



Volunteers Making a Difference Since 1994

Stream Watch 2021 Season Summary



Volunteers with program and agency staff at the 2021 Volunteer Appreciation (Sanchez 2021)

Introduction

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. Over 27 years, the program grew to additional sites on the Russian, Kenai, and Kasilof Rivers.

Today the Stream Watch mission is to assist land management agencies with stewardship of important recreational sites and the health of the region's watersheds. Stream Watch volunteers remove riverside litter; install habitat protection fencing; complete fish habitat restoration projects; and share critical information with the general public on river stewardship, agency regulations, and bear safety during the summer season (June-September).

In the past 27 years, Stream Watch volunteers dedicated 23,338 hours of time within the program, provided peer-to-peer education to 68,171 individuals, picked up 36,378 pounds of trash, and recycled 889 pounds of fishing line. Alongside these successes the program helped revegetate miles of riverbank by installing habitat fencing and by encouraging visitors to use boardwalks and designated river access.

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

- Northern Peninsula Program
 - Kenai- Russian River Confluence (Angler & Falls Trail), Kenai-Russian River Ferry
- Western Peninsula Program
 - Bings Landing, Moose Range Meadows (East & West), Centennial Park, N. Kenai Beach, and the Kasilof River Special Use Area
- Southern Peninsula Program
 - Clam Gulch, Deep Creek, Ninilchik, and Anchor Point
- Ambassador Volunteer Season:
 - Northern Peninsula Program: June 1—September 11
 - Central Peninsula Program: June 1 – September 15
 - Southern Peninsula Program: July 1 – September 15

Covid-19 Impacts

While the Covid-19 pandemic drastically reduced Stream Watch outreach and events in 2020, in 2021 the program adapted to operate safely in a more normal capacity. Stream Watch staff built an online learning platform for the mandatory Ambassador orientation, and as infection numbers decreased with widespread vaccination in the spring of 2021, staff and volunteers were able to safely hold Stewardship days and even an outdoor volunteer appreciation event.



Tom and Elaine Reale working hard on the Russian River. (Kraxberger-Linson, 2021)

Season Recap

Stream Watch experienced a very successful season in 2021. While there were fewer Ambassadors than in 2020, volunteer engagement was high, and Stream Watch saw the highest number of volunteer hours ever. 58 Ambassadors participated in the program, with 13 new and 45 returning Ambassadors in 2021. 91 volunteers participated in Stewardship Days, including some Ambassadors. Below is a table illustrating Stream Watch impacts for the past ten years.

Table 1: 2021 Stream Watch Program Volunteer Statistics

Year	2021	2020	2019	2018	2017	2016	2015	2014	2013	2012
Volunteer Hours	2263	862	1557	1896	1504	1282	1492	1217	1497	1607
Public Contacts	5759	2256	4031	2616	3962	2870	4618	3195	4150	4041
Trash (lbs.)	2925	4590	4258	6921	3110	2413	1808	1446	2953	851
Fishing Line (lbs.)	138	99	127	124	81	75	148	97	-	-
Cigarette Butts	6789	3072	5549	3485	2257	-	-	-	-	-

With 2,263 volunteer hours, Stream Watch had a great year in 2021, exceeding all past years in terms of volunteer engagement. Similarly, Stream Watch had the highest ever numbers for public outreach with 5,759 public contacts. Trash collected is notable because Stream Watch did not have any very large items such as vehicles, which were removed in years past, and yet volunteers removed nearly 3 tons of debris from habitat including a large amount of small wildlife endangering plastics. Overall, the impact of the program in 2021 exceeded expectations thanks to a highly involved group of volunteers and many successful Stewardship Days.

