

WAYPOINTS



News and stories from Alaska's public lands



The reflection of mountains in the calm blue waters of Lake Clark. Credit: NPS/T. Vaughn

Exploration is the Classroom

From salmon streams to wildfire science, spring in Alaska brings a renewed sense of connection—between people, place, and learning. As the midnight sun brings longer days and open trails, students wade into the Chester Creek watershed, Alaska Geographic stores reopen across the state to welcome curious visitors, and educators gather in Denali to study the role of fire in northern ecosystems. These opportunities, made possible through close collaboration with the National Park Service, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Bureau of Land Management, and the U.S. Forest Service, reflect the power of partnership in outdoor education.

In this issue, we highlight how learning about and in the natural world is taking shape across Alaska. Whether a fourth grader discovers macroinvertebrates, a visitor picks up a field guide at one of our stores, or a teacher explores fire's role in the boreal forest, these experiences deepen understanding and inspire stewardship. Together with our agency partners, we're helping people step outside, look closer, and engage with Alaska's public lands in meaningful ways.

With Gratitude,
Andy Hall
Executive Director

We're Excited to See You!



Adventures of an Alaskan Woman Biologist

By Margaret F. Merritt, Ph.D.

In my “Coffee with a Scientist” talk, I’ll share highlights from my book “Adventures of an Alaskan Woman Biologist,” covering several animal populations I studied across Alaska working for the Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADFG). Using a PowerPoint presentation, I’ll touch on the animals’ biology, research methods, discoveries, and impacts of climate change on these populations.

First, I’ll discuss sonar counts of sockeye salmon in the Copper River. These fish support commercial, subsistence, personal use, and sport fisheries. I reported numbers of salmon passing by the counter to managers in Cordova who regulated the commercial harvest to attain the desired escapement. Calving icebergs posed serious safety risks.

Next, I’ll talk about early life history studies of chum salmon in northwest Alaska. I monitored egg development, tracked migration, and studied feeding habits. My research supported building a hatchery in the area to stabilize commercial salmon harvests.

The third topic is aerial moose surveys in southcentral Alaska—a dangerous survey method due to fast-changing weather. I’ll also discuss moose-vehicle collisions, an issue in communities.

The fourth topic is the composition and movement of the Western Arctic caribou herd. We radio-collared caribou to monitor their winter movements. I estimated over-winter calf survival in the spring.

My final topic is red king crab investigations in Lower Cook Inlet. As the shellfish research



biologist from 1984-85, I assessed these stocks after the fishery had collapsed. We uncovered a surprising factor causing egg mortality.

The challenges I faced over the years included inclement weather, equipment failures, unexpected situations, skepticism about the ability of women to work in the field, and integrating motherhood into my career.

About me: I've been a biologist and outdoorswoman for over 40 years. I earned degrees from the University of California, Utah State University, and a Ph.D. from the University of Alaska (UAF). From 1977 to 2001, I worked for four divisions in ADFG, eventually becoming the first woman research supervisor in the Sport Fish Division. I later served as an adjunct associate professor at UAF's School of Fisheries and Ocean Sciences.

This is a guest piece by Margaret F. Merritt, Ph.D., who will be presenting at the [Anchorage Alaska Public Lands Information Center](#) on [Friday, June 6th at 2:00pm](#)

The 2nd Edition of *Canoeing Yaghanen* is Out!

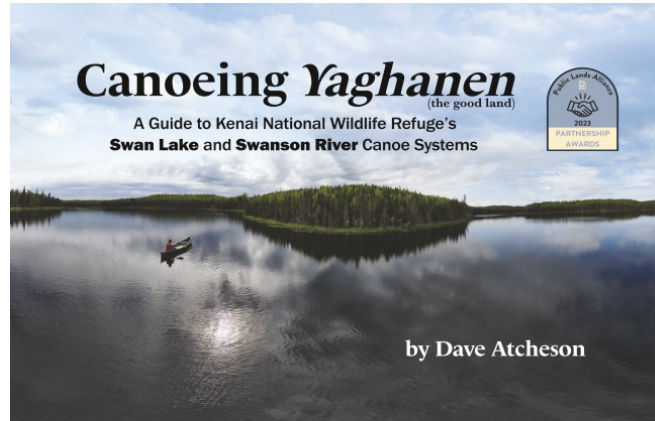
By Joey Sirois

When I was an Education Program Coordinator at Alaska Geographic, one of the first trips I planned from scratch was our youth canoeing expedition through the [Kenai National Wildlife Refuge](#). "Canoeing Yaghanen:

A Guide to Kenai National Wildlife Refuge's Swan Lake and Swanson River Canoe Systems", by Dave Atcheson, was my primary reference when putting everything together, and it was my go-to pocket guide when scouting out the route on a two-day excursion with our trip leaders. I also had the pleasure of working with the Refuge staff, who were monumental in making the trip happen. They helped with everything from route planning, providing canoes and safety equipment, and lining up our students with conservation projects along the journey. Between the info in the book and the help of the staff, this became one of my favorite trips that I put together as a Program Coordinator.

