

Kodiak Refuge Offers Programs For All Ages

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Brianna Gibbs/KMXT

The Kodiak National Wildlife Refuge Visitor Center typically has educational programs year round, but things really pick up during the summer months. Yesterday a handful of refuge staff members spoke on KMXT's Talk of the Rock, and detailed some of the activities and programs happening over the next few months.

Malia Sutphin runs the refuge's F.U.N. program, which stands for families understanding nature. It runs year round, and usually takes place on Wednesdays at 10:30 a.m. Sutphin took over running the program when she moved to Kodiak in May. It's open to families with children ages 3-5 and focuses on a variety of nature and environment-related topics.

"Sometimes it's specific to Kodiak and other times it's more general and can be more about Alaska, stuff about Alaska."

Sutphin worked with adult programs at the Kenai Fjords National Park in Seward before coming to Kodiak and said she had to adjust her teaching style to fit the much younger age group. She said the most important thing she's learned is how to get kids

"If you can get a kid excited about something, it causes them to care. So that's kind of my motivation or my goal. Even though it can be really simple if you know, I can get them excited about who has horns or what animals have antlers, you know maybe they'll be able to understand the differences and then when they see an elk or a deer they'll be able to say, 'hey mom, look at the horns,' and understand the difference and then care about those animals."

Families with kids above the age of 5-years-old can take part in the refuge's summer program WILD. Jackie Keating hails from New York, but has been working and volunteering at the refuge since October. She runs the WILD program and said it's a fun way for some of the island's older kids to get involved with science and nature.

"WILD is awesome because we start it in summer for kids that are normally in school. And a lot of them are past F.U.N. participates so they have kind of experience working at the refuge and experiencing all of those things. So bumping it up a level and having a little bit more of an intelligent conversation, getting some feedback from them."

WILD is open to ages 6-12 and takes place on Thursdays at 11 a.m. Both the F.U.N. and WILD programs involve interactive activities, typically focused around a certain theme. Keating said the themes can be about a variety of different things.

“It’s kind of up to us what we want to do, which is cool. So sometimes we’ll do animals, things like that. Other times, like for example this week we’re doing a conservation conversation — so why is conservation important to you — kind of those broader more generalized concepts. And that’s cool to get them thinking on a little more of an advanced level, like how do their actions impact something beyond themselves.”

Another program offered this summer through the refuge is Happy Trails. Rachel Post moved to Kodiak from Ohio and runs that program, which takes kids and their families out on local trails. Happy Trails typically meets Saturday’s at 2 p.m. Post said this week they will be meeting at the south end trail on Near Island and will talk about plants and trees as they walk out to the point.

Folks can keep track of what programs are happening at the refuge by following the Kodiak Refuge Visitor Center on Facebook.