Stream Watch staff did allow volunteers to count travel time as volunteer time in 2021. This change was made both to accommodate certain volunteers for whom travel could be an obstacle to participation in the program and to help ease the transition from 2020, when volunteers were only asked to work 12 hours, to 2021, when volunteers were expected to work 24 hours. Not all volunteers chose to count travel time as volunteer time, but some did. It is not possible to tell exactly how many travel hours were counted in the volunteer hour count, but based on information from volunteers about 10% of total volunteer time is likely travel time in the figure of 2263. Even excluding 10%, Stream Watch still saw higher numbers of volunteer hours than ever before.

Table 2: Site Specific Data from the 2021 Stream Watch Data

Site	Travel Mileage	Hours	Number of Contacts	Pounds of Trash	Pounds of Line	Cigarette Butts
Anchor River	-	10.5	-	-	-	-
Bings Landing	277	21.5	60	31.33	8.6	208
Centennial Park	1153	194.95	235	110.62	42.55	2388
Deep Creek	64	32.5	21	141	4.5	185
Kasilof	279	34	88	218.4	7	1161
Kenai Mouth	1178	92	961	41.5	5	312
Moose Range Meadows	103.5	39	24	32.75	6.95	113
Ninilchik	119	88.5	110	60.5	0.6	449
Other	-	135.5	-	-	-	-
Orientations	-	300	-	-	-	-
Russian River Campground	6370	675.3	3837	170.78	33.45	897
Russian River Ferry	410	46	318	57.75	28.72	360
Stewardship Days	N/A	593.5	105	2060	1	716
Invasive Species	383	87.75	-	-	-	-
Totals:	9954	2263	5759	2925	138	6789

In Table 2, “Other,” is considered volunteer time such as data entry, cleaning fishing line, or other tasks that do not fit the mould of the primary Stream Watch data sheets. “Orientation” is a tally of the time spent by volunteers doing the online orientation, which was automatically considered six hours upon completion, as well as on-river orientation activities. “Invasive Species” refers to volunteer time spent with the new pilot program for the Stream Watch Invasive Species Task Force, more on that below. “Stewardship Days” refer to discrete work days with volunteers such as habitat fencing, beach cleanups, or outreach days. Stewardship Days are a great way to achieve significant conservation impacts in a short period of time.

Table 2 shows the distribution of Stream Watch activities across all program sites. The Northern Peninsula program consists of the Russian River Ferry and Russian River Campground, where Stream Watch originated in 1994. With a high concentration of volunteers, the Russian River Campground saw the highest number of volunteer hours and public contacts. Centennial Park received the most volunteer attention of any of the Central Peninsula sites and Ninilchik received the majority of volunteer time spent on the Southern Peninsula. Of regular sites, the most trash was removed from the Kasilof River Special Use Area during the dipnet fishery.



Kay Gardner and Sally Tachick during the first lower river shift of the season (Hecht 2021)

Program Administration

Stream Watch is jointly administered by Chugach National Forest and Kenai Watershed Forum. To fulfill its mission, Stream Watch operates cooperatively with the following land managing agencies:

- US Forest Service, CNF (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 and Anchor River, Deep Creek, and Ninilchik Recreation Sites) & Division of Mining Land and Water (Kasilof River Special Use Area)
- City of Soldotna (Centennial Park)
- City of Kenai (Kenai Beach)

Stream Watch activities are primarily conducted by volunteers. Both Chugach National Forest and Kenai Watershed Forum hire full-time coordinators to ensure program success. The following staff coordinated the program for the 2021 season:

- Volunteer Coordinator, Galen Hecht (Kenai Watershed Forum)
- Volunteer Coordinator, Amber Kraxberger-Linson (Chugach National Forest)
- Intern, Brandon Drzazgowski (Kenai Watershed Forum)
- Intern, Carson Lambert (Kenai Watershed Forum)

Funding from a variety of agencies and organizations makes Stream Watch possible. Funding or in-kind match for the 2021 season was provided by the following entities: Alaska Conservation Foundation; Alaska Department of Natural Resources—Alaska State Parks and Department of Mining, Land and Water, Alaska Recreational Management; Chugach National Forest; City of Soldotna; ConocoPhillips; Kenai National Wildlife Refuge; Kenai Peninsula Fish Habitat Partnership; Kenai Watershed Forum; National Forest Foundation; Pacific States Marine Fisheries Commission; and private donations.



