

Borealis

The Newsletter of the



PO Box 141613, Anchorage, Alaska

Summer 2024

Summer 2024 is almost upon us and the Alaska Native Plant Society has so many exciting opportunities for you!

Botanical Hikes



Work Parties



Also.....

Join us in celebrating Alaska Native Plant Month throughout May! You can learn more and [sign up for events](#) or on our website: <https://aknps.org>

Events include a native plant webinar series with the UAF Cooperative Extension Service at noon on May 1, 8 & 15. Register [here](#) or via our website: <https://aknps.org>

IT'S HERE – Your ANPS SUMMER 2024 ACTIVITY CALENDAR!

Keep it by your side and take advantage of all we have to offer while you get outdoors and enjoy summer in the land of the midnight sun!

P.O. Box 141613 Anchorage, AK 99514

Alaska Native Plant Society

2024 AKNPS Field Trip Calendar

Alaska Native Plant Society members lead a wide variety of field trips throughout Alaska each year—from urban plant walks to alpine ascents. Most hikes have a size limit to ensure a good experience for all participants. If you would like to join one or more of these hikes, we ask that you:

- RSVP in advance with the trip leader
- All AKNPS field trip participants are required to sign a liability waiver, which is available as an [electronic form](#) or a [PDF](#) that can be filled out and submitted to the trip leader by email or printed copy. If using the electronic form, forward the confirmation email you receive to the trip leader.
- Do not bring dogs without permission from the trip leader a few days ahead of the trip.

Always plan for Alaska weather: Carry warm gear, snacks, water

PLEASE remember to ALWAYS contact trip leaders to let them know if you change your plans.

May 16, Thursday: “Sutton Paleobotany Hike”

Time & Location: 9 am to 4 pm; meet at Muldoon Fred Meyer (east side of parking lot)

Leader: Curvin Metzler, 907-333-8766

Description: Hike one mile with some mud and scree to collect various plant fossils, such as leaves, cones and stems, from trees and shrubs, deciduous and coniferous, including horsetails.

Travel Plan: The road is rough and rutted. Vehicles need adequate clearance and a skillful driver. The group will be limited to 7 persons, with priority for AKNPS members. **Contact the leader if you'd like to attend or have**

questions: Curvin will be away from phone service fossil hunting until Wednesday evening and will respond to voice messages at that time.

May 18, Saturday: “Windy Corner”

Time & Location: 1-3 pm, roadside parking at Milepost 106.6 of Seward Highway (12 miles from Anchorage).

Leaders: Dennis and Annie Ronsse, dennis.ronsse@gmail.com

Description: Early snowmelt on Turnagain Arm makes it one of the first places to find plant growth near Anchorage. Join Annie Ronsse and Marilyn Watts for a 2.5-hour, 2-mile hike on the Turnagain Arm Trail. Fairly level, but rocky in places.

RSVP Required: It is required to contact the leaders to reserve a spot. Non-ANPS members are welcome, but due to the narrow trail, this trip will be limited to 10 participants with priority given to AKNPS members.

May 19, Sunday: “Jensen-Olson Arboretum”

Time and Location: 11 am - 12 pm, Jensen-Olson Arboretum, 23035 Glacier Hwy, Juneau, AK; parking lot holds 20 cars, with accessible parking down the driveway; additional parking is available at the Peterson Creek trailhead a short walk north of the arboretum.

Leaders: Ginger Hudson, ginger.hudson@juneau.gov

Description: A native plant walk focusing on Southeast Alaska woody species for native plant month and to recognize Alaska Arbor Day. A native plant list handout will be available. We'll enjoy the entry walk through spruce and hemlock and work our way through the Arboretum to the section that highlights native plants. Featured species include native grey and black currants, shore pine, red huckleberry, pink spiraea, and more. Not all plants will be flowering or fruiting but plant ID and growing conditions will be discussed. Rustic paths, gravel, uneven lawn, gravel beach.

RSVPs Encouraged: We'd like to be prepared with plant lists and anticipate parking. Call 907-789-0139 with any questions.

