

North for Science! 2026 **Trip Report**

Now in its tenth year, *North for Science! 2026* was, to quote one participant, "...exceptional, incredible, and outstanding." Despite the initial cold and wet forecast, ten intrepid Interior Alaska middle school-aged students from diverse backgrounds spent eight days camping and learning together along the Dalton Highway in the Brooks Range June 7-14, 2026.

Despite a dry drive north, the weather forecast proved fairly accurate. Fortunately, the cold rain began after we set up camp at Marion Creek campground north of Coldfoot. Not a complaint was heard and the group had immediate practice in staying warm and dry through a very cold night.

Rain gear and rubber boots served us well as we headed to the Arctic Interagency Visitors Center (AIVC) for our bear awareness training and deterrent practice with BLM's Steve Taylor, who was also one of the trip leaders. The AIVC provided materials and space for additional hands-on activities that included collecting "vegetation plugs" with BLM's Kerri Hamos for display inside the AIVC throughout the season, local mining history and hands-on gold panning with FWS's Hanna McBrearty and Beatrix Adams, Leave No Trace activities with Kerri Hamos, and a wildlife skull identification/examination with Brain Perry, BLM manager of the AIVC.



Happily, the weather cleared and although generally cool, remained mostly precipitation-free for the rest of the trip. We hiked to Marion Creek Falls, and used clinometers to help us flag a re-route along the way after last autumn's washout caused by torrential rains. Another outdoor recreation management service-learning project had us lopping willows in the campground itself, freeing up space so users will stay on the established camp pads.

As in previous years, we conducted snowshoe hare pellet counts for BLM ecologist Anna O'Malley on our designated "North for Science" site on the Hammond River. BLM hydrologist Noel Turner then joined us on the Hammond to teach us how to gauge water quality with both digital

equipment and a macroinvertebrate survey, which we then replicated on Gold Creek. She also explained the geological processes of the Frozen Debris Lobes seen on the valley slopes nearby.

Additionally, we gathered data on a boreal forest transect, then repeated the transect on the tundra above Galbraith Lake. This provided everyone an up-close examination of the similarities and differences between the subarctic and arctic environments.





On our way north we stopped for a brief tour of the community of Wiseman to gain insight into the local mining history and a different perspective of living in the Brooks Range... and a game or two of ping-pong, thanks to our hosts Berni and Uta Hicker.

On the north side of the Brooks Range we found the road to Galbraith Lake campground still closed by several snowdrifts. Undaunted and with a team effort we were able to shovel and stamp our way through them to open the campground for the season. Early the next morning, Jesse Krause and his EvoME (Evolving Meta-Ecosystems) research team met us there to capture and “process” white-crowned sparrows. The team involved the group in measuring and recording data on the sparrows, then showed us how to safely release the birds. Later FWS’s Kaiti Ott (also a trip leader) provided insight into the use of radio collars and telemetry equipment for studying populations of wild animals. Pairs of kids used the equipment to find a hidden collar, then hid the collar for the next pair – a fun version of hide ‘n’ seek.

During our last field day, we visited UAF’s Toolik Field Station to learn from staff and researchers there about many ongoing Arctic research projects. For the first time ever, we took some data from a vegetation site comparing growth inside open-topped chambers (OTCs - which block wind and increase temperature slightly) with plots outside the OTCs. Future N4S groups will take the same data on the same plots yearly for comparison. We also took an evening stroll along Galbraith Creek, looking for fossils and playing with the ice needles in the aufeis (unmelted winter overflow).

Throughout this fun-and-learning filled week team members were constantly active and engaged, enthusiastically soaking up every new experience and enjoying living (device-free!) outdoors – regardless of weather conditions – with a new group of friends, all in awesome surroundings.

To describe the overall experience, participants wrote:

“If someone came up to me and asked me what North 4 Science was like I would have no fitting words for how amazing it was.”

“I would say just how cool, fun, silly, and just how much I learned at N4S. I truly believe seeing this side of Alaska up close has made me want to enter a field of science even more. Everything from the bird banding, the pollinator work, and just the scenery made me want to do more activities like this. I went into this program skeptical but came out with a whole new mindset.”



And when asked to rate their experience (out of ten), some wrote:

- 10/10 I really liked learning all these different things that I didn’t know before
- 10 it was fun learning about so much stuff
- 100,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000

Many thanks to the organizations and agencies who made this experience possible: The Alaska Songbird Institute (ASI’s N4S founder/coordinator Carol Scott and staffer Andrea Chin were trip leaders), the Bureau of Land Management, the US Fish & Wildlife Service, the University of Alaska Fairbanks/Toolik Field Station, and Alaska Geographic. Thanks also to the National Park Service for equipment loans, and to individual community members for funding support.