



Successful Search & Rescue Mission on Nushagak River



En route to the search area



The R44 helicopter lands on the river ice to assist a snowmachiner

Ranger Ali Eskelin assisted the Alaska State Troopers with a search and rescue for two overdue snowmachiners in early March. Two teenagers were traveling by snowmachine from Koliganek on the Nushagak River ice and failed to arrive in New Stuyahok that evening as scheduled. The state troopers received multiple reports of poor ice conditions on the river with several spots of open water and deep overflow.

The Air National Guard and US Coast Guard assisted with the search overnight in poor weather. The following morning, an AST Super Cub and R44 helicopter transported the Dillingham and King Salmon Wildlife Troopers and Ranger Eskelin to the search area, about 50 miles from Dillingham.

The young men, who spent the night in the field with little to no survival equipment, were located several miles from their broken snowmachine. Investigation revealed that the two were thrown from the snowmachine after a collision and they had continued toward New Stuyahok on foot.

The Super Cub from Dillingham located each teen separately and directed the helicopter and ground searchers to both locations. The men, both wearing dark clothing, were difficult to locate in the tree-covered terrain. Luckily, they heard the air assets overhead and were able to hike to the river corridor where they were found.



Four rescue four-wheelers transport a victim to New Stuyahok.

Alaska Boating Safety Educator of the Year



Director Ben Ellis, Alaska Boating Safety Educator of the Year Kelli Toth, and DNR Commissioner Mark Myers



Alaska Boating Safety Educator of the Year Kelli Toth and Deputy Commissioner Ed Fogels

In early February, a small group of Anchorage-based Department of Natural Resources employees and supervisors, including Alaska State Parks Director Ben Ellis, Chief of Operations Claire LeClair, Deputy Commissioner Ed Fogels, and then-DNR Commissioner Mark Myers gathered to present the Alaska Boating Safety Educator of the Year award to Kelli Toth of the Alaska Office of Boating Safety.

In her nomination, Kelli is described as a sparkplug. “Her passion is overwhelming. If you aren’t onboard with her, she’ll throw you overboard . . . but not before she makes sure you’re wearing a lifejacket.”

“In 2015, some 17,660 Alaskan school children attended Kids Don’t Float (KDF) courses, up 3,266 from 2014. Another 431 high schoolers became Kids Don’t Float Ambassadors, graduating from one of the 31 train-the-trainer programs offered across the state last year. But her most impressive accomplishment from an impressive year was the partnership she developed to grow KDF’s hands-on skill component. Skill training is done primarily in a pool with students rotating through four stations—life jacket fitting, boat stability, rescues and communication/signaling. Under Kelli’s guidance, the Office of Boating Safety conducted 62 sessions in 2015 (up from 40 in 2014) for 1,497 participants.”

As one grateful training participant put it, “staff commented that it was the best training they had ever had... no comparison for getting in the water and learning situational awareness, effective rescue methods, and the importance of appropriate life jackets... You may have saved a life with your training.”

Way to go, Kelli!



Park Specialist Blaine Smith has volunteer Jean-Pierre Rosay loaded up for work on the Ptarmigan Trail, clearing out trees that had blown down in recent storms and doing some brushing.

Northern News



Northern area maintenance workers hauled out several large skids from Angel Creek Trail. They were originally used for transporting ATV bridges to the Upper Angel Creek Public-Use Cabin and were left there until appropriate snow conditions allowed them to be dragged back out.



Northern Area maintenance workers Doug Avara and Marty Schatz prepare cables for hauling out the skids.



Northern Area park rangers removed a trespass cabin from Chena River State Recreation Area this month. The structure was signed prior to moose season notifying the occupants that it would be removed during the winter.



Park Specialist Jackie Cheek teaches boating safety to 4th and 5th graders at Salcha Elementary School, 40 miles south of Fairbanks. Park Specialists Brian Charlton and Jackie are busy teaching boating safety in Fairbanks this winter. Brian's goal is to reach all the 7th grade classes in Fairbanks.



Northern Area maintenance workers Marty Schatz and Doug Avara prepare an iron ranger for installation at Upper Chatanika State Recreation Site.



Mat-Su Minute



Rangers Damon Hampel and Dan Amyot recently attended the Mat-Su Kids Ice Fishing Derby at Finger Lake. This is an annual event for kids that benefits Make-a-Wish Alaska and Washington, so the Mat-Su rangers focused on positive, helpful contacts. Alaska State Troopers and Alaska Department of Fish and Game staff also participated. Hundreds of kids attended despite the windy weather.

