



# Happy Holidays!

A message from the Eagle Watch Editor

Dear Alaska State Parks crew & friends,  
The holiday season is upon us and another year has flown by. It has been a year full of challenges ranging from wildfires to budget cuts and, just this last month, tremendous snow dumps. But we met them head on, each Alaska State Park employee and volunteer doing their part and then some.

Next year might not be easier; it's impossible to predict with certainty what Mother Nature might throw our way, but one thing is certain, the Alaska State Parks team will rise to the challenge.

This holiday season I count myself blessed to work with such a wonderful and dedicated crew. May you all enjoy some well-deserved quality time with those you love—not to mention good food and outdoor fun!

Happy holidays and may the force be with you!

Niki Acevedo



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# Avalanche Season in Hatcher Pass

A series of winter storms began moving through the Mat-Su Area a week before Thanksgiving and they lasted more than a week. Heavy snow mixed off and on with rain, creating severe snowpack instability in the Talkeetna Mountains and resulting in avalanches on nearly every mountain and slide-prone aspect.

Early on the Tuesday morning before Thanksgiving, a large avalanche crossed the Hatcher Pass Road at mile 15 closing the road for over a week. The Department of Transportation's crews were unable to clear the road until avalanche assessment experts from Girdwood gave the green light to begin clearing the road on the first of December.

Conditions were so extreme on Thanksgiving week that DOT, Alaska State Troopers, and Alaska State Parks collaboratively closed the Hatcher Pass area completely to the public—the first time this has ever occurred. Rangers Ben Corwin, Drew McElvain, and Dan Amyot placed barricades at both the Willow and Palmer sides of the Hatcher Pass Management Area. The area re-opened after the severe avalanche danger had lessened and DOT had cleared the road.



DOT road crews clear Mile 15 of Hatcher Pass Rd.



Alaska State Trooper HELO 2 conducts beacon sweeps looking for the missing Hatcher Pass skier, Liam Walsh.

During this time only three people were snowbound beyond the dangerous slide area, one of whom was Independence Mine caretaker volunteer Bernard Federspiel who lived a lifestyle similar to the movie “Shining” for several days. As a seasoned second-year veteran caretaker, Bernard adapted well to the conditions that left over eight feet of snow on the ground at the mine. He was even able to maintain his sanity!

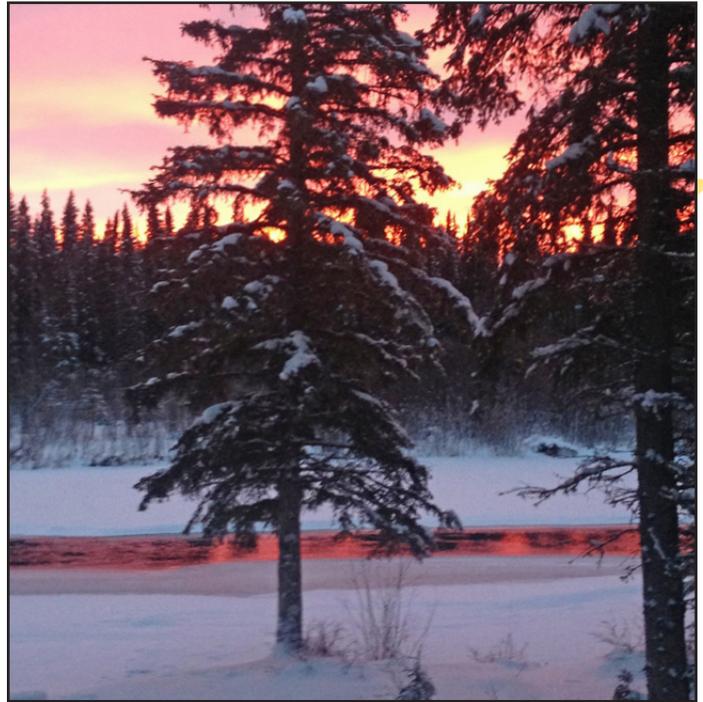
There was, however, at least one unfortunate casualty of the storms—a backcountry skier did not return from a day of skiing somewhere in the Independence Bowl area and was deemed missing two days before the large avalanche that closed the Hatcher Pass Road. Skier Liam Walsh remains missing at this time despite multiple helicopter search attempts over the following week. Ground crews started searching on foot once the road was cleared and the avalanche danger had lessened considerably.