May 19, Sunday: “Alaska Wildflowers Walk and Talk”

Time & Location: 2pm, Eagle River Nature Center

Leader: Julie Jesson

Description: All Ages Walk + Talk. In celebration of Alaska Native Plant Month, ERNC volunteer Julie Jesson will present a slide show of local wildflowers along with tips on how to photograph flowers. Afterwards, an ERNC naturalist will lead a hike on the 3-mile Albert Loop in search of wildflowers.

Registration Encouraged: https://www.flipcause.com/secure/event_step1/MTgxODg2

May 22, Wednesday: “Alaska Native Plant Month Walk: Rodak Trail”

Leader: Beth Baker

Time & Location: 5:30-7pm Eagle River Nature Center

Description: Beth Baker will lead a 2-3 mile hike around the Rodak Trail with a botany focus. Learn about the boreal forest and plant adaptations to Alaska winter, how plants respond to aspect of slope and elevation, and what is photosynthesis. The hike is sponsored by the Eagle River Nature Center in celebration of May as Alaska Native Plant Month. The event is open to the public.

Registration encouraged: https://www.flipcause.com/secure/event_step1/MTgxODg2

May 25, Saturday: “Alaska Native Plant Month Walk: Dew Mound Trail”

Time & Location: 11am, Eagle River Nature Center

Leader: Beth Baker

Description: Beth Baker will lead a 6.8-mile hike around the Dew Mound circuit with a botany focus. Learn about the boreal forest and plant adaptations to Alaska winter, how plants respond to aspect of slope and elevation, and what is photosynthesis. The hike is sponsored by the Eagle River Nature Center in celebration of May as Alaska Native Plant Month and is open to the public. Bring your lunch and water.

Registration Encouraged: https://www.flipcause.com/secure/event_step1/MTgxODg2

May 27-June 2: “Indianhouse Self-Guided Hike”

Time & Location: Anytime May 27-June 2. This trail begins at mile 104.5 of the Seward Highway. There is a small unmarked pullout and small path with room for only 4-5 cars.

Organizers: Phyllis Rogers & Dennis Ronsse (dennis.ronsse@gmail.com)

Description: Small, numbered markers will be placed along the trail beside plants. [A list of plant names and corresponding numbers](#) will be available by May 26. In addition, an Indianhouse Ridge plant checklist and field guide with photos are available on the AKNPS field guide page. Contact Dennis with any questions.

June 2, Sunday: “Art to Explore Native Plants”

Time & Location: 10am-12pm. Park at the Beach Lake Parking Lot.

Leader: Barb Johnson, 907-229-6891

Description: Join Barb Johnson to walk around Beach Lake with time set aside to explore the joy of sketching and painting plants in the outdoors. No experience necessary. Plan to hike along Beach Lake to Cook Inlet and if time, out to Fire Creek Estuary. We will be sketching/painting at two or three locations along the way, and use different techniques. Bring water, mosquito repellent, snacks, and warm garments. Knee high mud boots are probably the best footwear. A small, lightweight insulated pad to sit on can be helpful, but isn't necessary. Also, let Barb know in advance if you need any supplies listed because she can bring items for you to use.

Materials: Bring a watercolor booklet or sketchbook, pencil and sharpener or mechanical pencil, fine tip black ink pen, eraser, watercolor brushes 2-3 sizes, watercolor set or watercolor pencils, small container for water, paper towel or Kleenex. Optional extras: Hand lens, binoculars, camera

RSVP Required: Text your name and email to Barb (907-229-6891) if you'd like to attend or get more information about the trip. This will be limited to 10 participants/members of AKNPS.

June 14-16, Friday-Sunday: “Interior Alaska Weekend Float Trip”

Time & Location: Clearwater and Tanana Rivers, Delta Junction

Leader: Jeff Mason

Description: Arrive at Clearwater River Campground evening of 14th. Camp, botanize all weekend while floating the Clearwater and Tanana Rivers. Takeout at Tanana River bridge on the Richardson on Sunday.

RSVP Required: Contact Jeff Mason at jdotmason@gmail.com if you would like to attend or have questions.

