

SUCCESS STORIES

Matanuska Experiment Farm and Extension Center

Citizen science at the Matanuska Experiment Farm draws an enthusiastic online audience

Issue

The closure of the Matanuska Experiment Farm and Extension Center due to the pandemic made the continuation of its citizen science programming challenging as people could not gather to share their passion for science. Citizen science is essentially science performed by citizens to help answer real-world questions. According to the National Park Service, “anyone can be a scientist regardless of where they’re from. It doesn’t matter how old you are or what your background is. All it takes is some time, curiosity and a sense of wonder.”

Response

Mat-Su/Copper River 4-H District Program Coordinator Ann Biddle recognized the need to keep citizens engaged in science. Biddle launched Citizen Science Walkabout Wednesdays and a Citizen Science Academy to encourage the continuation of science from home during the pandemic.

Walkabout Wednesdays feature Biddle and Matanuska Experiment Farm Director Jodie Anderson considering different science-related topics on the farm. The 45-minute program is streamed through Facebook Live every Wednesday. Topics have included birding, foraging, farming activities, gardening, nature scavenger hunt, clouds and soil science. A farm tour is also conducted each month as in-person tours were canceled due to the pandemic.

The Citizen Science Academy was offered through Zoom with the goals of encouraging learning, creating a sense of belonging within your community and comprehending science through discovery and technology. Citizens were encouraged to download apps on devices, which allowed them to participate in science activities from home.



Ann Biddle, left, and Jodie Anderson investigate bird tracks during a Walkabout Wednesday.

Results

The pandemic expanded the potential audience for both of these activities as it allowed participants from all over to attend weekly Walkabout Wednesdays and the Citizen Science Academy. As of January, 42 Walkabout Wednesdays have been conducted since last March. Participants from all over Alaska and from out of state can attend the live videos and ask real-time questions about each activity. Biddle hopes to continue offering a virtual option once in-person classes resume so a broader audience can be reached.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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