Later on, little did I know that one of my first projects as the Project Manager for Alaska Geographic was to help with the 2nd edition of this book. I couldn't think of a better way to transition from my role as a Program Coordinator to becoming a Project Manager. I had used the book, canoed some of its routes, put together a small-scale expedition, and now I was getting to revise this publication with graphic designers and the author himself. This not only created a serendipitous connection with the project but also provided me with a sense of familiarity with my work in this new role. Also, it was a COOL project that I liked from the start.

Now that the new edition is available, I feel a sense of accomplishment that I never thought I'd associate with a book. Also, I can't imagine canoeing in the Kenai National Wildlife Refuge without it! This latest version has updated campsites, a laminated foldout map, and the option to pair it with a perfectly sized dry bag for easy reference while on the water. Also, with this latest version, we digitized some routes via a partnership with AllTrails. AK Geo will support the refuge in posting important safety information and updates through the app, and whenever folks record themselves via AllTrails using the routes that Dave and I put together, AK Geo and Kenai National Wildlife staff can utilize that



data to track any trends that are going on within the refuge. We're also proud to display the Publication of the Year award we received from the Public Lands Alliance in 2023.

Thank you again to the Kenai National Wildlife Refuge for working with us to make our youth expeditions happen, and to Dave for his continued passion and insight into this amazing canoe system. I feel incredibly fortunate to have a career that allows me to do such fun projects and programs with people who share a passion for the outdoors and our community, all while striving to create accessible means to our public lands through educational programs and literature.



Purchase the new edition
here!



Learning and Teaching about Fire in Alaska

Shout-out to all educators! First and foremost, thank you for all you do in education! We appreciate you and would like to invite you to the teacher workshop “Project Learning Tree and the Nature of Fire in Alaska,” which will take place on the last weekend in June.

Join [Alaska Project Learning Tree](#) and National Park Service fire ecologists to learn about fire ecology and fire's role in the boreal forest and tundra. By exploring Denali National Park and Preserve, we'll get a hands-on look at past fires in the park to understand interior Alaska's fire regime, management strategies, and how ecosystems respond to fire. We'll also discuss the wildland urban interface – where natural landscapes meet human development – and how fire protection must adapt to a changing climate.

Then, you'll learn how to pass on that knowledge to your students by exploring the many fire education resources available, such as Project Learning Tree's Nature of Fire Activity collection, fire education kits, and more. You'll also learn where to find age-appropriate lessons and how to adapt curricula to specific grade levels.

Professional development credit is available through the University of Alaska Anchorage, and thanks to funding from the [Sustainable Forestry Initiative](#), educators working in Alaska are eligible for a \$250 reimbursement after attending this workshop!

For More Information or to
Register

RECENT AID TO PARTNER

Your support in the form of in-store purchases, donations, and membership allows us to give back to our public land partners. Read on to learn more about recent projects funded by Alaska Geographic.



Alaska Geographic Supports Beloved “Puppy Cam”

We're excited to share that Alaska Geographic fulfilled a new Aid to Partner request from our partners at [Denali National Park and Preserve](#)—this time to support a project that brings joy to thousands each summer: the Denali Puppy Cam.

With a subscription funded by Alaska Geographic, Denali's interpretation and education team

will continue streaming live footage from the park's sled dog kennels. This subscription allows the beloved Puppy Cam to be embedded directly on Denali's website, making it easy for viewers worldwide to tune in and fall in love with the park's newest four-legged rangers.

Each summer, when a new litter of sled dog puppies is born, the Puppy Cam goes live. It offers an intimate, real-time view of the pups as they grow, play, and begin their journey toward becoming working dogs in service of wilderness preservation. The stream has become a vital piece of Denali's communications strategy and a powerful tool for public engagement.

But the Puppy Cam is more than just adorable—it's educational. Through this live stream, Denali's interpretation team shares meaningful messages about the park's storied dog mushing tradition. Viewers learn that:

- Sled dogs are vital to Alaska's and Denali's history.
- The dogs and puppies are cared for by a dedicated team and lead fulfilling, active lives.
- The kennel staff collaborates across park divisions, supporting fieldwork and backcountry safety.
- Dogsledding in Denali honors a 10,000-year-old cultural heritage and continues as a recognized traditional mode of travel.

These messages help deepen public appreciation for the park and build widespread support for the kennels program.

We're proud to help Denali National Park & Preserve bring these special moments to life for audiences near and far. Whether you're watching from Anchorage or Australia, the Puppy Cam reminds us that a connection to wild places can start with just one wagging tail.

[Click here to learn more about the kennels!](#)

10 Years of Watershed Education!

The Anchorage Education Team just wrapped up the Watershed Education Project with ASD 4th-graders—celebrating 10 years of connecting students to the Chester Creek Watershed and the salmon that depend on it!

This 3-part program includes classroom lessons, hands-on science at Chester Creek, and a culminating field trip to Westchester Lagoon. Students conducted experiments on water quality and stream velocity, searched for macroinvertebrates, pulled a fish trap, and walked to the ocean to investigate whether salmon can complete their lifecycle in the Chester Creek watershed.

Huge thanks to our dedicated partners at Anchorage School District, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, and FedEx for supporting this program, as well as our incredible volunteers and the teachers and students who make this program possible year after year!



Students searching for macroinvertebrates at Westchester Lagoon

Want to support education for youth in Alaska?

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Now!**



Students holding a three-spined stickleback at Westchester Lagoon

Alaska Geographic works in support of our agency partners:



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