June 15, Saturday, “Birds & Flora of Arctic Valley & Mt. Gordon Lyon”

Time & Location: Arctic Valley Ski Area (Parking \$5.00 / day) 8 am

Description: Expect 5-6 hours, 5 miles, with 1,763 feet ascent over Mt. Gordon Lyon in a loop route back to the parking lot.

Contact: Email dennis.ronsse@gmail.com for more information. An expert birding leader from the Anchorage Audubon Club will be co-leading this trip. Open to the public.

June 16, Sunday, “Willows & Orchids at Eklutna Lake”

Time & Location: 1-5 pm, Eklutna Lake Parking Lot

Leaders: Cam Webb & Dennis Ronsse

Description: Expect 3-4 hours, 2 miles on the Lakeside Trail and to a calcareous fen. Walking in the fen will be ankle deep, rubber boots recommended.

RSVP Required: It is required to contact dennis.ronsse@gmail.com a few days in advance to confirm space. There is no network connection at Eklutna Lake, text 907-202-3100 (Dennis) for meeting place details before leaving home.

June 8, Saturday, “Red Mountain (outside of Palmer)” - revised date from print edition

Time & Location: 11 am, TBD

Leader: Lorene Lynn, lorene.lynn.uaf@gmail.com

Description: Hike is approximately 4.5 miles one way, summit is ~3,300 feet, some steep pitches but mostly gentle uphill; expect 5-7 hours round trip, bring a lunch, layers for the summit, and bear spray.

RSVP Required: Participants are required to contact Lorene at lorene.lynn.uaf@gmail.com or 907-354-5444 to confirm space and get an update about possible changes to the plan.

July 13, Saturday, “Pepper Peak Hike”

Time & Location: 8am, Eklutna Lake Trailhead Parking (for Twin Peaks Trail)

Leader: Dennis Ronsse, dennis.ronsse@gmail.com

Description: Hike 10 miles / climb 4500 feet (8-10 hours). Bring a lunch, water, windbreaker & warm garments.

RSVP Required: Participants are required to contact dennis.ronsse@gmail.com to confirm space and get an update about possible changes to the plan.

Aug 3 Saturday, “Falls Creek Hike”

Time & Location: 10 am, Falls Creek parking lot at mile 105.5 of the Seward Highway

Leader: Glenn Brown, gbrown@aknps.org

Description: Expect 6+ hours; total distance to the tarn is about 10 miles with 2800 feet of ascent. The trail follows Falls Creek up a valley with steep sides and then opens to a broad alpine area and then a small lake. It is a moderately difficult hike, and portions of the trail will be muddy and brushy. Bring a lunch and warm garments as weather can change quickly above tree line.

RSVP Required: It is required to contact Glenn (gbrown@aknps.org) a few days before to confirm space and get an update about possible changes to the plan.

✿ Aug 17 Saturday, Portage Pass (near Whittier)

Time & Location: 9 am, meeting location TBD

Leader: Preston Villumsen, TigerBeetle275@protonmail.com or (253) 970-0101

Description: Expect to hike 5+ hours, four miles round trip, 750 feet of ascent on the trail.

RSVP Required: It is required to contact Preston Villumsen (email and / or phone) to reserve a spot, get details for the meeting place, and stay in touch for a foul weather contingency plan. Non-ANPS members welcome, but due to narrow trail, this trip will be limited to 10 participants with priority given to AKNPS members. Cost of the tunnel is \$13 per vehicle. For times and direction of traffic in the tunnel see

<https://dot.alaska.gov/creg/whittiertunnel/schedule.shtml>.

✿ Aug 24 Saturday, Anchorage Coastal Wildlife Refuge

Time & Location: 4 pm, Oceanview parking instructions will be provided to participants.

Leader: Marilyn Barker, 907-360-5910

Description: Expect 3+ hours of hiking in the marsh. Knee boots (or hip boots), and a windbreaker are recommended. Dogs are prohibited on the Anchorage Coastal Wildlife Refuge during the summer season.

