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Assembly holds solid waste workshop, discusses refuse

By RYAN LONG
Sentinel writer

The City and Borough of Wrangell has a trash problem.

With the landfill closing the Wrangell Assembly held a workshop Tuesday evening to discuss Wrangell's refuse removal options, and its potential role as a regional solid waste disposal site.

Currently, the recommended proposal is to install equipment for thermal destruction of solid waste and coordinate an island-wide recycling effort at the current dumpsite.

The incinerator would run on half-day schedule, according to Borough Manager Tim Rooney.

"Based on the amount of waste we create per year, about 5.5 tons of waste per day, a thermal destruction system would operate on a six hour feeding cycle with a one hour warm up cycle and a three hour cool down cycle," said Rooney.

The system that was discussed at the workshop would be large enough to meet all of Wrangell's solid waste needs, and be capable of expanding with the community or potentially serving one other similarly sized community.

It would not be capable, nor would the current site be large enough, to handle southern Southeast Alaska's refuse.

One potential move would be to locate the solid waste facilities elsewhere on the island, and the mill site was sited as an early favorite for development of a regional waste facility.

Assembly Member Jeremy Maxand urged caution, pointing out that other options may be more practical.

"All of this seems to be gravitating towards the mill site, so we need to be thinking if that is the best use of that site," said Maxand.

The Assembly plans to hold a public hearing on the issue of solid waste in the fall and further discuss its options.



PHOTO BY RYAN LONG

Stairway to the heavens

The upper reaches of the High Country Shelter trail looked as if it lead into the clouds on a recent weekend afternoon.

Josh Ream studies reptiles, amphibians and their cultural impacts

By RYAN LONG
Sentinel writer

Josh Ream has been traipsing through the wet lowlands of Wrangell, hunting newts, toads, salamanders and various species of local reptiles and amphibians as a part of his doctoral dissertation research.

Unlike many traditional PhD programs in similar biological fields, Ream's research takes on a two-fold approach, which incorporates both ecological and anthropological research.

"I'm pursuing an interdisciplinary degree, so that means I'm working both ecologically and with people. My earlier training is primarily in biology and herpetology. I'm in Wrangell because I'm particularly interested in the role reptiles and amphibians play in culture, for instance the Kicksetti clan," said Ream.

When Ream first arrived in Wrangell, he had planned to stay for just a short while before heading to the next destination on a comprehensive survey of Southeast Alaska's reptiles and Amphibians.

After just two weeks of working in Wrangell, Ream decided to refocus his research goals and pursue an unrivaled depth of knowledge here in Wrangell, rather than a substantial breadth of knowledge covering the entirety of Southeast Alaska.

That does not prevent Ream from traveling to do his research and share his findings with area residents.

"I am actually traveling to Prince of Wales this weeks and give a couple of talks looking at herps in Haida culture there. The typical length of a PhD in the United States is about eight years and I

would like to be done much quicker than that," said Ream.

Ream said that he has targeted Wrangell primarily because of its key position in the Stikine River, a biodiversity hotspot and the wealth of traditional knowledge of local wildlife.

"I'm interested in what people know about amphibians and reptiles. It's a realm of research that people have been focusing on in Anthropology, and it's traditional ecological knowledge, what people know about what's on the landscape and how we can use that knowledge to learn about amphibians and reptiles," said Ream.

Aside from studying amphibian populations, Ream is also gathering traditional stories and data and researching the impact of amphibian populations on culture,

"One of the chapters I'm working on is the importance of reptiles to native cultures, and I'm interviewing people here about what they know. I also want to know what people have seen through their lifetimes, not just what they heard happened hundreds of years ago," said Ream.

Ream said that he is regularly impressed by how much locals know about the ecological environment, and particularly as it relates to herpetology.

"A lot of people have been really modest about their knowledge. I have gotten a lot of help from people locally, and I've found a large population of newts on the island," said Ream.

From what Ream has gathered so far, there is a perception locally that populations of some amphibians, particularly toads, have been in decline over the last few years.

"It seems that recently we've been having bust years with not a lot of populations turning up where people expect them to," said Ream.

Ream's research is still in its early stages and will continue to be examined over the coming years of work.

"The research is still evolving, and next year I should have a very complete idea of where I'm going with the research," said Ream.

Most of Ream's expeditions in search of local amphibians have been successful, but they have also been opportunistic, meaning that it is based primarily on heading out into the forest and simply looking for populations of amphibians.

"I've been trying to get around to as many places on the island as I can. People have been helping me with direction and just the other day I found many newts around the reservoirs," said Ream. "Right now I'm just working opportunistically, but in following seasons I'll be working with some more mapping software to go about my work a little more systematically," continued Ream.

Ream's ongoing research will be up for continuous examination by both the University of Alaska Fairbanks, the people of Wrangell, and surrounding areas who have contributed to the effort.

"Part of my fellowship requires me to have community input on how my research progresses. I've given four presentations already since I've been in town so far as well as conducting interviews with people. In the past a lot of anthropologists have been seen as taking more than they're giving so I'm hoping to co-author papers with the people that are giving me the information," said Ream.



SUBMITTED PHOTO

Josh Ream with some of his subjects.

Ream does hope to receive his Doctoral degree by the end of his research, but he also said that he hopes that the research itself will lead to improvements in wildlife management systems locally.

"Ultimately, to obtain my doctor's degree I will have to have four or five chapters of my dissertation complete. Another goal is to advance the traditional ecological knowledge as a tool for co-management of species in Alaska, which is used occasionally to manage game species," said Ream.