

Stream Watch Volunteer Program Final Project Report

Initiated and implemented by the Kenai Watershed Forum in partnership with the Chugach National Forest

Period of Performance: October 1, 2015-September 30, 2016

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Project Summary:

The goals of this WNTI Small Grant project were to:

- 1) Educate 4000 members of the public on river protection, fishing regulations, and fish habitat needs
- 2) Conserve and protect 3 miles of trout habitat through installation of fencing that protects riparian plants
- 3) Conserve and protect 3 miles of trout habitat through maintenance of fencing that protects riparian plants
- 4) Remove 600 pounds of riverside debris including fish tackle
- 5) Install 50 linear feet of erosion control to improve water quality and trout habitat

The majority of the goals listed above were accomplished thanks to the generous funding provided by the Western Native Trout Initiative along with several other sponsors. The Kenai Watershed Forum and the Chugach National Forest jointly administered the project. Throughout the Period of Performance Stream Watch also worked with the following land managing agencies to accomplish its goals:

- USDA Forest Service, Chugach National Forest (Russian River Recreation Site)
- US Fish and Wildlife Service, Kenai National Wildlife Refuge (Kenai-Russian River Ferry, Moose Range Meadows)
- Alaska Department of Natural Resources, Alaska State Parks (Bings Landing) & Division of Mining, Land and Water (Kasilof River Special Use Area)
- City of Soldotna (Centennial Park)

Program Background:

Stream Watch is a national award winning volunteer program promoting river stewardship on the Kenai Peninsula.

Founded in 1994, the Stream Watch program began in response to a small group of enthusiastic river users looking to share river protection information on the Russian and Kenai Rivers. The program has grown to sites on the Kenai, Kasilof and Russian Rivers where trained volunteers remove riverside litter, install plant protection fencing, complete fish habitat restoration projects in addition to sharing critical information on river stewardship, agency regulations and bear safety during the summer season (June-September).

Stream Watch volunteers can participate as an “Ambassador” by committing to at least 24 hours of time each season or through participation in a “Stewardship Work Day” where individuals, groups or businesses help with a one day, river protection projects.

Project Results:

The only goal that was unmet was the number of public citizens educated through the Stream Watch's efforts. In total, 2,797 people were educated on the importance of river protection, fishing regulations and fish habitat needs during the Period of Performance. Due to the slow to spotty fishing reported by Alaska Department of Fish and Game throughout this summer there was a significantly lower number of anglers out on the river, which is why we were not able to meet the original goal of 4,000. However, the number reported does not reflect the community outreach done by volunteers discussing these topics in their personal conversations off the river, which likely would take us above the goal of 4,000.

Throughout the spring of 2016, the Stream Watch Program installed 3.1 miles of protective fencing along various sections of the Russian and Kenai Rivers, which provide habitat to thousands of Rainbow Trout. On May 21st, 2016 volunteers from the McLaughlin Youth Center came to the Russian River to install 1.5 miles of fencing with the U.S. Forest Service Stream Watch Coordinator, Tyler Gagat. Then, on June 7th, 2016 volunteers from Alaska Wildland Adventures completed the remaining 0.5 miles of fencing on the Russian River to protect riparian vegetation in one of the most highly used fishing areas on the Kenai Peninsula. Finally, on June 15th, 2016, volunteers from the Youth Conservation Corps (YCC) came to Moose Range Meadows on the Kenai River to assist the Kenai Watershed Forum's Stream Watch Coordinator, Melissa Steritz, in installing 1.1 miles of fencing. Melissa Steritz and Tyler Gagat maintained all of this fencing along with the help of several volunteers and Kenai Watershed Forum interns. Both coordinators checked for tears in fencing weekly and made repairs as needed in order to ensure that human foot traffic did not destroy riparian plants that protect trout habitat.

In June of 2016, two orientations were held in which 61 volunteers were trained and oriented to be Stream Watch Ambassadors. Throughout the summer of 2016, many of these volunteers came out for ten different Stewardship Days that resulted in more than 1,760 pounds of trash being collected from the Kasilof, Kenai, and Russian Rivers' banks. In addition, volunteers collected 58 pounds of fishing line that will be recycled. These cleanups effectively prevented a significant number of line and other litter from entering fish habitat and potentially poisoning or entangling wildlife including trout.

On October 5th, 2015 a spruce tree revetment project was completed on the Kenai River under the leadership of former Stream Watch Coordinator, Lisa Beranek. Volunteers assisted with installing an erosion control structure along a 60-foot stretch of riverbank belonging to the Kachemak Heritage Land Trust across from Bing's Landing State Park (a high use area). In this project, spruce trees were installed parallel to the riverbank, with about half of their length overlapping. Trees were tightly secured to the bank using cables and anchors. The trunks of these fallen trees now serve as a barrier to keep soil in place, therefore protecting fish habitat from excessive turbidity.

Through all of these accomplishments, we anticipate less erosion into fish habitats, greater success of riparian plants for bank stabilization, and increased environmental awareness of the public.

On behalf of the Kenai Watershed Forum, thank you to WNTI for your generous support on this project. We hope to continue working with you to protect trout and other wildlife.

Stream Watch 2015-2016 Accomplishments



U.S. Forest Service Stream Watch Coordinator, Tyler Gagat, presenting to volunteers at orientation.



Kenai Watershed Forum Stream Watch Coordinator, Melissa Steritz, teaching Kenaitze Youth about riparian plants.



YCC helps install fencing at Moose Range Meadows in June 2016.



Stream Watch Volunteers at Stewardship Day preparing to clean up the Kasilof River.



Stream Watch volunteers fill a truck bed with trash collected on the Kasilof River.



Once T-posts were in place, volunteers helped secure fencing at Moose Range Meadows to protect riparian plants.