DOT road crews clearing Hatcher Pass Rd.

## Northern News

- A grooming contract was awarded to Lucy and Jerry Knolls to groom 105 miles of trail in Chena River State Recreation Area. The contract runs from November through March. The first grooming cycle started in time for Thanksgiving weekend.
- Chief ranger Ian Thomas gave a presentation on snowmobiling in Chena River SRA to the Fairbanks Snow Travelers. The Snow Travelers enjoyed the presentation so much they asked if they could volunteer to help keep trails cleared. This led to an idea of creating an adopt-a-trail program similar to what's been implemented in Chugach State Park.
- Superintendent Brooks Ludwig gave a trail presentation for the Osher Life Long Learning Institute (OLLI) at the University of Fairbanks. OLLI is a non-credit educational program for adults age 50 and up. Another class is scheduled in April that will focus on recreation along the Chena River.
- The third snowiest November on record kept the Northern Area's two snow plows busy. It took 80 hours of plowing to keep trailheads, access roads, and popular winter destinations open over Thanksgiving weekend.

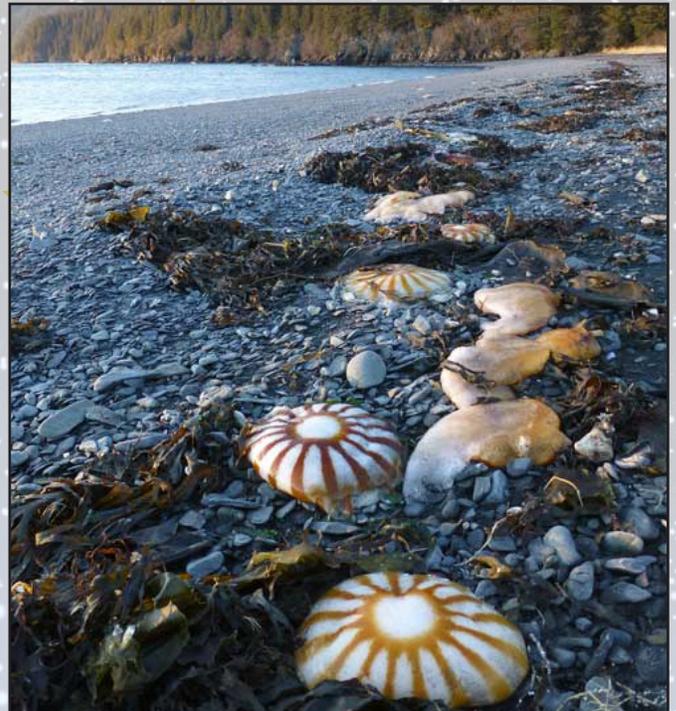


Brooks Ludwig snapped this sunrise photo from the Hunt Memorial Cabin on Thanksgiving morning.