Marathon Petroleum Company volunteer group after installing fence on the Russian River (Castro 2021)

Stream Watch Outreach and Volunteer Recruitment

Outreach was less limited in 2021 than in 2020. However, Stream Watch did not recruit as many new volunteers. With 13 new Ambassadors, Stream Watch maintained relative consistency compared to the numbers of Ambassadors in years past with many more total volunteer hours, showing higher volunteer engagement than in a typical year. New Ambassadors and returning Ambassadors alike showed a high level of commitment to the program.



On River orientation Russian River Ferry (Kraxberger-Linson 2021)

Ambassador Training/Orientation

Because of Covid-19, the group orientation was not held once again in 2021. Instead, program staff created an online orientation course using an integrated online learning platform. Video presentations were provided alongside quizzes to test the knowledge of volunteers. This online orientation was followed by short on-river orientation to provide the practical skills and experiences volunteers need to succeed in the program. General feedback from volunteers about the online orientation was positive. In order to accommodate all volunteers, coordinators still offered the full orientation in person to individuals or small groups. Returning volunteers repeatedly stated that having a refresher course for returning volunteers would be a positive addition to the program.

The screenshot displays an online learning platform interface for 'Stream Watch Volunteer Training'. At the top, a progress bar shows '20% COMPLETE 4/20 Steps'. The main content area is titled 'Peer-to-Peer Education' and features a video player with a list of bullet points: 'Store personal gear responsibly', 'Manage fish waste to prevent unwanted confrontations with wildlife', 'Photos are great! But never approach a bear or other wild animal to get a better shot.', and 'Use wildlife deterrents responsibly, and always practice responsibly'. The video player also includes 'Watch later' and 'Share' buttons. The interface includes navigation buttons for 'Previous Lesson', 'Mark Complete', and 'Next Topic'.

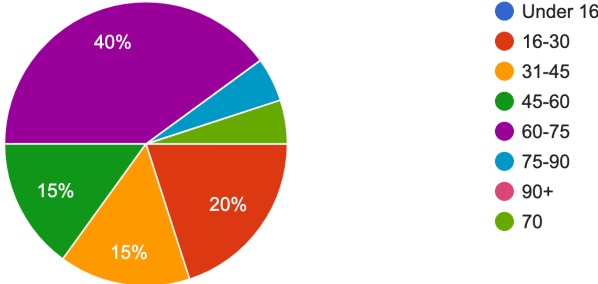
Screenshot from the online volunteer orientation created in the spring of 2021

Ambassador Demographics

This year, coordinators conducted pre-season outreach to all volunteers with a set questionnaire that included optional demographic information from volunteers. 20 volunteers opted into this demographic survey, and results are shown below.

