

Copper River Strategy Group Meeting

June 4-5, 2009

Buster Gene Memorial Facility
Gakona, Alaska

Sponsored by:
Cheesh'na Tribal Council and Ecotrust

Meeting Overview

The Copper River Strategy Group (CRSG) is made up of stakeholders of the Copper River watershed who have an interest in the status and well-being of the Basin. The CRSG focuses on issues related to salmon and salmon habitat, water and in-stream flow reservations, and development-associated impacts within our watershed. The CRSG meeting is open to all stakeholders of the Copper River watershed and the input and ideas of all is welcome.

The CRSG meetings serve to:

- Present project status reports and findings and solicit feedback on projects taking place in the Copper River watershed;
- Identify and present local-level, large-scale and small-scale issues and information needs that necessitate new and continued research;
- Develop project and program collaborations to address issues and information needs in the Copper River watershed;
- Facilitate cross-cultural and cross-boundary communication;
- Provide a venue for all participants to learn and acquire skills;
- Facilitate partnerships to increase the application and utilization of local observations and Ahtna knowledge in scientific research; and
- Maintain all aspects of ecosystem health – social health, environmental health, and economic health.

On June 4-5, 2009, the Cheesh'na Tribal Council and Ecotrust hosted a CRSG meeting at the Buster Gene Memorial Facility in Gakona Alaska. Over 40 individuals, representing many Copper River communities, Tribes, state and federal agencies, businesses, and individual interests, attended the two day meeting (see Attachment I for attendee contact information). The CRSG meeting agenda was based on past CRSG meetings, where those present identified issues and projects they would like to discuss and/or learn more about. Joeneal Hicks of the Cheesh'na Tribal Council facilitated the meeting and Erica McCall Valentine of Ecotrust provided additional facilitation assistance. Chantelle Pence of Copper River Consulting took and prepared the meeting notes.

At the first CRSG meeting, attendees agreed that resource allocation issues were not to be discussed at CRSG meetings because there are other venues (such as Board of Fish and Federal Subsistence Board meetings) to discuss such matters. Furthermore, at the past meetings, basic meeting ground rules were established. These ground rules include:

- Respect one another and differences of opinion;
- Provide ample and varied opportunities for public participation;
- Listen and learn from all meeting attendees; and
- Share and use the information gained at the meetings with others.

These guidelines were upheld at the June 2009 CRSG meeting.

After an **Invocation** by Larry Mercurieff (Eyak Preservation Council), a **Welcome and Acknowledgement of Elders** by Clair Scribner (Gakona Village Council), the meeting **Introduction** was given by Joeneal Hicks (Cheesh'na Tribal Council). Nine presentations were given and the meeting was facilitated to allow many opportunities for discussion. On the evening of June 4, 2009, Former Alaska State Senator Rick Halford gave a dinner presentation entitled,

Unwanted Lessons. Mr. Halford talk provided insight and advice on working together despite differences. To close each of the two days, Joeneal Hicks opened the floor and requested that each individual in attendance provide a closing statement or comment. Syntheses of the comments are available by contacting either Joeneal Hicks (jhicks@cheeshna.com) or Erica McCall Valentine (evalentine@ecotrust.org).

Overview of CRSG Meeting Presentations

Presentation Title: Cultural Models of Copper River Salmon Ecology

Presenter: Bill Simeone, Alaska Department of Fish and Game

Contact Information: bill.simeone@alaska.gov (907)267-2309

Summary: In 2009, the Alaska Department of Fish and Game, Subsistence Division received funding from the North Pacific Research Board to partner with Ahtna Incorporated, Ecotrust, North Cape Fisheries Consulting, and the University of Alaska Anchorage, Institute of Social and Economic Research to evaluate the cultural models, or the way different groups of people think about, the Copper River salmon ecology.

The research and analysis components of this project are currently underway. Three different user groups – commercial fishers, Ahtna subsistence fishers, and fishery biologists and managers - are being studied to try to understand the different models that each group uses to conceptualize what is going on in the river. The study reveals differences such as, “Ahtna observes that fish are declining, but managers observe and believe that the fish are diverse and abundant.” Project researchers hope this project is used to improve transbounday (upriver and downriver) and cross-cultural communications as well as identify additional data gaps in what is known about Copper River salmon runs.

Representatives from each of the three different groups participated in a survey in which they were asked a series of yes or no questions pertaining to salmon, and the human relationship to salmon. The final report is expected to be shared in November 2009 at the next CRSG meeting. The peer review group consists of the people who were involved in the study and the North Pacific Research Board. Each study group will have a chance to provide feedback on the project analysis and conclusions.

