

# Warming up to WAISC

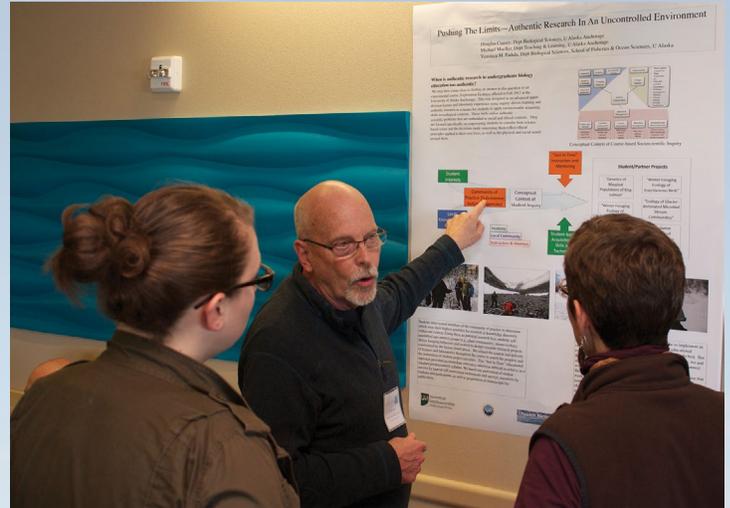
If you're going to focus a science conference on warming, Kotzebue in April is a good place to do it.

Warmth was everywhere at this year's Western Alaska Interdisciplinary Science Conference (WAISC): in the mild blue skies overhead, in the snowmelt on the gravel roads, and in the waning pack ice on Kotzebue Sound, across the street from the hotel where 100-odd researchers and local residents gathered for the annual symposium. And global warming was front-and-center at the event, where the main topics of conversation were the myriad effects of climate change on local ecosystems and residents.

"When we talk about science and we talk about global warming ... it's going to affect everything that we are as people," noted UAF Chukchi Campus Director Pauline Harvey in her opening remarks. "That's our livelihood out there in the waters, the seal, the walrus, the whale, the salmon, the sheefish, the trout, all of the ducks and geese and caribou. That's our food and that's our sustenance, and without that we're not who we are as Inupiat people."

WAISCs have been held in rotating Western Alaska communities since 2008, but 2014 marked the first visit to Kotzebue. Entitled "Science of a Cold Place in a Warming World," the conference centered on two lengthy sessions dedicated to ecology, environment and climate change, talks by local Native elders, and a keynote address by UAF Professor Emeritus Terry

he was impressed by the science efforts being undertaken in the region, especially by Alaska Natives. He also said he appreciated the setting of the conference, which both brought research to local audiences and enabled academics from Fairbanks and Anchorage,



EPSCoR travel grantee Doug Causey discusses his poster at the 2014 WAISC.

himself included, to experience the local conditions.

"Seeing breakup happening early, having a chance to go out and jog for whitefish and hearing that those are earlier than they usually are, just gave me a sense of climate change on the ground, boots on the ground," he said. "That's how you feel it and that's how you get to empathize with the issues that are involved."

Alaska EPSCoR has supported WAISC since its inception, principally by providing travel grants for students and faculty members to attend the conference. In 2014 Alaska EPSCoR funded attendance by Chapin and seven other UA students and faculty, who presented on topics ranging from the neurobiology of hibernation in arctic ground squirrels, to the use of aquariums as biology teaching tools, to the extent to which wolves use salmon as a food resource. UAF grad student Lisa Strecker, who is studying the economics of dog teams versus snowmachines in Kamchatka, Russia, said the conference was a great opportunity to learn about the region and to hear from researchers across disciplines.

"I got lots of interesting input from different people," she said. "That's why it's great to go to interdisciplinary conferences - I had great discussions and great input, and it was definitely worthwhile coming here."



EPSCoR travel grantee Terry Chapin delivers his keynote speech at the 2014 WAISC.

Chapin on "Linking Science to Action in a Warming Arctic."

"We are looking basically at the effects of global warming on the communities of western and rural Alaska, so what happens to subsistence food, what health effects people are encountering due to global warming, what weather effects they are seeing," said Anshul Pandya, Assistant Professor of Biomedical Sciences at the UAF Chukchi Campus and chief organizer of the event.

Terry Chapin, who was attending his first WAISC, said

