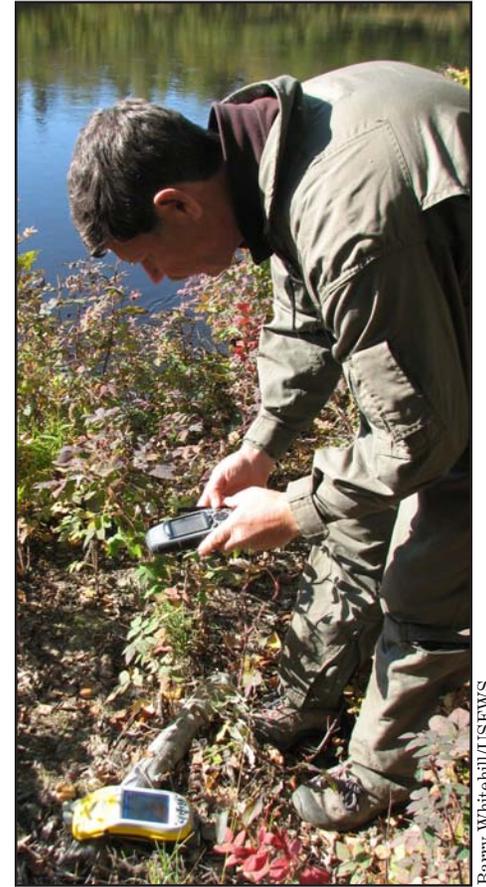
A school slogan contest was held to select the educational message that appears on the mural "Leave the Cow Moose, Leave Our Future Healthy". CATG and Refuge staff reviewed numerous entries from students and awarded prizes for first, second, and third place. The winning slogan was submitted by Frederick James.

CATG and Refuge staff also presented moose education activities and talked with students about moose biology, ecology, and management. The moose mural community masterpiece now serves as a permanent reminder of the crucial part that local residents play in managing the moose population. For more information contact Education Specialist Shannon Nelson at 800/531-0676. 📍



The mural was designed and created by students at the Fort Yukon School and is prominently displayed in the school's cafeteria.

## Easement Project Near Completion



Service Realty Cartographer, Scott McGee, records the location of a site easement on the Sheenjok River.

Over the past four years, approximately 58 trail easements and 31 one acre site easements within the Refuge were evaluated as part of an annual funding agreement with the Council of Athabascan Tribal Governments. These easements were to allow public access through land owned by Alaska Native Corporations in order to access federal public land.

The goal was to visit each easement to record exact locations and determine whether they are practical or not. Many of the trails were designated under Section 17(b) of the 1971 Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act. The project involved several meetings in various Yukon Flats communities and traveling hundreds of miles by jet boat, snow machine, and helicopter.

The next step in the process is for the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service Realty Office to evaluate the easements. If determined to be good trails, they will be marked for the public to know where to travel without trespassing. 📍

## Friends Group Works on Projects that Benefit Local Communities

The Friends of Alaska National Wildlife Refuges (Friends) is a nonprofit group that promotes the conservation of natural resources on all 16 of Alaska's National Wildlife Refuges. The Friends promote an understanding and appreciation of refuges and assist the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service in accomplishing its mission. They also perform advocacy work on issues that impact refuges.

In June 2008, Friends President David Raskin gave a presentation at a Gwichyaa Zhee Gwich'in Tribal Council meeting in Fort Yukon about what the Friends group does for Alaska's National Wildlife Refuges and local communities. Friends Outreach Coordinator Sue Hazlett, Refuge Manager Rob Jess, and Education Specialist Shannon Nelson also participated in the meeting where ideas for joint projects were explored.

The Friends have accomplished many projects across the state including several science, culture, and art camps. The group is always seeking new members and is interested in working on projects that benefit local communities and the Refuge. If you are interested in joining the Friends group or have ideas for cooperative projects please contact Friends Outreach Coordinator Sue Hazlett at <shazlett@hotmail.com>. For more information go to <<http://www.alaskarefugefriends.org/>>. 📍

## Revised Moose Film Released

The Refuge and the Alaska Department of Fish and Game are pleased to release the newly revised "Interior Alaska Moose Management" educational DVD. The film covers topics ranging from hunting, predation, the habitat needs of moose, and the importance of cooperatively managing the population. Responsibly managing today's moose population will ensure moose are available for future generations.

