

Parks Responds to the Sockeye Fire



Smoke billowing south of the Willow Creek SRA fee booth



Fires crews camped in the Nancy Lake campground for about a week during the thick of it (at no charge, of course).



A fire crew prepares to fight the blaze from a Forestry helicopter along the Parks Highway.



The Sockeye Fire seen from Willow Creek Parkway in Willow Creek SRA

On a Sunday in mid-June, ranger Drew McElvain and recruit Ben Corwin were getting ready for a boat patrol on Nancy Lake when news of a small two-acre forest fire just north of Willow came over the radio. They responded to Sockeye Road to render assistance to state troopers.

The fire was still small at that time, but strong northerly winds blew the fire up to about 80 acres within two hours, moving at 20 mph.

The rangers assisted with evacuating Willow residents in the path of the fire with a boat and trailer. This evacuation method elicited a few chuckles, but the amusement waned as they continued evacuating homes during much of the afternoon.

Soon everyone seemed to be occupied doing something related to protecting people, structures, and resources as much as possible from the fire. Park Specialist Vic Stanculescu, four backcountry volunteers, and four campground hosts were instrumental in evacuating Willow Creek SRA, Nancy Lake SRA, and Nancy Lake SRS campgrounds. Maintenance foreman Paul Dimaggio responded from home to begin moving park assets to safety at the Nancy Lake Office compound and setting up hoses to water the building if needed.

Maintenance assistant Nick Allen and ACC Dustin Knapp, whose homes were in the immediate path of the fire, took several days off to safeguard their properties. Fortunately, their homes were spared due to adequate fire-wise tree clearing and Nick's access to a 3,000-gallon water truck.

In the end, roughly half of the Willow Creek SRA was scorched. The campground was saved by the efforts of Forestry firefighters who cleared the area of fire fuels and then back-burned areas away from the facility. No structures were lost and the fire was contained around Crystal Lake, after it jumped Willow Creek Parkway and continued south until it was approximately one mile north of Nancy Lake SRA. All park units near Willow re-opened a week after the fire was first reported.

For information on what measures you can take to protect your property and help it survive wildfires, go to:

<http://forestry.alaska.gov/pdfs/firewise09.pdf>

The Trail Pro in Office Plaid or Outdoor Blue



Alaska State Parks is home to many employees with work stations throughout Alaska. One employee you might come across in the Atwood Building, or out on the trail with an antenna sticking out of his pack, is none other than Natural Resource Specialist II, Justin Wholey.

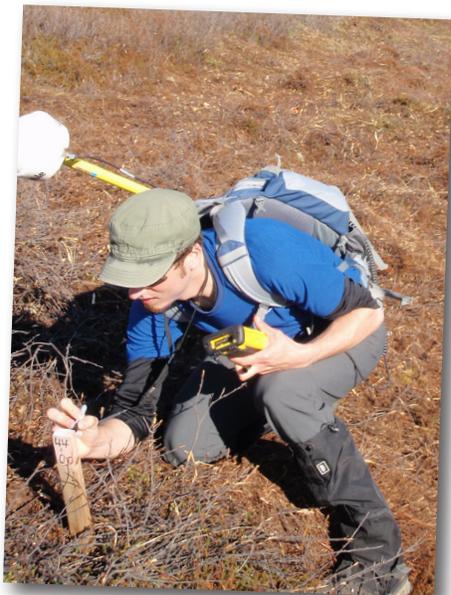
So, who is this guy in the stylish plaid shirt?

Justin processes geospatial information for the State Parks Trails Program, and although he keeps a fairly low profile in the office, his extensive knowledge and experience make him an invaluable asset to the Parks team.

“Justin is a pleasure to work with,” says Darcy Harris who is in charge of Alaska State Parks’ Trails Program. “He’s easygoing, positive, and a very competent mapping and GIS professional.”

Justin and his family moved up to Alaska when his father was stationed at Elmendorf Air Force Base in 1993.

In 2010, he graduated from Alaska Pacific University with a bachelor’s degree in Environmental Science and a minor in Outdoor Studies. In 2009, during his coursework at APU, Justin began his employment with the State of Alaska as an intern for Alaska State Parks.



Justin takes in the sights around Alaska State Parks.

As an intern, he took part in an ambitious joint effort between the National Park Service and the Alaska State Parks Trails Program called the Alaska State Park Trail Inventory Project to map out and establish a GPS Data Dictionary for many of the trails within the Alaska State Parks system.

