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 in-depth knowledge of amphibians here in Wrangell, rather than a substantial breadth of knowledge here in Wrangell, Ream decided to refocus his research.

“At present 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 newts, 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 counter papers with the people that are giving me the information,” said Ream.

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.

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

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 proposed recommendation 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.

“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.

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Josh Ream with some of his subjects.