A key message of the film is the importance of not taking cow moose. In the Interior, a cow moose produces an average of 10 to 20 twenty calves during her lifetime. If a cow moose is killed, so are her future offspring. By following current hunting regulations and taking bulls instead of cows, the moose population is more likely to grow.

The DVD has been distributed to Interior Alaska tribal councils, advisory councils, and schools. For more information contact Education Specialist Shannon Nelson at 800/531-0676. 📺

## 2008 Spring Moose Survey

A spring moose survey was conducted in the western Yukon Flats from March 10–13 for the first time since 2004. Refuge staff were not able to conduct a fall survey due to weather. These surveys usually occur in the The survey area extended from Beaver to Stevens Village and south to the White Mountains, totaling 2,300 square miles. The number of estimated moose in this area was 300 plus or minus 20%. We estimated that about 11% of the population were calves. The 2008 estimate of 300 moose is down from the 2004 estimate of 632 moose. 📺



To learn more about the Refuge visit our web site at <http://yukonflats.fws.gov/>, call 800/531-0676, or e-mail [yukonflats@fws.gov](mailto:yukonflats@fws.gov). This newsletter may be viewed at <http://yukonflats.fws.gov/community.htm>.

## Stevens Village Lowers Wildfire Risk

Stevens Village began a brush thinning project in July 2008 to lower the risk of wildfire spreading to the village. It is the latest in a series of forest thinning projects begun in 2003 near towns and villages in northern Alaska Wildlife Refuges. The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service-funded project entails the construction of an open fire lane by the local fire crew. The cleared fire lane will help lower the risk of wildland fire spreading from the north into Stevens Village.

The project involves cutting and removing all spruce, most brush, but leaving some healthy birch trees along the fire lane. Pile burns will be carried out to dispose of the brush during fall and winter, when the risk of fire spreading is very low.

The Alaska Fire Service, Bureau of Indian Affairs, Stevens Village IRA Council, Tanana Chiefs Conference, and the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service have worked together to establish community fire protection needs. In cooperation with Stevens Village this project also involved writing a Community Wildfire Protection Plan, Prescribed Fire Burn Plan, and a Thinning Plan.

In 2006, the village of Beaver completed three prescribed fire burns and developed a Community Wildland Fire Protection Plan. For more information contact Fire Management Specialist Sam Patten at 800/531-0676 or [sam\\_patten@fws.gov](mailto:sam_patten@fws.gov). 📺

## Fish Habitat Study Begins



Stan Triebenbach/UAF

*Humpback whitefish were one of several fish species collected during the study.*

University of Alaska Fairbanks graduate student Stan Triebenbach began field work this past summer sampling 12 lakes near Beaver for fish and several habitat features. A total of seven fish species were collected including northern pike, broad whitefish, humpback whitefish, least cisco, burbot, longnose sucker, and an unidentified lamprey species.

Fish were collected in lakes that were currently, or recently have been, connected to a river by high water levels. No fish were captured in lakes that were disconnected from a river or those that did not appear to have been flooded recently. Many of the disconnected and non-flooded lakes were two meters deep or less, which may allow the lakes to freeze solid or greatly reduce the amount of winter shelter for fish. This work is part of a larger project to determine the effects of climate change on fish populations in the Yukon Flats. 📺

**U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service**  
**Yukon Flats National Wildlife Refuge**  
101 12th Ave, Rm 264  
Fairbanks, AK 99701-6237

Phone: 800/531-0676  
Fax: 907/456-0447  
Web: <http://yukonflats.fws.gov/>



STANDARD PRESORT  
POSTAGE AND FEES  
**PAID**  
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE  
INTERIOR  
PERMIT G-77

*Bull moose or “Ch’izhir” in Gwich’in, shed the velvet from their antlers in late summer, they become aggressive and begin sparring to size up other bulls in their area prior to mating. This behavior usually goes into early winter.*



*Two bull moose clash antlers during the rut in the Yukon Flats National Wildlife.*

Stephen Dubois /ADFG