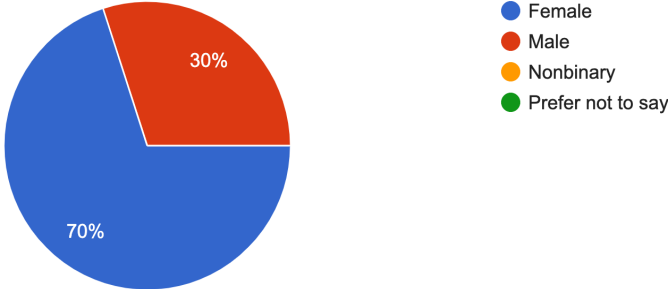
Age

20 responses



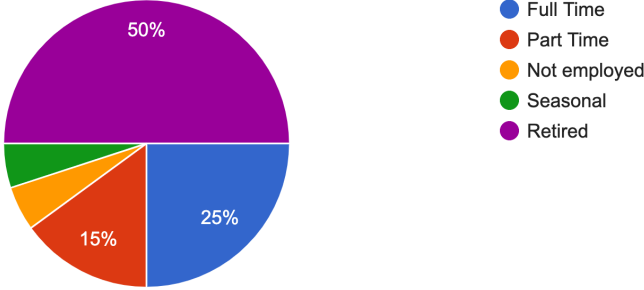
Gender

20 responses



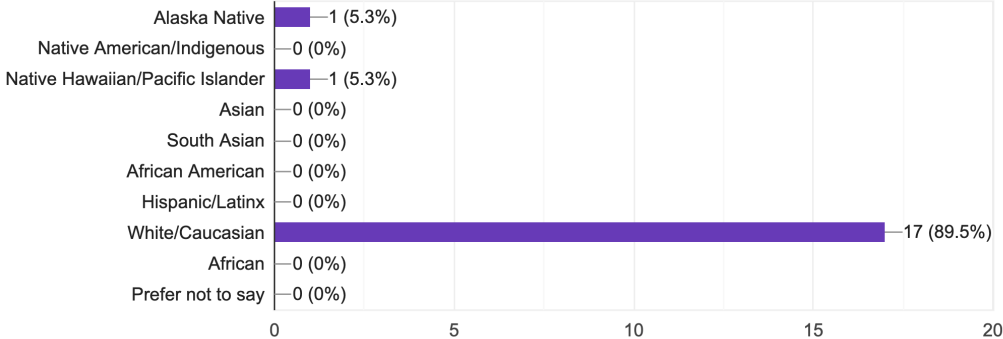
Employment Status

20 responses



Ethnicity (Check all that apply)

19 responses



Invasive Species Task Force

This year Stream Watch collaborated with the Kenai Watershed Forum invasive species program to provide an opportunity for 10 Ambassadors to participate in special invasive species training and control efforts. This group received a special orientation with Maura Schumacher, Kenai Watershed Forum's Invasive Species Specialist, and participated in an array of weed-pulls, invasive species surveys and other activities to contribute to regional invasive species control and education efforts. This pilot project was supported through funding from the Copper River Watershed Project, with funds originating from Chugach National Forest.



A youth group from Global Leadership Adventures helps clip reed canarygrass seedheads (Hecht 2021)

Kenai Dipnet Booth

The Kenai dipnet booth is a volunteer-staffed informational table located at the entrance to Kenai Beach off of South Spruce St. in Kenai, Alaska. The booth is facilitated by Kenai Watershed Forum's Stream Watch program with support from Alaska Department of Fish & Game, Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation, and the City of Kenai. The booth started in 2018 in order to inform the

public about public health threats posed by bacteria problems produced by fish waste on the beach attracting gulls. The booth also provides valuable information on regulations, emergency fishing orders, fish identification, tides, and other work being done with the organizations involved. Kenai Watershed Forum staff and Stream Watch volunteers are the primary personnel present at the booth. Aside from information, booth volunteers also conduct trash cleanups along the beach and give away stickers, finclippers, dog bags, coloring books, and more.

The dipnet booth was on site for 22 days (from July 10 until July 31) during the 2021 Kenai Beach dipnet season. Of those 22 days, 16 featured operations by a Stream Watch volunteer or KWF or ADF&G employee. Operation of the booth generally occurred in 4-hour long shifts that were scheduled through high tide expected on that day. This scheduling ensures that the booth will reach as many fishermen as possible due to the fact that most dipnetters fish during these times.



Leah Ellis of ADFG talking to youth at the Kenai Dipnet Booth (Hech, 2021)

Marine Debris Cleanups

Stream Watch has been attending to coastal issues with increasing effort over the past five years. The Kenai Dipnet Booth and Trashercise Tuesday cleanups at Kasilof Beach are both regular marine debris

programming. Stream Watch also collaborated with Alaska SeaGrant and Ninilchik Traditional Council to host beach cleanups around Ninilchik and worked with Marathon Petroleum Corporation and Kenai Rotary Club to conduct marine debris surveys and cleanups at Kenai Beach.