Discussion Points:

- This study is an example of how to create a research protocol and design that brings in other streams of knowledge.
- Larry Mercurieff of the Eyak Preservation Council noted, “The Native people here need to understand that the ‘best available science’ that agencies and policy makers use, does not necessarily include traditional ecological knowledge. This project is a good example of individuals outside of the Native community, illustrating the validity of local knowledge and TEK.”

Presentation Title: Copper River Watershed Culvert Project
Presenter: Kate Alexander, Copper River Watershed Project
Contact Information: kate@copperriver.org (907)424-3334

Summary: The Copper River Watershed Project (CRWP) is engaged in an effort to identify culverts that are not conducive to fish passage. Only 4% of the culverts in Alaska are adequate for fish passage and 64% are inadequate for juvenile fish passage. Since culvert replacement is expensive, the CRWP is developing a rating system to hierarchically categorize which culverts should be addressed first. The rating pulls together historical info, info from users, as well as scientific data.

This project requires extensive groundwork to check the condition of culverts in the watershed. CRWP looks at every culvert, not just those listed in Anadromous Waters Catalog. Kate said “We err on the side of caution; we will assess every culvert that we come across...” When CRWP staff discovers a salmon stream that is not listed in the Anadromous Waters Catalog, they are collecting and submitting the necessary documentation to add the stream to the Anadromous Waters Catalog. Kate said, “We add streams to the catalog as we are doing assessments.”

Discussion Points:

- Harding Ewan stated that there are no more grayling in that Bear Creek since the Department of Transportation put a culvert in at Mile 126.
- This project needs to include the local landowners and tribes.
- Ecotrust has done a lot of work developing tools that others can use. For example, we can take a map to Tribes (either online or in person) to identify local streams that have been impacted.
- The State of Alaska is revising the protocols for documenting a stream in the Anadromous Waters Catalog, the cataloged that lists all of the known salmon streams in the state of Alaska. The new protocols will state that local or traditional knowledge must be substantiated in order to identify salmon streams. We need to work together to substantiate the local and traditional knowledge that states salmon are in a creek or a stream.
- We should work together to write letters to DOT requesting that they improve their standards for culverts and make them responsible for the salmon passage in the streams they are working on. Joeneal Hicks stated, “If there is a way to influence DOT to better manage culverts, to not cut corners... as a group-our voice will be heard.”

Follow-up: Gloria Stickwan, Ahtna Incorporated, volunteered to help facilitate communications between the Copper River Watershed Project and the Ahtna villages.

More information can be found at: Copper River Watershed Project www.copperriver.org.

Presentation Title: Engaging Citizens in Oversight of the Trans Alaskan Pipeline
Presenter: Kate Alexander, Copper River Watershed Project
Contact Information: kate@copperriver.org (907)424-3334

Summary:

The Trans-Alaska Pipeline System (TAPS) crosses four major tributaries to the Copper River Basin, all of which are salmon spawning rivers. Residents of this region fear a spill from a pipeline breach could quickly end up in the main stem of the Copper River and damage spawning and migratory habitat of the Copper River salmon.

The Copper River Watershed Project (CRWP) and several partners are working to create a prototype model of citizens' oversight for the entire TAPS by focusing initially on the lower fifth of the pipeline that traverses the Copper River drainage. In the recent past, the CRWP and Ecotrust developed a GIS (mapped) illustration of a hypothetical spill scenario in which the pipeline is breached at the Tazlina River crossing. This map makes a critical point – even under perfect weather conditions, which would allow for timely spill response, oil will pass the containment sites before response personnel arrive. Oil would then enter the mainstem of the Copper River and flow downriver where it will, again, enter Prince William Sound.

More information (and a downloadable GIS spill scenario) can be found at www.copperriver.org.

Presentation Title: Gulkana Hatchery Straying Project
Presenter: Alison Bidlack, Ecotrust
Contact Information: abidlack@ecotrust.org (907) 424-3541

Summary: In 2008, Ecotrust lead a team of researchers in conducting a one year pilot project to collect otoliths (ear bones) from 448 spawned-out salmon in six sample sites in the Copper River basin. The Gulkana Hatchery marks the hatchery fish with chemical called strontium, which leaves a mark the fish's otoliths. Using a scanning electron microscope, the otoliths were analyzed to determine if some of the Gulkana Hatchery fish are straying and therefore, potentially mixing with wild salmon stocks. No strontium marks found in fish except for Gunn Creek, which does have a natural run of sockeye, but they lay their eggs a couple of weeks before hatchery release. This pilot project did not detect any straying of Gulkana Hatchery salmon, but the Copper River watershed should continue to be researched and monitored for straying in the future.