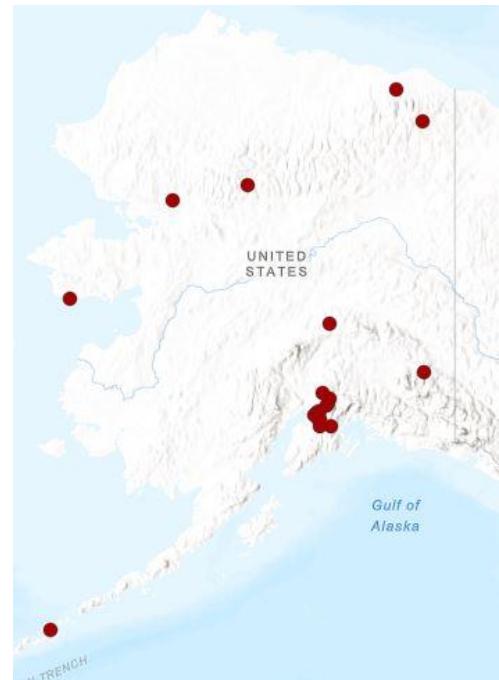
RSVP Required: It is required to contact Marilyn Barker (907-360-5910) to reserve a spot. Non-ANPS members welcome, but this trip will be limited to 10 participants with priority given to AKNPS members.

Self-Guided Field Trips: Are you bummed out that your summer calendar is so full that you can't take advantage of some of the guided field trips you see offered in this newsletter? Well, we can't provide a live plant expert at any time, day or night, but we can help you check out native plants in numerous spots where you can create your own field trips. There is an app for that, too! <https://aknps.org/field-guides> .

The Alaska Native Plant Society offers field guides and checklists for native plants observed along a number of trails and in backcountry areas around Alaska. Thanks to ANPS member and past President Dennis Ronsse for producing these field guides which include stunning photos and specific identifying information. They are formatted to fit on a phone and assist with field identification for numerous plants in a designated area. **Intro** documents provide information to help plan a visit. So, gather some friends and family and head for the trails!



Windy Corner, Turnagain Arm
Photo by Susanne Kruse



Field Guide Locations

2024 AKNPS Summer Volunteer Calendar

Campbell Creek Science Center Garden Work Parties

Meeting Location: The Campbell Creek Science Center, located in the Campbell Tract at 5600 Science Center Drive in Anchorage

Description: Join Alaska Native Plant Society volunteers who are maintaining the Campbell Creek Science Center's wildflower gardens. Gardening equipment is provided. RSVP using our [CCSC garden work party signup sheet](#) (<https://bit.ly/CCSC-Work-Parties>). This volunteer work is a mutually-beneficial arrangement enabling the Alaska Native Plant Society to use the center's indoor space for in-person educational meetings. *Make sure to log your time on the CCSC log sheet!*

Questions? Send an email to ccsc_gardening@aknps.org

Dates/Time:

- Saturday, May 18, 9-12, (Leader: Liliana Naves)
- Tuesday, June 4, 1:30-4:30 (Leader: Beth Baker)
- Wednesday, June 12, 9-12 (Leader: Mel Langdon)
- Thursday, June 27, 5:30-7:30 pm (Leader: Melanie Hess)
- Tuesday, July 9, 1:30-4:30 (Leader: Beth Baker)
- Wednesday, July 17, 5:30-7:30 (Leader: Melanie Hess)
- Thursday, Aug. 1, 9-12 (Leader: Ginger May)
- Wednesday, Aug. 14, 5:30-7:30 (Leader: Elizabeth Bluemink)
- Friday, August 30, 9-12 (Leader: Ginger May)
- Saturday, Sept. 28, National Public Lands Day (Leader: Elizabeth Bluemink)

Tragopogon Removal along Turnagain Arm

Meeting Location: Potter Section House Parking Area (Seward Hwy just past Potter Marsh)