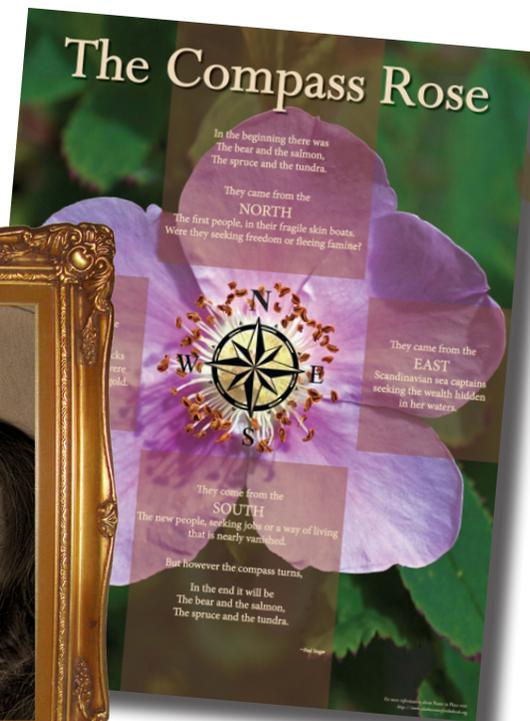
Ranger Brad Garasky successfully completed the Sitka Law Enforcement Academy in mid-November. Ranger Kevin Murphy attended the ceremony and congratulated Brad on behalf of Alaska State Parks.

## Volunteer Voices

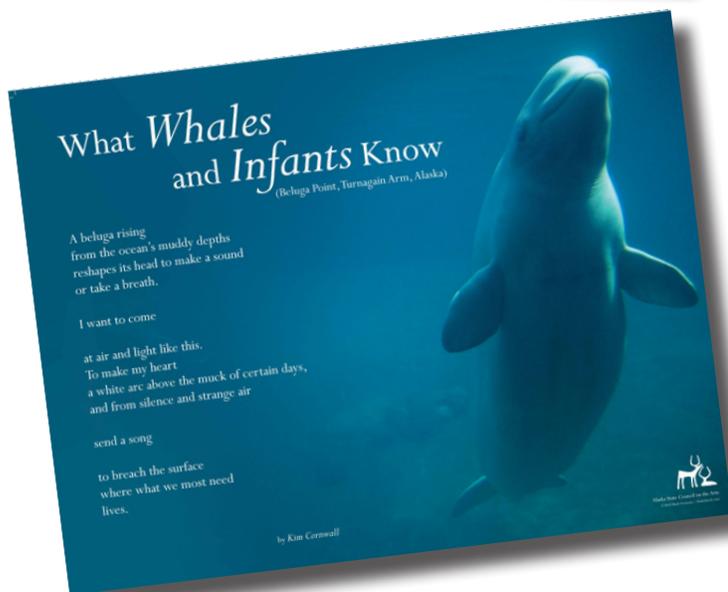


Photographer and Seward Citizen Advisory Board member Carol Griswold was treated to a display of frozen jellyfish lined up in the wrack while she was out enjoying the beauty of dawn at the beach at Lowell Point State Recreation Site. She enthused, "and the most wonderful part is that this beautiful beach is protected for the public, unlike the rest of Lowell Point which is festooned with NO TRESPASSING and PRIVATE PROPERTY signs. I love my state parks!"

