

## **American Recreation Coalition 2013 Beacon Award Nomination**



Lisa Shon Jodwalis and Post Modern Company film crew on the Yukon River Bridge

**Bureau of Land Management  
Central Yukon Field Office  
Fairbanks, Alaska**

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Park Ranger-Interpretation  
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### Introduction

The BLM-Alaska nominates Lisa Shon Jodwalis, Park Ranger-Interpretation, for the 2013 American Recreation Coalition Beacon Award. Lisa served as Project Lead for a **30-minute high-definition film, *Arctic Visions & Voices, a Journey through Northern Alaska*** which communicates the unique environmental challenges and multiple resource values of public lands in northern Alaska. This is an area so vast and remote that few people have the opportunity to visit. The federal public lands are valued for their special wildland recreational opportunities, nationally significant energy and mineral resources, and importance to the subsistence life of remote villages, values which lead to multiple resource management challenges. In addition, climate warming is rapidly changing the arctic environment and the way we perceive and use it. These changes are visible and measurable, but the future remains uncertain.



The gateway to this remarkable area is the Dalton Highway, originally built in 1974 to support the Trans-Alaska Pipeline. It is the only road in North America to reach the Arctic Ocean and now provides a jumping-off point for remote backcountry recreation. The Bureau of Land Management's Central Yukon Field Office administers over 2 million acres along the highway. The National Park Service and U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service manage large tracts of adjacent public lands. Lisa led an interagency effort to develop the film's vision, theme and messages about the public lands through which the highway passes. The consulting team included staff from Gates of the Arctic National Park & Preserve and Kanuti National Wildlife Refuge as well as residents of the historic village of Wiseman.

Lisa has lived in Alaska for 40 years and obtained a Master's degree in Wildlife Management from the University of Alaska Fairbanks. She is passionate about wildlife and outdoor recreation. She has worked for the Central Yukon Field Office since 2001, including eight years as manager of the Arctic Interagency Visitor Center in Coldfoot, 250 miles north of Fairbanks on the Dalton Highway. Prior to that, she worked for the National Park Service at the Alaska Public Lands Information Center in Fairbanks. Twenty years of providing front-line visitor service gave her a deep understanding of the diverse viewpoints of Alaskan residents and visitors of all persuasions. Building on personal experience, she is also adept at conveying the real risks and challenges of

Alaska's wilderness to those who hope to experience its recreation opportunities, whether backpacking, mountaineering, hunting, floating, or dog mushing.

Lisa's expertise as a resource interpreter as well as her strong commitment to communicating the wonders of the natural environment and the significance and benefits of public lands infused her role as Project Lead for *Arctic Visions & Voices*. Throughout the three-year process, she nudged, cajoled, and sometimes prodded the interagency consulting team members towards agreement at critical stages, always working towards a film that would be beautiful, provocative, and reflective of the people who live, work, and visit Alaska's Arctic.

### ***The Film: Arctic Visions & Voices, A Journey through Northern Alaska***



Still shot from the film: Post Modern Company photo

The following topics were addressed in the film:

- **Permafrost**

Permafrost is unique to arctic and subarctic regions. Entire ecosystems have evolved around permafrost. Even recent human development is built around permafrost. If permafrost is stable it serves as a solid foundation, which is what determined much of the Trans-Alaska Pipeline engineering design. When it melts it affects roads, buildings, bridges, pipelines, power lines and other infrastructure.

- **Adaptations**

Summer is short and packed with activity: migration, blooming, giving birth, and food-gathering. Winter is long and harsh and living things must have special adaptations to survive the snow, wind, cold, darkness and lack of food: they migrate, hibernate, grow thick, insulating coats, super-cool, or hide beneath the snow. Plants stay low to the ground for protection against wind-driven ice particles.



The land supports few kinds animals and often, in low numbers. Although animals such as caribou and migratory birds may be abundant in a few places and at a few times these incidents of abundance are sporadic, highly seasonal and habitat-specific. Animals at the top of the food chain, like bears, wolves and wolverines, must roam hundreds of miles to find enough food to survive. Populations rise and fall precipitously, highly vulnerable to disturbances whether natural or human-caused.



- **Living with winter**

Human activity doesn't shut down in winter. Even at -40° or -50° F, people who live and work in arctic Alaska go out and do everyday things, whether it's hunting for food, maintaining the camp generator, providing aurora tours, or plowing snow to keep the Dalton Highway open for truck traffic supplying the oilfields at Prudhoe Bay. A few hardy souls even visit in winter.

- **History**

This land is inhabited by Native Alaskans who have a rich cultural history going back tens of thousands of years, with deep sensitivities to weather, seasons, and the behavior and timing of wild animals and their movements. These cultures still thrive, not as museum-like artifacts, but evolving and adapting useful technologies while retaining cultural traditions and identities. They are still deeply connected to the natural world.

(U.S. Geological Survey photo of Arctic Village by J.B. Mertie, 1926).