Staff and volunteers after a beach cleanup in Deep Creek with SeaGrant and Ninilchik Traditional Council (unknown 2021)

Digital Outreach

Stream Watch uses social media platforms Facebook and Instagram and Mailchimp as primary communications channels. Statistics from the page are shared below:

Results

Export

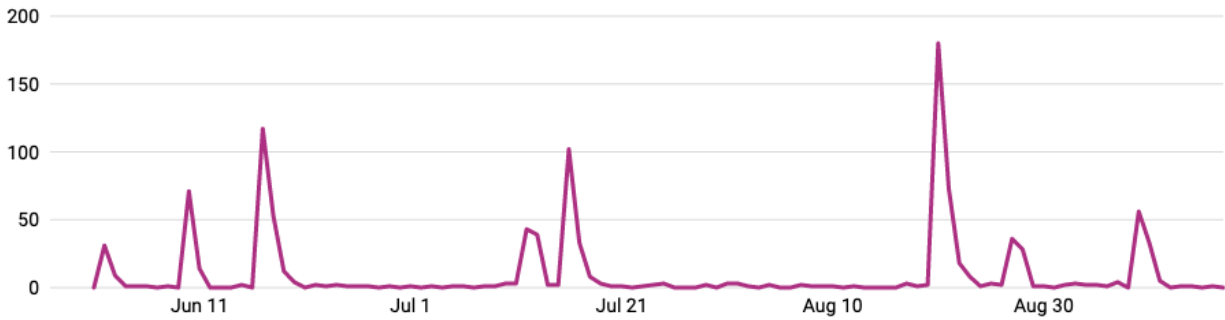
Facebook Page Reach

11,511 ↑ 505.2%



Instagram Reach ⓘ

454 ↓ 9.9%



Audience [See What's New](#)