The early days of the project took Justin and his fellow interns all over the state, ranging from the Chena River State Recreation Area of the Northern Area, down to Kachemak Bay State Park on the Kenai Peninsula, and even to Shuyak Island State Park in Kodiak.

Each trail had to be surveyed to catalog GPS coordinates, elevation, and other specifics to establish enough data for a trail map. Albeit long and meticulous work, Justin is an avid hiker and pack rafter, so there are few places he would rather be than hiking along and exploring the trails of a state park.

“The trails I most enjoyed surveying were in Kachemak Bay SP,” Justin says. “The weather was great and the scenery was beautiful. But, most of all, it felt secluded. While there, [the survey crew] did come across a few other groups hiking the trails, but for the most part, it felt like we had the entire park to ourselves.”

The project took five years to complete, and resulted in highly accurate trail maps with information regarding relief, ground cover, and trail condition for over 200 miles of trails within the Alaska State Park System.

You can find the fruit of Justin’s hard work on the Alaska State Trails webpage:

<http://dnr.alaska.gov/parks/aktrails/explore/trailmapguide.htm>

Northern Area



Northern Area staff and volunteers pose for a group photo at the annual volunteer appreciation picnic held at Whitefish Campground in Lower Chatanika River State Recreation Area.



Justin Wholey riding the trails at Lower Chatanika River SRA. In late July, he spent a few days mapping the trail system as part of a recreational trail grant to produce an ATV brochure.

Mat-Su



Mat-Su Area Chainsaw Safety Training was held in Denali State Park this season. Instructors Carter Forney and Vic Stanculescu are happy to report that seven attendees are now ready to clear and open trails in the Mat-Su park units this summer.

Chugach



Chugach's park staff has been busy this summer using the supplies and materials they took across the frozen Eklutna Lake earlier this year. Here's what they've built with those materials. The exterior of the brand new public-use cabin at Eklutna is almost complete, this winter they will start working on the interior.



(L-R) NRT II Joe Hall, ACC Sean Cook, ACC Nancy Long, ACC Maggie Nielson, Park Specialist Blaine Smith, and ACC Solomon Hull-Johnson show off the result of their hard work on the new public-use cabin across Eklutna Lake from the Yuditnu Public-Use Cabin.

Mat-Su Volunteers

The Nancy Lake volunteer trail crew and backcountry hosts have had numerous adventures and achievements and have received many compliments this summer. They helped the Alaska Department of Fish & Game stock some of the parks' lakes on two separate occasions.

“I got some much appreciated help from your enthusiastic crew today,” Andrew Garry with ADF&G told Park Specialist Vic Stanculescu in early July. “Tell them thank you for all the bucket carrying!”

When a visitor injured her leg at Red Shirt Lake Public-Use Cabin #4 (a backcountry cabin), they coordinated with Park Specialist Vic Stanculescu and Willow Air to get her a flight out because she was unable to hike and paddle out on her own.

These volunteers also assisted ranger Drew McElvain and Alaska State Troopers with a search and rescue in Hatcher Pass. The four volunteers found the overdue hiker down the Gold Mint Trail, keeping the troopers from needing to dispatch additional resources. They also lent a hand to Willow area park staff, assisting with the evacuation of Nancy Lake SRA and Willow Creek SRA when the Sockeye Fire was raging.



(L-R) Kierre Childers, Sean Maguire, Sam Crisanti, and Chris Voda helped ADF&G



Arts Along the Arm in Chugach State Park

ARTS in the Parks

Bird Creek Campground

- Friday, August 21 – 12pm to 6pm
- Saturday, August 22 – 10am to 6pm
- Sunday, August 23 – 12pm to 6pm
- Workshops, music, and art fair

Workshops

Alcohol Inks: Led by Francine Dufour Jones on Friday, Saturday, and Sunday from 1-2:30pm (cost \$20 per workshop; register at Blaines Art Supply)

Oil Painting En Plein Air: Led by Don Kolstad on Saturday from 10am-2pm at McHugh Creek Trailhead (cost \$40; register at Blaines Art Supply)

Entertainment by:
 Nutter Brothers – Saturday from 3:30-5pm
 Douglas Yates playing a traditional Native flute – Saturday from 2-3pm

Mushroom forays and kids arts and crafts all weekend long!

Art Fair
 For a \$50 donation, artists can reserve a 10'x10' space to sell art.

Blaines Art
 Picture Framing • Art Supplies • Art Classes • Gifts
 On the corner of Benson and Cope
 For more information visit www.alaskastateparks.org, or contact David Griffin, State Parks Project Coordinator, by phone (907) 269-8696, or email david.griffin@alaska.gov

Don't Miss This!

