

Hard Working Girl Scouts Shine on National Public Lands Day

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In the days leading up to September 26, 2009, the sun remained hidden, the clouds dominated the skies, and the wind whipped aggressively as it often does in Portage Valley. However, as the sun rose on National Public Lands Day, the Girls Scouts of Alaska (formerly of the Susitna Council) and staff of the Glacier Ranger District were treated to mild temperatures, calm winds and abundant sunshine. These have been the conditions for the last few years and good weather was once again on our side.

This year's service-learning project was centered on native vegetation and exotic and invasive plants. Outside the Portage Valley Learning Center wing of the Begich, Boggs Visitor Center, a garden that contains a variety of native plants such as Nootka lupine, heather, and willow species, has been established. Over time, and mostly due to the aforementioned weather, there has been a loss of soil, and these plants were becoming more and more exposed. Additionally, the grade has sloped towards the building which has made drainage less than ideal.

So this year, the Girl Scouts lent a huge assist to improve this garden. The tasks of the day included delicately removing all the plants. Then, a rock wall was constructed around the entire bed and a second tier was added on the back half of the bed. Soil was filled in on the upper tier to improve the drainage and position the slope away from the building, and also on the lower tier to raise the grade level. Then the plants were re-bedded and carefully positioned by Betty Charnon and her ecology crew with an emphasis on plant size,

color of the flowers and the timing of the bloom. This will allow plants to bloom at different times throughout the growing season. By teaching the girls about the plants' unique characteristics, and why we favor them over non-native and invasive species, their understanding of the importance of native Alaskan vegetation was enhanced.

To say that the girls put forth a hard day's work would be an extreme understatement. Almost immediately after the initial briefing and safety discussion, the girls jumped into the work with great enthusiasm. The youngest girls, nicknamed the "Marmots," worked on removing the plants. The oldest girls and therefore the strongest, were the "Bears," and they worked on the rock wall construction. This was one of the toughest jobs of the day and the end result was a beautiful yet very sturdy set of walls. The third group was the "Moles," and they were charged with applying and churning new soil into the existing soil. Forest Service employees contributed by supplying the "Bears" with rocks and the "Moles" with soil, but the majority of the work was done by the girls with support from parents and troop leaders. Amazingly enough, all of this work was conducted, including the lesson briefing and safety session, in four hours.



Forest Service employee Jim Sumner inspects the hard work done by Girl Scouts building a rock retaining wall at Begich, Boggs Visitor Center. Photo by Kathleen Keusenkothen.

I would like to extend gratitude to Betty Charnon and her ecology crew: Kate Mohatt, Timm Nawrocki, and Kelly Bandoch, and to BBVC staff members Jim Sumner, Saralynn Fenwick, and Farah Renno for their help with the day's event. In addition, the Glacier Ranger District cannot thank the girls and their parents enough for their hard work and dedicated effort for this year's National Public Lands Day. We plan to erect a plaque that gives credit to the girls for their efforts on this project. We are confident that when the girls visit the center in the future they'll remember the lessons they learned and take pride in the accomplishments they achieved on that beautiful day in September.