Discussion Points:

- Eleven percent of the Copper River commercial catch is hatchery fish.
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Presentation Title: Intrinsic Potential, a mapping tool for identifying salmon habitat

Presenter: Analisa McKay, Ecotrust

Contact Information: analisa@ecotrust.org

Summary: In the summer of 2009, a team of researchers is conducting field investigations for a salmon habitat modeling project called “Intrinsic Potential.” The Intrinsic Potential model was developed in Oregon and Washington to “predict” where coho salmon spawning and rearing habitat should be based upon habitat perimeters. This project, in the Copper River basin, is revising the model produced for the Pacific Northwest so it can be applied in an Alaskan context.

Over the past year, researchers and modelers met with agency and tribal staffs to describe landscape in which Copper River salmon spawn and rear. Researchers were looking for large scale descriptions of the habitat - such as river sinuosity and valley width - that could be quantified and “plugged” into a computer generated model. The model produces a map that can cover large geographical areas where it is typically not feasible to cover all of the area by foot. This summer researchers will field verify the computer generated model and, if the model is deemed to be effective, it can then be used for conservation planning and as a tool in expanding the Anadromous Waters Catalog.

Discussion Points:

- More local and Alaska Native knowledge need to be incorporated into this project, even though it is a pilot project. We know that the Ahtna know how to classify streams and are in fact the local experts. These are things where Ahtna have detailed knowledge that has been documented. This documentation could have been used.
- The other thing that’s missing...Up in Slana we have an invasive plant called white sweet clover that is choking down streams. This needs to be included.

Project Update: Based upon the comments and feedback provided at the CRSG meeting, project investigators included documented local and traditional knowledge in their field investigations. Using the report written by Dr. William Simeone and Erica McCall Valentine, *Ahtna Knowledge of Long Term Changes in Salmon Runs*, investigators identified areas on the Klutina and Tonsina Rivers that, according to Ahtna observations and narrative, had either high or low intrinsic potential for salmon spawning or rearing habitat. This data was added to the Intrinsic Potential model for the Tonsina and Klutina drainages and aided in field verification efforts in June and July 2009.

Presentation Title: Headwaters to Ocean (H2O) Data Portal

Presenter: Shane St. Clair, Axiom Consulting and Allison Bidlack, Ecotrust

Contact Information: abidlack@ecotrust.org (907) 424-3541

Summary: Headwaters to Oceans (H2O) is a web-based mapping and data visualization tool. The main objective of H2O is to provide a simple process to download knowledge and data about the Copper River. The framework has been developed and is ready for new data sets to be added. The plan is to work with local folks that could possibly use it, and then modify it to make it more useful at a local level.

The H2O data portal was unveiled at the June 2009 CRSG meeting. The data layers available on the H2O website are only a start and project partners are working to incorporate many more data sets. Ecotrust and Axiom Consulting are currently working with the Alaska Department of Fish and Game, Subsistence Division to incorporate some local and traditional knowledge data sets, an Ahtna place names map, and historical photos. A great variety of data types can be added to H2O. If you are interested in adding some (or all) of your organization's or agency's geo-referenced data to the H2O data portal, please contact Erica McCall Valentine (evalentine@ecotrust.org) or Allison Bidlack (Abidlack@ecotrust.org).

The H2O Data Portal Prototype can be found at <http://dev.axiomalaska.com/h20>.

Discussion Points:

Erica McCall Valentine of Ecotrust added, "One of the main goals of Ecotrust Copper River Program is to get information in the hands of local people. For example, we [Erica and Bill Simeone] went to the National Archives in Washington DC to scan information and bring it back to local people. We are looking at other ways to distribute the information. We are willing to help people to make the data available."

