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Website
Brochure

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ROC the Kenai A Caring for the Kenai Project

Introduction

My grandmother lives on the bluff south of the Kenai River. Some of my favorite summer hours are spent on the beach there; however walks on the beach in July can resemble a trip through a salmon Armageddon. Heads, intestines, and trash can be found strewn throughout the tide line, all spewed from the river's mouth. In addition, the massive amount fish waste created by the dip net fishery attracts seagulls, which in turn causes enterococci and fecal coliform outbreaks. I have long thought that it is not right for our community's beaches to be decimated in that way. Because of my belief, I started my journey from casual observation to community activism. My plan will find a solution to manage the excessive amounts of fish waste and to prevent enterococci and fecal coliform bacteria outbreaks during the personal use fishery.

Background Information

Every summer during the month of July, Alaskan-residents have the opportunity to take part in the dip net fishery at the mouth of the world-famous Kenai River. Every head of household is allowed 25 red salmon, plus an additional ten fish for each member of the family. According to the [2011 Kenai Dip Net Fishery Report](#), 20,000 dip net participants fished for record numbers of sockeye salmon. It is estimated that there is up to 1.2 million pounds of waste generated from the fishery (R. Koch, personal communication, October, 14). This amount of pressure on the resource resulted monumental fish waste left on the north and south beaches. In mid-July, water samples revealed that enterococci and fecal coliform bacteria were elevated at the south Kenai River Beach (T. Stevens, Environmental Program Specialist, July, 2011). The elevated bacterium is thought to come from seagulls feeding on the fish waste left on the beaches (D. Pascucci, personal communication, February 23, 2012).

Proposed Solution

I began interviewing and initiating discussions with personnel of the Alaska Department of Fish and Game (J. Fox, personal communication May 6, 2011) staff and management at The Kenai Watershed Forum (J. O'Conner, R. Ruffner, D. Pascucci, personal communication, May 6, 2011), officials and department heads at the City of Kenai (R. Koch, P. Porter, R. Marquis, personal communication, March 28, 2011), local business leaders (N. Ala, personal communication, April 12, 2011), and area residents. After observations and discussions with community members, my inspiration to solve this problem of excessive fish waste grew and I began to look for a solution.

My solution focused on a plan called "ROC the Kenai". R.O.C. represents "Respect Our Community". I took a three-tiered approach in order to implement my plan: education, regulation, and infrastructure.

My first goal included the development of an educational campaign to inform resource users about the role they play in preserving the fishery and protecting the environment. I founded this program with the development and distribution of brochures, public service announcements on local radio, speaking at the local Rotary Club, and a youth -driven face-to-face educational campaign. I recruited and managed a group of local young people to conduct face-to-face discussions with dip netters during the 2011 fishery. We walked the beaches and handed out brochures, met the dip netters, and encouraged them to "Respect Our Community."

I received a pledge of financial support Kenai City Manager, Rick Koch, for the brochures after the approval of an Alaska Clean Waters Action Grant. My overall proposal was met with enthusiasm by the Kenai City Council, and I received their support to proceed and continue with my plan. In addition, the director of the Kenai Visitors and Cultural Center, Natasha Ala, pledged her agencies participation in distribution of education materials and "ROC the Kenai" is endorsed by the Kenai Economic Strategy Committee. Also, Bridges Community Resource Network provided monetary support for the purchase of "ROC the Kenai" t-shirts for my youth- driven campaign.

My second goal is the implementation of regulatory action by the City of Kenai. I met councilman, Ryan Marquis, to discuss better enforcement of litter ordinances (which include fish waste) that already exist. I am currently continuing to discuss how best to implement this regulatory action, as the fine for littering is \$500.00 which is difficult to enforce.

My third goal is the development of permanent infrastructure such as installation of fish cleaning stations, and additional collection containers for fish remains After meeting with Rick Koch in October, 2011, he stated that "It is my intent to have a fish waste system in place next year that results in fish waste not being allowed to be deposited in the Kenai River and/or its beaches."

Outcomes

All three of my original goals have either been accomplished or are currently in progress. My successful youth -sponsored education campaign benefited the community by bringing awareness to the thousands of dip netters who participated in the fishery, in addition to helping to make our local beaches cleaner. The goals that are currently in progress are enforcing regulation and installing infrastructure. I attend Kenai City Council work sessions and continue conversations with borough officials (M. Navarre, J. Maryott, November, 23, 2011) to strongly urge the progress of "ROC the Kenai". Through these discussions, installation of fish cleaning tables and, possibly, regulation will occur next summer.

My most recent accomplishment has been the establishment of a website, www.rocthekenai.org, which I will use to further my goal of educating the users of the

dip net fishery. My website tells about my campaign to keep the beaches clean, explains fecal coliform, and informs the community of how they can get involved (a form which can be emailed to me) with the mission of "ROC the Kenai". This July will find me back on the beach with my crew, talking to the dip netters, picking up trash, and bringing the message of "ROC the Kenai" to the public.

Conclusion

"ROC The Kenai" has provided me with opportunities for speech writing, and public speaking; radio, newspaper, and magazine interviews; and organizing a youth -sponsored campaign. From these experiences I have learned about our local environment and government, as well as how to communicate the passion for what I truly believe. "ROC the Kenai" brings me pride when I see how much local residents appreciate my efforts to preserve our river and beaches. These treasures will be fundamental to our local heritage and economy for years ahead.

References

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