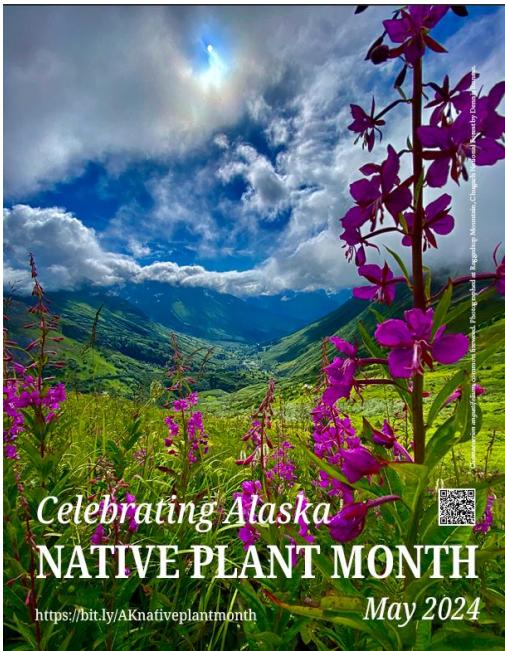
Description: Western salsify (*Tragopogon dubius*) is a persistent invasive weed along Turnagain Arm. Due to AKNPS efforts, it is nearly eradicated but more work is needed to finish the job. Bring dandelion digger type tools, gloves, and garbage bags. No dogs or children allowed. Volunteers should not venture into any steep terrain unless they are experienced climbers and have discussed this in advance with the trip leader. RSVP for one or more work sessions using our [Tragopogon volunteer signup sheet](#) and contact the trip leader in advance if you plan to participate.

Dates/Time:

- Tuesday, June 4, 6:30-8:30 pm, led by Diane Toebe, diannetoebe@gmail.com or 907-365-9100 ([updated](#))
- Tuesday, June 11, 6:30-8:30 pm, led by James Sowerwine and Elizabeth Bluemink, president@aknps.org
- Tuesday, June 18, 6:30-8:30 pm, led by Mel Langdon, mellenlangdon@gmail.com
- Tuesday, June 25, 6:30-8:30 pm, led by James Sowerwine and Elizabeth Bluemink, president@aknps.org
- Tuesday, July 9, 6:30-8:30 pm, led by Gino Graziano, gagraziano@alaska.edu and/or Diane Toebe, diannetoebe@gmail.com or 907-337-0328



Tragopogon dubius reproduces only by seed



Fireweed - 2024 Native Plant of the Year!

By Beth Baker

Sick of winter? Waiting for the snow to melt? Alaska's native plants are waiting too. Snow, cold, and wind can't stop them. Some, like pasqueflower, are so impatient they'll push right through the snow.

Nearly every state sets aside a month to celebrate its native plants. In the Lower 48, that month is April. For obvious reasons, that doesn't work so well in Alaska. Starting in 2023, by formal proclamation from the governor, May is the official month to celebrate Alaska native plants. This year, the Alaska Native Plant Society opted to celebrate a native plant of the year, too. Which would you vote for? Any one favorite? With over 2,500 Alaska native plant species, picking one wasn't easy. Should we have held an election for write-in candidates? Then ranked choice? Well, this year, a small committee picked...drumroll...fireweed.

Fireweed occurs throughout Alaska except for the far north above the Brooks Range and it is cherished for its beauty and utility. Travel throughout Alaska. Fireweed will greet you on your arrival. Important plants are named by the cultures that appreciate them. A partial list of fireweed's Indigenous names in Alaska include: ch'deshtleq'a in Inland Dena'ina, tl'ik'desq'a in Upper Inlet Dena'ina, paniuqtaq in Iñupiaq, lóol in Lingít, ciilqaaq in Central Yup'ik, cillqaq in Alutiiq, and chikayaasiñ in Unangax̂. Common names include wild asparagus and willow herb. Its previous scientific name was *Epilobium angustifolium* but that has been changed to the equally unpronounceable *Chamaenerion angustifolium*.