Presentation Title: Informal Science Education, Electronic Kiosks

Presenter: Erica McCall Valentine, Ecotrust

Contact Information: evalentine@ecotrust.org (907) 733-2625

Summary: Ecotrust submitted a pre-proposal to the National Science Foundation to create interactive kiosks, and have them on display at up to three high traffic sites within the Copper River region. The kiosks will be placed in an informal setting (outside the classroom) and project investigators are working with the Ahtna Heritage Foundation, the Native Village of Eyak, and the Cordova Maritime Museum to host the kiosks. An Educator's Manual will also be developed so teachers will have an educational facilitation resource tool to use teachers to use when they take their students to kiosk. The kiosks will feature information about the Copper River salmon, their natural environment, cultural information, as well as the role that salmon plays in the economy. The overall goal of the project is to educate people about how the Copper River is an exceptional place. The hope is that the folks who visit the kiosk(s) will gain information that will enrich their experience, and come to have a greater respect for the area. This project is still in the planning stages, it is not static in design. The information can change with the times by adding new software. Ecotrust is seeking partnerships to develop a full proposal and to facilitate the implementation of the project, when funded.

Discussion Points:

- Vicki Penwell stated that there might be overlap with the Copper River Stories project, which could turn into a useful partnership.

Presentation Title: Resilience and Adaptive Management

Presenter: Andy Anaru Kliskey

Contact Information: afadk@uaa.alaska.edu

Summary: The Resilience and Adaptive Management (RAM) group is a highly interdisciplinary and multicultural effort at the University of Alaska Anchorage. The purpose of the project is to share knowledge among communities that are different but share the same environment, and to highlight the usefulness of local traditional knowledge. RAM focuses on social-ecological systems and seeks to develop tools for understanding community response to environmental changes. There is potential to develop a proposal that includes local traditional knowledge at the forefront. It is not easy to bridge science with TEK, but when it is done, and done well, it is incredibly valuable.

Discussion Points:

- We need to start with local questions, observations, and ideas about what's happening in the community, and then expand it to be acceptable to the NSF & science community.
- Local people have to have buy in. What use is a scientific driven agenda, unless it is something that the local people are concerned about? We just have to get all of the people together and let them decide and drive the process.

More information can be found at: <http://ram.uaa.alaska.edu/>

Presentation Title: Water Reservations Initiatives in the Copper River Basin

Presenters: Craig Jacobson, Ecotrust, Joe Hicks, Cheesh'na Tribal Council and Warren Keogh, U.S. Fish & Wildlife

Contact Information: craig@ecotrust.org (503) 227-6225; jhicks@cheeshna.com (907)822-3503; Warren_keogh@fws.gov (907) 786-3901

Summary: The combined presentations covered areas of water rights laws and application of laws. The water rights laws that we have to work with are inherently flawed, as they were put in place to secure economic growth rather than conservation. However imperfect the system is though, it is what we have to work with. It is important to act now to secure water rights for conservation/cultural purposes, because the process is lengthy. The way the State application process works is that whoever applies first has the first "right" to water.

Joe gave examples of the process that Cheesh'na went through to obtain water rights for the protection of Chinook salmon habitat in Sinona Creek. It was a lengthy and costly process (\$1500 for DNR application, plus staff time), requiring a lot of data and determination. Cheesh'na was the first Tribal organization in the region to lead such an effort, and is an example of what could be done for all of the Copper River tributaries.

Permissible Instream Flow uses under Alaska State Law includes:

- 1) Protection of fish and wildlife habitat, migration, and propagation;
- 2) Recreation and parks;
- 3) Navigation and transportation, and

4) Sanitation and water quality.

Under State Law, priority is given to water that is used for human consumption. There is a federal water reservation in place on Gulkana River but there is an opportunity for the community of Gulkana to top-file the current reservation application by applying for human consumption.

Joe and Donna Pennington also informally presented information about the proposed mine at Indian Pass Lake (near Mentasta Lake). There was a discussion about the possibility of using water laws to protect the lake. It is possible to do an application for the lake, but would first need to come up with a statement of need (what is the water needed for?) and also to collect data. Data collection is critical to submitting a successful application.

The overall and ultimate point of the water reservation discussion is that it is important to take action now. If we wait, it may be too late. We have to identify the water bodies now, begin data collection (this may include installing water gauges), and get applications in before others (who may not have the best interest of conservation and/or local people in mind). Water laws are complicated but there are people (such as Joe and Warren) who have navigated the system and can help.

Discussion Points:

- Instream flow reservations are reviewed every 10 years... they can be changed.
- Only 1% of Alaskan water has gauges. To apply for water rights, we may need to install gauges to determine amount of water flow etc.
- The goal is the long term protection of community water, habitat, and subsistence rights. We need to identify data needs (such as gauge data) and fundraise to support efforts. How to we get at data needs, and how can we support that?
- The lack of water data in the region is an issue. We need to have a lot of data in order to put together a through application(s).
- 40% of fresh water is in Alaska. If we can be foresighted we can protect our most precious resource.
- I can't get to my fishwheel anymore. Where it's at, the people say I can't cross their land. I've been going there all along, but now I can't go there anymore.
 - Ahtna is working to create fishwheel access sites for each of the villages.