(L-R) Ranger Damon Hampel, Alaska Wildlife Trooper Technician J.C. Arrington as Safety Bear, Fishery Biologist Samantha Oslund, Alaska Wildlife Trooper Jimmy Lindberg, Ranger Dan Amyot.

Nancy Lake SRA Gets New Public-Use Cabins

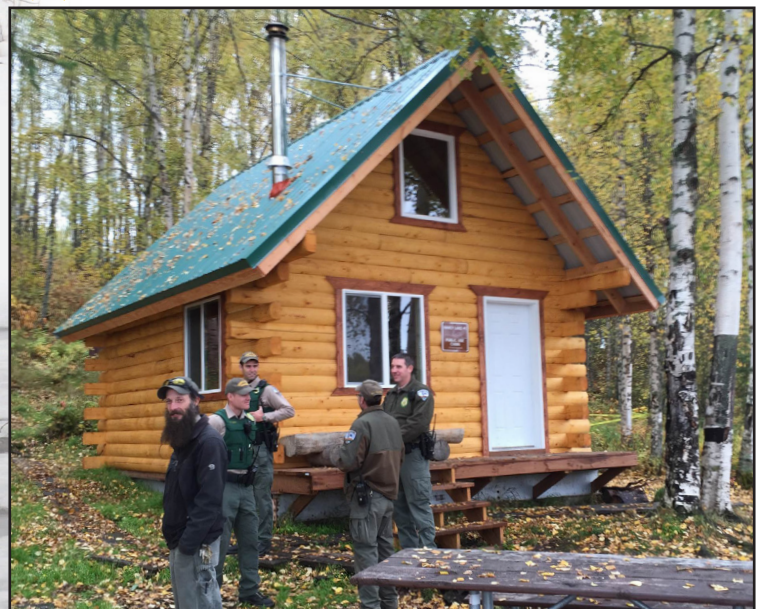
In late January, ACC Dustin Knapp and maintenance workers Paul DiMaggio and Nick Allen completed the replacement of the fourth public-use cabin at Nancy Lake State Recreation Area. Cabins replaced include Lynx Lake #2 and #3 and Nancy Lake #1 and #2. All four 16x20-foot cabins are of the same design. They comfortably sleep four people and feature a storage loft. To make reservations, visit <http://dnr.alaska.gov/parks/cabins/>



Nancy Lake Public-Use Cabin #2



Ranger Ali Eskelin came across these river otters while on a snowmachine patrol near the southern boundary of Wood-Tikchik State Park in late February.



Maintenance foreman Paul DiMaggio, Park Ranger Ben Corwin, Ranger Chris Love, Park Specialist Vic Stanculescu, and Ranger Drew McElvain conduct a final inspection on Nancy Lake Public-Use Cabin #1.



Volunteer Voices

By JANET R. KLEIN, *Volunteer Heritage Specialist for Kachemak Bay State Parks*

While studying culturally modified western hemlocks (*Tsuga heterophylla*) in Kachemak Bay State Park in 2015, Volunteer Heritage Specialist Janet R. Klein documented three trees with row upon row of holes drilled around and up the tree trunks. Red-breasted Sapsuckers (*Sphyrapicus ruber*) had pecked these holes to suck hemlock sap, feed on insects caught in its stickiness, or possibly to cache food.

How long ago the birds frequented the forest no one knows, yet one such tree died, fell, and is deteriorating on the ground. This dead western hemlock exhibits holes consistent with those made by Red-breasted Sapsuckers. Notice the three lines of small holes encircling the trunk on the left-hand side.

Red-breasted Sapsuckers are considered rare in Kachemak Bay, but these distinctive drilled holes reveal that, at one time, they frequented this now old growth hemlock forest.

Training and Partnering to Save Lives

The Northern Area Alaska State Parks rangers teamed up with Alaska State Troopers' Rural Unit for training with the US Army's 52nd Aviation Regiment on Fort Wainwright. The training focused on using Army Black Hawk helicopters and their highly trained crews for civilian search and rescue missions.

Alaska State Parks employees frequently partner with the Alaska State Troopers for search and rescue missions in state park areas all over the state. Last July, Ranger Ian Thomas flew two search and rescue missions with AST in one night and located two separate subjects that the pilot hadn't been able to find. AST invited the Northern Area Alaska State Parks rangers to this training as a result of that night.

Partnerships like these will help improve the effectiveness of rescue missions, bolstering the likelihood of a positive outcome for park visitors should they become injured or lost.



An Army Black Hawk lands near Ranger Ian Thomas' truck to pick him up for a successful SAR mission last summer.



Ranger Dane Happ and Trooper Zac Johnson receive training regarding the use of Black Hawks and their crews for search and rescue missions.