Current Audience

Potential Audience

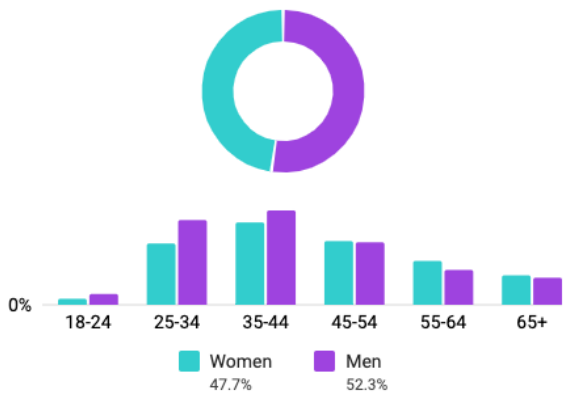
Facebook Page Likes ⓘ

2.3K

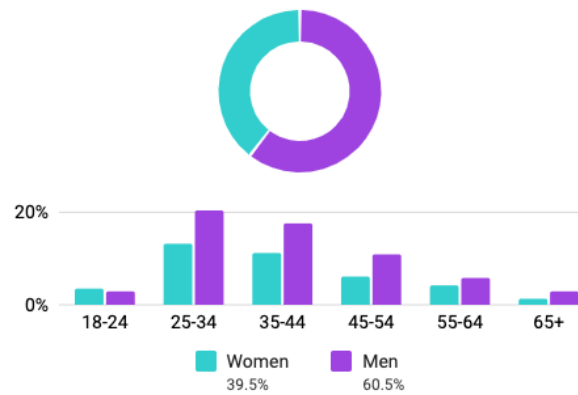
Instagram Followers ⓘ

542

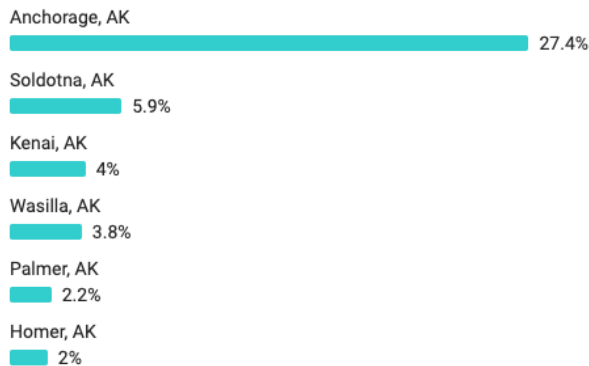
Age & Gender ⓘ



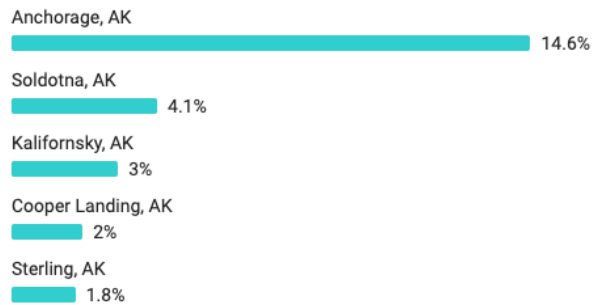
Age & Gender ⓘ



Top Cities



Top Cities



On Mailchimp, Stream Watch has a core audience of 160 and a general audience of 600. The average open rate is 57.3% and the average click rate is 19.2% compared to peer averages of 39.6% and 4.9% respectively. This shows a high degree of engagement with program emails.

Events

Below is a list of events hosted by the program in 2021. The many stewardship events the program hosted complemented Ambassador efforts and increased program impact. Kenai Watershed Forum also hosted a series of educational talks called Fireside Chats at various sites in a unique outreach effort.

Date	Time	Name of Event	Host	Location	Classification
05/25	10am-4pm	Russian River Fencing	KWF/USFS	Russian River	Stewardship Day
05/26	10am-4pm	Russian River Fencing	KWF/USFS/	Russian River	Stewardship Day
06/02	9am-5pm	Soldotna Wednesday Market	KWF	Soldotna Creek Park	Educational/Interpretive Event
06/04	11am-3pm	Soldotna Boot Brush Installation	KWF	Soldotna Parks	Invasive Species Stewardship Day
06/07	10am-4pm	Bird Cherry Surveys	KWF	Cooper Landing/Kenai/Soldotna	Invasive Species Stewardship Day
06/08	10am-4pm	Bird Cherry Surveys	KWF	Cooper Landing/Kenai/Soldotna	Invasive Species Stewardship Day
06/09	10am-4pm	Bird Cherry Surveys	KWF	Cooper Landing/Kenai/Soldotna	Invasive Species Stewardship Day
06/10	6-7pm	Fireside Chat – Tom and Tom ADF&G	KWF	Russian River CG/Ferry	Educational/Interpretive Event
06/12	1-5pm	Rainbarrel Workshop	KWF	Soldotna Creek Park	Educational/Interpretive Event
06/15	10am-4pm	Moose Range Meadows Fencing	KWF	Moose Range Meadows West	Stewardship Day
06/12	10am-4pm	Russian River Invasives Booth	KWF	Russian River Falls TH	Educational/Interpretive Event
06/17	10am-1pm	Salvage Art & Recycling With Regroup	KWF	KWF Office	Educational/Interpretive Event
06/17	6-7pm	Fireside Chat – Everything But the Fillet	USFS/KWF	Russian River Ferry	Educational/Interpretive Event
06/22	4-7pm	Sign Installation at Kasilof River Special Use Area	KWF	Kasilof River Special Use Area	Stewardship Day
06/23	4-6:30	Butter & Eggs Weed Pull	KWF	Cooper Landing	Invasive Species Stewardship Day
06/24	6-7pm	Fireside Chat – Dave Atcheson	KWF	Centennial Park	Educational/Interpretive Event
06/30	9am-5pm	Soldotna Wednesday Market	KWF	Soldotna Creek Park	Educational/Interpretive Event
07/01	6-7pm	Fireside Chat – Teresa Becher/Sonia Kumar	KWF	Kenai River Brewing	Educational/Interpretive Event
07/06	4-6:30pm	Central Peninsula Weed Pull Caravan	KWF	KWF Office	Invasive Species Stewardship Day

