

Students learn about resource apprenticeship

by Megan McAtee
Tundra Times staff

About 50 Alaska Native students will be able to continue learning about natural resource career opportunities thanks to two large grants awarded last month. The National Environmental Education and Training Foundation (NEETF) and the Kellogg Foundation each gave \$15,000 to the Resource Apprenticeship Program for Students (RAPS).

The students, participating from all over the state, are high school students, mostly juniors and seniors. They are placed in paid apprentice-

ships with a natural resource agency like the National Park Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Environmental Protection Agency, or the Alaska Department of Natural Resources.

Over the summer the students benefit from the mentorship of a professional in the field, and also are exposed to the career opportunities available to them. For example, Robert Sam of Arctic Village is learning general surveying skills and map reading at Ft. Wainwright. Shona Geist of Kotzebue is helping with a wildlife survey in her region. With the credit that University of

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Fairbanks Alaska gave her from last summer's apprenticeship, she was able to graduate from high school this year.

Jon Deininger, RAPS Coordinator for the Bureau of Land Management-Alaska (BLM-Alaska), says they have been getting calls from parents and councilors about how students are coming back from RAPS more motivated and eager to learn.

BLM-Alaska began the program in 1987. Deininger said that one of the reasons for starting the program was to interest Alaska Native students in natural resource jobs and career exploration. After training it is hoped that they will enter the field

and help manage lands and resources in their own villages and regions, especially in rural Alaska.

So far, the RAPS program has helped more than 200 students.

"It seems like very few but you have to keep in mind that the average time the students are in the program is 2-3 years," said Deininger. The program has had a few students for four years but that is very unusual.

Students are paid \$6 an hour for their first year and are paid more in following years. There is also one tuition waiver to the University of Fairbanks awarded each year.

RAPS is a public non-profit partnership of 11 state and federal agen-

cies supported by Native corporations, IRA's, and private foundations.

After losing Federal funding due to cutbacks, RAPS became more dependent on private sources. Deininger began contacting NEETF and writing a proposal for funding. A year and a half later the deal was struck as a challenge grant. NEETF would give \$15,000 if RAPS could find an organization to match the offer. Deininger approached the Kellogg Foundation and they accepted.

"Taking the step to diversify funding, and being so successful on the first attempt, is a testament to the success of the RAPS program for BLM-Alaska," said State Director Tom Allen.



Vaughn DeWilde of Eagle is apprenticing with the National Park Service at Yukon-Charley Rivers National Preserve. Vaughn and pilot Dennis Knuckles prepare to do a flight survey of park.

Photo by Jessica Kuntz, RAPS Coordinator