Meeting rooms don’t get much more spectacular than this.

In May 2013, researchers in Alaska EPSCoR’s Southcentral Test Case began their second year of work with a roving team meeting along the course of the Kenai River. The event served as an orientation for new researchers, an opportunity to organize research groups, and a chance to meet with community partners.

“The research teams, folks from UAF in Fairbanks, UAA in Anchorage, who may not spend a lot of time here, it’s getting to know the landscape, getting to know the study sites,” said Andy Kliskey, leader of the test case. “It’s been a really important opportunity for everyone.”

The focus of the Southcentral Test Case is on the Kenai River watershed, a heavily populated (by Alaska standards) corridor that stretches 82 miles across the Kenai Peninsula, passing through a number of small to medium-sized towns along the way. Test case researchers are study how communities in the watershed are adapting to different environmental and social changes, from fluctuating salmon populations to wildfires.

The group visited the headwaters of the river at Summit Lake and explored several key spots along the waterway, including the sites of aquatic sensor arrays set up by the test case as well as communities, prime sportfishing areas, and the Kenai Bluffs, where the river reaches the sea. Various speakers discussed the history of the area, hydrology data, ecology, and the social dynamics of the region, which is experiencing interrelated changes in temperature and precipitation, salmon populations, tourism levels, and a number of other factors.

“Though there are test case subcomponents that focus on, for example, the aquatic ecology of the Kenai, climate hydrology, what we’re particularly interested in is how these components link to human communities, to residents and to managers in the Kenai,” Kliskey said, “and so understanding the link between hydrologic change and livelihood.”

Following the one-day tour, the group proceeded to the city of Soldotna, where they spent the next two days in meetings designed to further scope out research goals and methods and also to enable scientists to meet some of the effort’s community partners, such as the Kenaitze – a local Alaska Native tribe – and the nonprofit Kenai Watershed Forum. Another partner, the Kenai Peninsula Campus of UAA, served as the site of the meetings.