

A Hub of Marine Research and Education

-- Nina Daley

There's a lot more to Homer's marine identity than meets the eye out on the Spit. For instance, just step into the Alaska Islands & Ocean Visitor Center and you'll find yourself at the headquarters of the Alaska Maritime National Wildlife Refuge as well as the Kachemak Bay Research Reserve.

The most remote and far-flung unit of the National Wildlife Refuge System, the Alaska Maritime National Wildlife encompasses critical habitat for several marine mammals and supports an array of seabird populations with national and international significance. The Kachemak Bay Research Reserve (KBRR) is part of the National Estuarine Research Reserve system. KBRR staff study the ecological processes in the Gulf of Alaska, with emphasis on Lower Cook Inlet and Kachemak Bay.

Both agencies strive to conduct scientific research on an entire marine ecosystem basis, sharing their findings and collaborating with other entities to achieve that goal. Both are also committed to informing and educating the public about Alaska's marine environment. Educational programs at the Visitor Center are led by trained naturalists and include hands-on activities in exhibit areas, labs, classrooms, and field sites.

It doesn't stop at government agencies. The Center for Alaskan Coastal Studies (CACCS) is a grassroots nonprofit organization whose mission is "to foster responsible interaction with our natural surroundings, and to generate knowledge of the marine and coastal ecosystems of Kachemak Bay through environmental education and research programs". The CACCS boasts over 350 memberships with more than 70 active volunteers, providing educational programs and guided tours to over 11,000 students and visitors every year.

Work, play, study, mentor, learn – if it has to do with our regional marine environment, you can find it all happening right here in Homer.