
Salmonfest vendors educate despite low Friday attendance

Posted: August 1, 2015 - 5:24pm | Updated: August 1, 2015 - 9:44pm

By by MEGAN PACER

Peninsula Clarion

The breakout year for Salmonfest, formerly known as Salmonstock, was hampered slightly by a nearly 10-hour closure of the Seward Highway, but that didn't keep educational vendors from showing up to spread the word about protecting salmon in Alaska.

From Friday through Sunday, Salmonfest hosted 60 bands, artists, craftsmen, food vendors and educators in its first year under the new name. After a change in management, the festival has broadened to focus on conservation of the salmon species in general, rather than any specific issue. This led to vendors representing multiple organizations and causes set up shop for the weekend to educate festival-goers on all things salmon.

Alexandra Guilford and Bryan Goldstein set up to represent Salmon Beyond Borders, an organization dedicated to protecting Alaska's transboundary salmon rivers from proposed mines in British Columbia.

"Most people have actually not heard about this, which is kind of why we're out here," Guilford said.

Guilford said that while the mines are proposed in British Columbia, they would have negative effects on the rivers that cross the Alaska-Canada border and carry many salmon that Alaskans rely on. She and Goldstein urged passersby to sign postcards they plan to send to members of the legislature in an attempt to persuade them to take action on the issue.

Also advocating against projects that would be harmful to Alaska's salmon were members of Musicians United To Protect Bristol Bay, who both educated from their vendor booth and performed at the festival. Co-founder and former state senator Suzanne Little said the group has been attending Salmonfest for four years, and finds people are generally receptive and willing to listen.

The group seeks to inform people about a proposed mine through Pebble Mine Partnership that would be placed in Bristol Bay near the headwaters of some of Alaska's wild-salmon rivers.

"Our goal... is to inform people all over the world about this issue, because it's a world problem," Little said. "This is the last... remaining wild salmon fishery on the planet.

Little said it is easier to get through to people when the message is delivered through song.

"Music has a way of reaching people where, you know, just a lecture or a speech might not," Little said. "Music really can touch your heart in a way that those other methods may or may not."

The group members played every day of the festival and collected signatures of people they hope to call on when future advocacy action is needed.

Other educational groups with vendor booths set up at Salmonfest included United Tribes of Bristol Bay, the Alaska Center for the Environment, the Alaska Marine Conservation Council, the Wild Salmon Center and more.

Though Salmonfest Director Jim Stearns said the festival will do fine in terms of turn out, the multi-vehicle accident on the Seward Highway — involving a tour bus and one fatality — did affect its schedule. Stearns said at least four or five bands were caught in the standstill that lasted nearly 10 hours on Friday. This was easily remedied by shuffling around the bands who were already present, he said.

This is not the first time Salmonfest has been affected by a traffic incident. Stearns said this is the second accident to result in low attendance at the festival's opening night.

"This is the kind of thing we've faced many times," Stearns said. "I just am incensed with the idea that they have to close a highway with no detours. It's tragic when people die, but to destroy all kinds of people's travel plans, people's events, people's weddings... that is just beyond comprehension to me."

Volunteer Coordinator Sally Oberstein said several of the festival's 400 or so volunteers were also delayed, forcing existing volunteers to work longer shifts. Oberstein even took to asking festival attendees if they could fill the positions as they walked through the gates. Fortunately for the festival, she said the community of music lovers stepped up to the task.

"So much of this whole festival is run thanks to the help of volunteers," Oberstein. "The way that most of (the positions) were filled were people walking in the door and us asking if they would help. Practically no one said no."

For Stearns, putting the festival on regardless of hiccups or unforeseen problems is always worthwhile when all the kinks get worked out by Saturday night and he sees hundreds of music lovers enjoying themselves while being informed about important salmon issues.

“It’s testing every fiber of your being,” Stearns said. “When it all comes together finally in this great culmination of joy and creativity on Saturday night, and we’ve got everything in place and it’s really rolling, there’s a smile on every face.”

Reach Megan Pacer at megan.pacer@peninsulaclarion.com

Sunday schedule

Ocean Stage

11:15 a.m. - Susan Grace

12:15 p.m. - Katie Emerick and John Cottingham

1:20 p.m. - Anna Lunch Band

2:30 p.m. - Moonalice

4 p.m. - Super Saturated Sugar Strings

5:30 p.m. - The California Honeydrops

7:30 p.m. - Emmylou Harris

River Stage

11:45 a.m. - Diana Z

12:50 p.m. - K'alik'a

1:55 p.m. - Emma Hill and Her Gentlemen Callers

3:20 p.m. - Good Time Travelers

4:45 p.m. - Ghost Hands

6:30 p.m. - Nervis Rex

Inlet Stage

11:50 a.m. - Kevin Duff

12:45 p.m. - Jim Page

3:25 p.m. - Leeroy Stagger

4:05 p.m. - Rik Nielsen Band

4:55 p.m. - Ratfish Wranglers

5:55 p.m. - Ellamy Tiller and the Twang

[Comment](#)