- **Environmental Changes**

Large-scale changes stemming from global warming affect the circumpolar Arctic sooner and faster than elsewhere: sea ice, permafrost, plants, animals, glaciers, hydrology. Everything is interconnected: warming, wildfires, flooding, winter rain events, fish and wildlife habitat and seasonal movements, subsistence hunting and gathering, coastal erosion, and infrastructure.

- **Land management**

Despite having different missions, federal and state land-managing agencies must balance the need to develop and extract tangible resources such as oil, gas, and minerals, yet protect habitat and pristine environments that produce resources for subsistence and recreation – resources that provide intangibles such as solitude, freedom, independence, personal challenge, and inspiration.



The results often require complex compromises. Besides showing that different people value the area for different reasons, the film acknowledges that contradictions and controversies arise.

Impacts such as those from the highway and pipeline can resonate throughout Alaska's north and the circumpolar Arctic.

- **Take Home Messages**

Life is fragile and easily disturbed, and everything that people do has some kind of impact. People

make decisions from far away that impact resources at a local level and also those intangible qualities that make these places so special.

Human-caused changes are continuing and even accelerating. The Dalton Highway allows development but also access for people to experience the Arctic wilderness who would otherwise never see it. Can Americans retain these beautiful, wild public lands while demanding ever more resources, which require extraction and development? There are no easy answers.



Ultimately, *Arctic Visions & Voices* helps the public understand and appreciate the legacy of public lands that were designated to benefit all Americans.

### **Innovation in use of technology for visitor services**

The Dalton Highway is still a remote, primitive and challenging road and few people have the time and resources to attempt the drive. The summer season is short: from late May to early September. The underlying complexity of the arctic landscape and its stories does not lend itself well to websites or other social media. Cell phone service and public Internet connections are unavailable along the 414-mile highway. It became clear that a film provided the opportunity to have the biggest impact on the most people. Film does not require special equipment or Internet connection to view, nor is it tied to a particular site. A short film can easily be shared and can reach larger, more distant and more diverse audiences.

The target audience includes Dalton Highway visitors who may not have the time or inclination to visit the Arctic Interagency Visitor Center – these include hunters, long-haul truck drivers, Alyeska Pipeline Service workers, and researchers from the University of Alaska’s Toolik Field Station. Yet Alaskans who visit and work in the area possess a strong regional pride of place. *Arctic Visions & Voices* will allow them to share the experience with family and friends. A surprising number of visitors are from other countries, especially Europe and Asia. This film provides a virtual tour of an immense region that still holds mystery, controversy, and inspiration for people around the world.

The BLM sees the film as part of an integrated program of interpretive services including the website [www.blm.gov/ak/dalton](http://www.blm.gov/ak/dalton), the Dalton Highway Visitor Guide, wayside exhibits, and the Arctic Interagency Visitor Center.

### **Partnerships with for-profit and nonprofit organizations in the private sector**

Alaskans are famously independent. From the very beginning, Lisa urged her team to include input from the region’s residents, workers, and visitors – the “voices” of *Arctic Visions & Voices*. She recognized that different people hold different values for public lands and wanted the film to

provide a balance. She solicited and received cooperation from trucking companies, tour operators, backcountry guides, bush pilots, oilfield workers, scientists and local residents as well as visitors. These people speak from their own experiences, which gives the film genuine authenticity.

The National Park Service and U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service were instrumental in providing video footage that could not otherwise be obtained by the BLM contractor. The University of Alaska Fairbanks graciously assisted with scientific expertise. The BLM's not-for-profit cooperating partner, the Alaska Geographic Association also assisted with logistical and marketing support.

### **Efforts to share news of creative solutions within the agency**

The BLM Fairbanks District Office has posted photos and news of the film shoot and pending release on the BLM-Alaska Facebook page and Dalton Highway website [www.blm.gov/ak/dalton](http://www.blm.gov/ak/dalton). Other BLM offices around the country have already requested copies for viewing.

Lisa is ready and willing to share “lessons learned” about the entire filming process from the Statement of Work and assisting the film crew all the way to scheduling the premiere.

### **Community support for the work of this initiative, as reflected in awards, community boards, and committees**

*Arctic Visions & Voices, a Journey through Northern Alaska* is scheduled for release in early June, 2013. Community support during the production phase is demonstrated by the willingness of independent Alaskans to assist with interviews and personal photos, and inquiries by the public. Offers to obtain the film for public viewing have already come from the Alaska Public Lands Information Centers in Fairbanks and Anchorage.

Perhaps the most telling example of community support comes from the 2012 Coldfoot premiere of the short (15-minute) version of *Arctic Visions & Voices*, which is available for viewing only at the Arctic Interagency Visitor Center. Coldfoot is a tiny community with a rustic truck stop/motel/café, a Department of Transportation Maintenance Station, an air taxi business, and a handful of seasonal gold miners, perhaps 30 people overall. The village of Wiseman, 15 miles farther north, has about 20 summer residents. Yet over 70 people attended the premiere in June 2012.



Arctic Interagency Visitor Center, June 2012 premiere of short film

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