

"This Place Knows Us"

An Alaska EPSCoR-supported effort gave the youth of the Kenaitze Indian Tribe a voice, and a book to go with it.

The "Kenaitze Youth Speak" project engaged students from the Kenai Peninsula tribe in conversations about traditional places, salmon fishing, the health of the Kenai River, and local effects of climate change. Led by Kenai Peninsula College Anthropology Professor Alan Boraas, Kenaitze Environmental Director Brenda Trefon, and a pair of tribal interns, the students compiled their comments and

photos into a hardcover book, which was distributed to local schools and libraries and members of the tribe.

"The youth discovered common ties in their comments and frustrations of the changes in the Kenai River landscape, and immeasurable pride in seeing their ideas formed into a book," noted Trefon.

As part of the project, students were brought to areas important to the tribe and asked to reflect on what they saw. At the Kenai River estuary, they observed how many signs had been put up, and how some visitors had paid little respect to the site. During one event, the students were left to explore a nearby beach on their own, at which point they began spontaneously clearing garbage. "It's our beach," one student noted. "If we don't clean it, no one will."

The students were also interviewed about the importance of salmon in their lives, and what they would like the river and nearby areas to be like in 10 years. Students took pictures showing their own perspective of the landscape, including images like trash in the ditch alongside caribou at the Kenai estuary. The final book combines landscape observations, art, and even facsimiles of observations written on post-it notes.

The project was funded through an Alaska Native Engagement Grant, designed to increase the interest of Alaska Native students in continuing their education and in exploring science, technology, engineering and math fields. In addition to taking part in the book project, over 20 Kenaitze students attended science activities, including Kenaitze science and archeology camps and the Alaska Native Health Consortium Native and Medicinal Plant Conference.



(l to r) Kenaitze youths Laurel, Haley and Kate help pick up trash at the Kenaitze's Educational Fisheries Site.



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