

Icefield-to-Estuary-to-Educators



Anne Beaudreau, an Assistant Professor of Fisheries at the University of Alaska Fairbanks, discusses a local estuary with Juneau-area educators.

Call it a doppelglacier. Southeast Test Case leaders wanted to expose a group of local teachers to the research they're doing on icefield-to-estuary ecosystems, but their study site, Berners Bay, is in a difficult-to-reach spot past the end of Juneau's road system. So they found something closer to home: Herbert Glacier, which sits at the end of an easy hiking trail about 30 miles out of town.

"If we're going to expose people to the type of research we're doing, it's really imperative that we have something that's pretty accessible," said test case lead Sanjay Pyare. "In one system, in about four miles, we have a way to travel from the base of the glacier to a very productive estuary."

On June 10, eight Juneau k-12 educators joined EPSCoR researchers and personnel to hike the trail from the road to the glacier. Along the way, test case researchers gave presentations on physical, biological and social characteristics of the area, such as glacial outflow, forest succession, and salmon numbers. Following the hike the attendees drove to the estuary at the mouth of the Herbert River to learn about estuarine and marine environments.

Pyare said the main purpose of the day-long event was to scope out the ways local educators could become involved in the test case. "I wouldn't call this a formal educational event," he offered. "It's more of a focus group." Pyare said he was able to talk individually with all of the teachers, which led to several possibilities for further outreach. One of these ideas, a Research Experience for Teachers program that would see educators spend time in the field assisting in test case efforts, is being implemented in summer 2014.



Herbert Glacier.

"One of these things we're really interested in, and the National Science Foundation is really interested in, is not just doing interesting science, but also what the implications of the science are," Pyare said. "How are you delivering the science, how does it get into the community, how does it help educate the general public? And so that's very much what we're here for today."