# Poems In Place

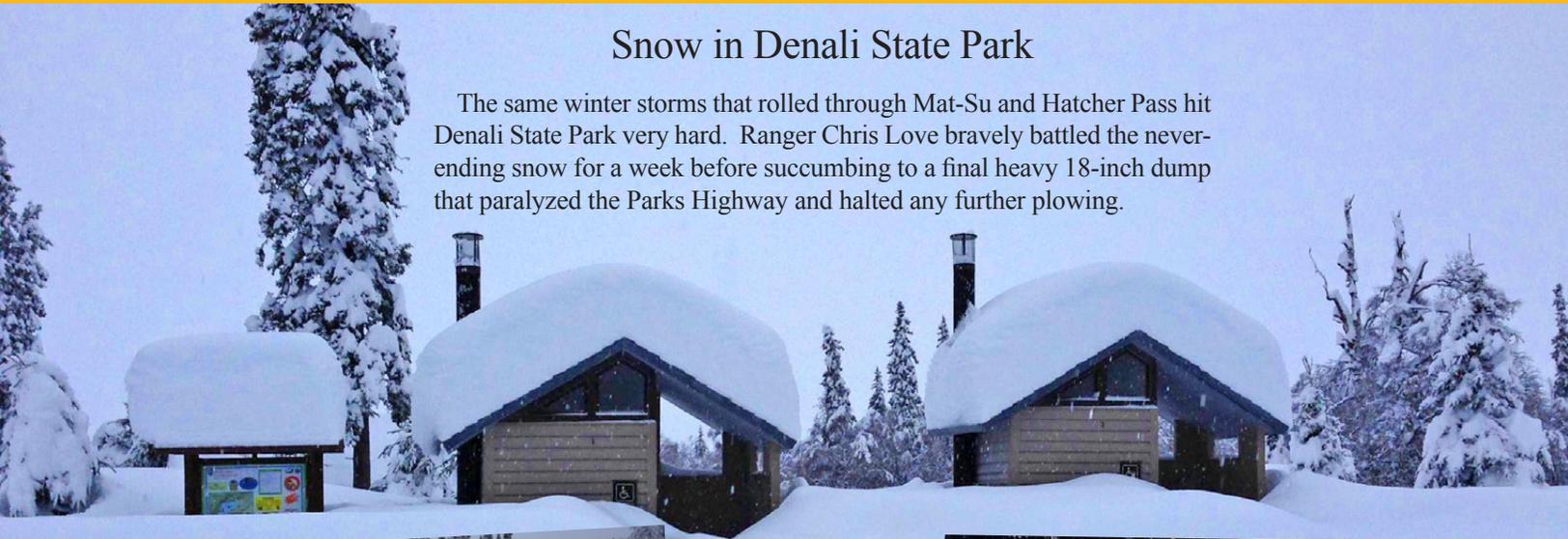


The Poems in Place project grew from Homer writer Wendy Erd's initial idea to place a sign with Kim Cornwall's poem, "What Whales and Infants Know", at Beluga Point in Chugach State Park. The project that started with that first poem now includes ten poems installed in six different state parks in addition to the poem in Chugach State Park. The project's great success can be attributed to the graphics for each sign that Alaska State Parks publication specialist Meg Anderson developed. Meg's designs complement each poem beautifully and will, for many years to come, help visitors connect to these special places.



## Snow in Denali State Park

The same winter storms that rolled through Mat-Su and Hatcher Pass hit Denali State Park very hard. Ranger Chris Love bravely battled the never-ending snow for a week before succumbing to a final heavy 18-inch dump that paralyzed the Parks Highway and halted any further plowing.



The new K'esugi Ken Road proved too much for the Love truck.



It's tough to plow snow when you can't find the plow in the snow.

## Maureen Gardner's Swan Song

After 30 years with Alaska State Parks, Maureen Gardner retired at the end of October. Maureen aka "Mo" started with Alaska State Parks in 1985 working at Twin Bears Camp in Chena River State Recreation Area. In 1987, she accepted a job in the Kenai Area working with and learning from ranger Don Barber. From there, she moved to Mat-Su and worked at Independence Mine.

Her next couple jobs led her back to Northern Area, first to Chena River SRA and then to Tok, where she oversaw management of Tok's three state park units and visitor center. In 1995, a park ranger position opened up in Mo's hometown of Delta Junction. Mo moved home and managed Delta's six park units for the next 21 seasons.

There was a special place in Mo's heart for Big Delta State Historical Park. She worked tirelessly to see that historical artifacts were cataloged, interpretive displays were developed, buildings maintained, animals and gardens cared for, and visitors informed. At Mo's retirement luncheon, she was presented with a Gail Niebrugge original pen and ink drawing of Rika's Roadhouse. The picture shows a person looking at an interpretive panel in front of the roadhouse, an interpretive panel she helped develop.

At her retirement luncheon, Mo said to tell everyone, "I'm very thankful for all the opportunities Alaska State Parks has given me as well as all the great working relationships I've had with everyone."

Enjoy your retirement Mo! As Niki Acevedo said, "You will be missed!"



Left: Maureen Gardner  
Below: drawing of Rika's Roadhouse by Gail Niebrugge