You might not recognize fireweed when it first comes up. Little, pinkish shoots. Then while you aren't paying attention, a long stalk with buds emerges. Bumble bees and other pollinating insects are paying attention though. When the buds open, one by one ascending the stalk, the insects move in for the nectar, transferring pollen between plants. Faster than anyone wants, the uppermost blossom opens and performs as nature's timekeeper, telling us winter is once again on the way. Seed pods develop and release white fluff that carries the seed to new ground. A Swedish study observed fireweed seeds floating over 330 feet above the ground. If seeds reach these heights, they can disperse 60-180 miles downwind. No wonder they are so widespread.

Bears and other wildlife eat fireweed. What about humans? Oh my, yes. Who doesn't like fireweed honey from the state fair? Make a syrup or steam the baby fireweed shoots. Add a few sprigs to soups, casseroles, quiche, or a stir fry. Pickle unopened buds as a capers substitute. Blossoms brighten tossed salads and yield delicious jelly. Fireweed tea is flavorful though in excess can cause diarrhea. The Cooperative Extension Service provides [storage and preservation tips and recipes](#) for fireweed vinegar, scones, jelly, and fireweed honey. Yum! Forage responsibly by following the 10 percent rule, taking no more than that in the general area where foraging. And don't pull up the roots as they will form future shoots.

What about nutritional and medicinal benefits? Janice Schofield, in her book *Alaska's Wild Plants - A Guide to Alaska's Edible and Healthful Harvest*, shares that spring shoots are high in vitamins A and C, as well as mucilage, a slippery substance that forms when the shoots are chopped and steeped in cold water overnight. The mucilage can soothe a scratchy throat or mouth ulcers. Or drink a cup to lubricate bowels and relieve constipation. Hot water infusions of fireweed leaves on the other hand, are astringent and help tighten too loose bowels. Infusions and extracts of flowering tops are used in Europe for inhibiting Candida. Add leaves, flowers, and powdered root to salves and boluses for bleeding piles.

Wow! But the benefits of fireweed aren't limited to food and medicine. In the aftermath of wildland fires, clouds of lovely pink flowers appear amid the blackened trees. A pioneer species, fireweed is one of the first plants to arrive after fire, and helps the entire ecosystem by regenerating soil. Huge fields of fireweed form not only from seed but asexually from

underground stems called rhizomes that run horizontally just below the soil's surface. If a pollinating insect never comes along to move the pollen for sexual reproduction, the fireweed has another way to survive. How smart.

We are blessed to share Alaska's glorious summer with fireweed. As Alaska Native healer Dr. Rita Blumenstein said: "Fireweed heals wounded ground from fire or other destruction. It returns vitamins and life back in the soil. It is gentle and healing. It is also gentle & healing for people."

Beth Baker is an Eagle River resident who serves on the board of the Alaska Native Plant Society as well as the planning committee for Alaska Native Plant Month.

Get Your 2024 Native Plant of the Year Swag!!

We're celebrating Alaska Native Plant Month in May, but we'll celebrate fireweed (*Chamaenerion angustifolium*) as the 2024 Native Plant of the Year all year long! Educational materials are sprouting. In the meantime, we've created Native Plant of the Year shirts. The shirts feature a botanical drawing in Volume 10 of the Flora of North America ([see FNA fireweed info](#)) that we sponsored several years ago.

We've got hoodies and short and long-sleeved T-shirts of many sizes, with our ANPS logo on the side arm or back:

Here is the link to shop for all styles, sizes and colors: <https://alaska-native-plant-society.square.site/s/shop>



Hoodies



Short Sleeves



Long Sleeves



Women's



Logo on arm
(Unisex)



ANPS Logo
on back
(Women's)

 Campbell Creek Science Center

Plant Identification Basics

6:30–8:30 p.m.
May 20 and June 3

This two-session short course will equip you with the tools and knowledge you need to identify plants, whether you are in Alaska or Argentina. The first session will cover the basics of leaves, stems, and growth forms; the second session will cover the basics of flower and fruit structure. Both sessions will include time for participants to apply what they learn. Cindy Johnson, a retired plant biology professor and award-winning instructor, will teach the course.

Please bring a notebook, pen or pencil, and a camera. Hand lenses and handouts provided.



This event is \$35/participant for both sessions; register at [Recreation.gov](#).



Photo by D. Ronseet, AKNPS