More Information can be found in the following books:

Locke, Allan, Clair Stainaker, Sandra Zellmer, Kathleen Williams, Hal Beecher, Todd Richards, Cindy Robertson, Alan Wald, Andrew Paul, Tom Annear, 2009. Integrated Approaches to Riverine Resource Stewardship: Case studies, science, law, people, and policy, Instream Flow Council, Lincoln Nebraska.

Annear, T., I. Chisholm, H. Beecher, A. Locke, P. Aarrestad, C. Coomer, C. Estes, J. Hunt, R. Jacobson, G. Jobsis, J. Kauffman, J. Marshall, K. Mayes, G. Smith, C. Stalnaker, R. Wentworth, 2004. Instream Flows for Riverine Resource Stewardship, Instream Flow Council, Lincoln Nebraska.

Getches, D., 1997. Water Law in a Nutshell, West Publishing Company, St. Paul Minnesota.

Presentation Title: Tribal Conservation Districts

Presenter: Joe Hicks, Cheesh'na Tribal Council

Contact Information: jhicks@cheeshna.com (907)822-3503

Summary: The primary objective of a tribal conservation district is to support tribal efforts to provide for the utilization, protection, conservation and restoration of lands for the benefit of the community in a partnership effort with USDA and NRCS. Tribal conservation districts provide a local voice in leadership efforts to address natural resources needs and concerns by providing assistance to land owners/users and managers in the conservation and wise use of land and natural resources. They also provide leadership for intra-tribal coordination between tribal governments, tribal natural resource managers and coordinate assistance from NRCS and other federal, state, local and private sources. Examples of Conservation Districts (within Alaska) include the Kenny Lake Soil and Water Conservation District and Tyonek Tribal Conservation District.

Discussion Points:

- Arlene Rosenkrans (local NRCS representative) would be a good resource for learning more about how to create a conservation district.
- Having a TCD could be useful in getting funding for water rights efforts.
- There could be a benefit in proposing area as a fish and wildlife refuge.
- The TCD does not have to cover the whole area; it could just cover the headwaters or other significant areas.
- Some other useful programs to look at (as a model) are the River Keepers program and/or Tribal Keepers projects.
- There is an opportunity right now to apply for a Tribal Wildlife Grant which could help with creating a TCD. The grant is due by September.

Planning the Next CRSG Meeting

The next Copper River Strategy Group Meeting is proposed for November 2009. Location is yet to be determined, but possible locations include: Copper Center, Mentasta, Chitina, and Gulkana. Cheesh'na Tribal Council and the Ecotrust Copper River Programs plan on co-hosting the meeting with other meeting co-sponsors. If you are interested in being co-sponsoring the meeting, please contact either Joeneal Hicks (jhicks@cheeshna.com) or Erica McCall Valentine (evalentine@ecotrust.org). Cheesh'na Tribal Council and Ecotrust Copper River Programs plan on creating a CRSG meeting Steering Committee to aid in developing the meeting agenda, identifying presenters/presentations, and aiding in other meeting-associated decision making processes. If you would like to participate in the CRSG meeting Steering Committee, please contact either Joeneal Hicks (jhicks@cheeshna.com) or Erica McCall Valentine (evalentine@ecotrust.org). The CRSG meeting Steering Committee will commence meeting (via teleconference) in late-August, early-September 2009.

To close the June 2009 CRSG meeting, meeting attendees discussed the following ideas as potentials for the November 2009 CRSG meeting agenda:

- How to be packaged in order to be funded;
- Presentation from Kenny Lake Soil and Water Conservation District;
- Who, what, when, where, why and how of Tribal Conservation Districts;
- What is AmeriCorps and what AmeriCorps opportunities are available for the Basin?
- Engaging with and working with Basin Tribal Councils;
- General networking;
- Make a video about why have a TCD in Mentasta;
- Headwaters to Ocean radio segments;
- Overall report on regional programs;
- Abandoned vehicle project report;
- EPA Brownfield program;
- Water reservations in the Copper River watershed;
- Copper River Stewardship program;
- Recycling activities along the Copper River; and
- Tribal Wildlife Grant presentation.

Attachment I: June 2009 Copper River Strategy Group meeting attendees

Name	Organization	Phone number	Email address
Gloria Stickwan	Ahtna Incorporated	822-3476	gstickwan@ahtna-inc.com
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