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07/08	6-7pm	Fireside Chat - Dave Atcheson	KWF	Centennial Park	Educational/Interpretive Event
07/10	9am-5pm	GLA Stewardship Day	KWF	Kenai River/ Beach/Beaver Creek	Stewardship Day
07/13	6-7pm	Trashercise Tuesday	KWF	Kasilof North Beach	Stewardship Day
07/15	6-7pm	Fireside Chat - Galen Hecht	KWF	Kenai River Brewing	Educational/Interpretive Event
07/20	6-7pm	Trashercise Tuesday	KWF	Kasilof North Beach	Stewardship Day
07/22	9am-5pm	GLA Stewardship Day	KWF	Russian River/Kasilof Beach	Educational/Interpretive Event
07/22	10am-4pm	Reed Canarygrass Seedhead Clipping	KWF/USFS	Russian River/HEA	Invasive Species Day
07/22	10am-3pm	Russian River Weir Interpretive Hike	KWF	Russian River Falls Trail	Educational/Interpretive Event
07/27	6-7pm	Trashercise Tuesday	KWF	Kasilof North Beach	Stewardship Day
07/29	10am-3pm	Russian River Weir Interpretive Hike	KWF	Russian River Falls Trail	Educational/Interpretive Event
07/29	6-7pm	Fireside Chat - Russian River Weir	KWF	Russian River Pavillion	Educational/Interpretive Event
08/03	6-7pm	Trashercise Tuesday	KWF	Kasilof North Beach	Stewardship Day
08/10	6-7pm	Trashercise Tuesday	KWF	Kasilof North Beach	Stewardship Day
08/12	6-7pm	Fireside Chat – Children’s Stories & S’mores	KWF	Centennial Park	Educational/Interpretive Event
08/20	10am-2pm	Ninilchik Beach Cleanup	KWF/SeaGrant/NTC	Deep Creek Beach	Beach Cleanup/Stewardship Day
08/21	10am-2pm	Ninilchik Beach Cleanup	KWF/SeaGrant/NTC	Ninilchik Beach	Beach Cleanup/Stewardship Day
08/24	9am-5pm	Ninilchik Scenic Overlook Stair Build	KWF	Ninilchik Scenic Overlook	Trail/Stewardship Day
08/26	9am-5pm	Ninilchik Scenic Overlook Stair Build	KWF	Ninilchik Scenic Overlook	Trail/Stewardship Day
09/02	9am-5pm	Slide Hole Angler Trail Build	KWF	Ninilchik Scenic Overlook	Trail/Stewardship Day
09/04	4-7pm	Stream Watch Volunteer Appreciation	KWF/USFS	Cooper Landing Community Center	Appreciation
09/11	9am-5pm	Kenai River Cleanup	KWF/USFS/ Alaska Fly Fishers	Russian River Ferry	Stewardship Day



Teresa Becher speaks about beluga whale monitoring on the Kenai River at a Fireside Chat (Hecht 2021)

Conclusion

Following a very abnormal year in 2020, Stream Watch returned to a more typical year in 2021. With 40 events and regular Ambassador programming, Stream Watch broke 27 year program records for total volunteer hours, public contacts, and cigarette butts collected. As the program looks toward the 2022 season, partners and administrators will work together to continue to deepen the program's impact as a support for land management agencies and conservation activities to benefit the great salmon rivers of the Kenai Peninsula.