



Interpretive Naturalist Certification Program of Alaska

Facts, Questions, and Answers

What is INCPA?

The Interpretive Naturalist Certification Program of Alaska is a cooperative venture among Anchorage-area organizations to train local citizens to become better interpreters, environmental educators, and non-formal science teachers.

What are the goals of the program?

- ✧ To develop a corps of community educators who have been trained to a rigorous standard in interpretive techniques, non-formal science education and environmental education.
- ✧ To link trained participants with volunteer and employment opportunities to meet specific needs within the Anchorage community.
- ✧ To pool community training resources for interpretation and non-formal science education into a comprehensive, coordinated program.
- ✧ To promote science and environmental education in the Anchorage community and to foster a sense of stewardship in the audiences served.

How do I become certified?

You will become certified upon completion of all the requirements listed in the Certification Standards document. You begin the process by attending the Introductory Seminar. Upon completion of the seminar, you may decide to pursue certification by enrolling with the Anchorage Committee for Resource Education (ACRE), the certifying organization. Once enrolled, you will receive documentation forms correlated to the six standards established for the program and a listing of approved local training opportunities to meet those standards. You are then responsible for completing the requirements by attending the training opportunities at your own pace, and submitting the forms to ACRE as you complete each standard.

What are the Certification Standards?

I. Introductory Workshop

This one-day workshop orients the candidate to the certification program and examines the following topics: Importance and Role of Interpretive Services, Scientific Knowledge and Methods, Understanding Your Audience, Field Research Skills, and Stewardship.

II. Education Knowledge and Techniques

Education Delivery and Interpretation Workshop; two curriculum workshops; two site-specific training sessions; and 20 hours shadowing experienced outdoor/science educators in the community.

III. Science Knowledge

Alaska Natural History Workshop; 30 hours of attending classes, workshops, lectures, instructional field trips, and conferences in the following core areas: Earth Science, Physical/Chemical Science, and Biological Science.

IV. Field Techniques and Experience

Field Methods Workshop; 10 hours of participating in resource inventories, ecosystem monitoring efforts, or other scientific projects organized by a university, government agency, or community group.

V. Instructional Experience

A total of 60 hours of instruction experience with various audience groups.

VI. Stewardship Project

Community Leadership and Stewardship Workshop; 20 hours developing and leading a pre-approved project that involves the community and promotes environmental stewardship.

VII. Knowledge of Local Natural Resources and Facilities

Site orientations at three education facilities in the community; visits to other facilities and local natural areas to complete Program Journal activities.

Who is the Certifying Organization?

The Anchorage Committee for Resource Education is the certifying organization. ACRE is a nonprofit organization dedicated to enhancing the understanding and appreciation of Alaska's natural resources through education. ACRE membership is comprised of professionals from the Anchorage School District, non-profit organizations, community groups, local, state and federal agencies, and individuals who share an interest in quality education and a commitment to resource and outdoor education. ACRE upholds the standards for the Interpretive Naturalist Certification Program of Alaska and ensures that all workshops, seminars, training and field experiences meet those standards.

What are the benefits to the participants?

Participants in this program will enhance their skills in science and environmental education, broaden their knowledge of local natural history, strengthen their understanding of science concepts and methods, and gain access to volunteer and employment opportunities with local science education organizations, science centers and visitor centers. Other benefits include:

- * Free training in resource education, science, and Alaska natural history.
- * Opportunities to network with community educators and scientists
- * Opportunities to instruct and become comfortable with various audiences.
- * Opportunities to volunteer for the community in education programs, field research projects and in organizing stewardship projects.
- * Opportunities to familiarize yourself with local organizations and resources.
- * Recognition and a resume enhancing certificate.

What is an Interpretive Naturalist?

An Interpretive Naturalist is someone who understands science and scientific methods and can effectively communicate the joy, wonder, and details of the natural world to a variety of audiences. It is someone who understands the resources of an area, both natural and institutional, that they can use to satisfy their curiosity about local natural history. It is someone with enthusiasm for the natural world and the process of sharing their discoveries.

Why an Interpretive Naturalist Certification Program of Alaska?

Presently there are no set standards for non-formal science or environmental education in Anchorage. This program seeks to fill that need, to develop a core group of community educators trained to a rigorous standard, and to promote stewardship. By raising standards in science and environmental education in Alaska, the quality of life is raised in the community and for future generations.

Is this program for me?

This program is for the nature enthusiast, college student, classroom teacher, tour guide, or interested community member who would like to learn more about resource education, Alaska natural history and how to share their knowledge with others. No previous experience is necessary. It is for anyone wanting to gain additional science and environmental education training and experience, get a better understanding of local education programs, or improve his or her outreach skills.

What does this program cost?

Training and certification is essentially provided to you free of charge. During the course of your enrollment, you will “give back” by leading a stewardship project and by volunteering at participating organizations. Although training is free, a one-time processing fee of \$35.00 is required upon enrollment into the certification program.

What is the time commitment?

Participants are encouraged to work at their own pace. Actual hours spent will vary depending on programs chosen, but it may approximate 200 hours. There is no set time limit for completion.

Is this a class? Is there a teacher?

This is not a traditional class, although you may take classes to fulfill some of the requirements. You are your primary teacher. This is a self-directed program. A partial list of opportunities and options for fulfilling the requirements is provided, but when and how you pursue them is up to you. This program will not teach you the “facts.” Rather, it will certify that you are experienced enough to know which facts and skills you need to lead an education program and that you are familiar with local resources.

What does certification mean?

Certification under this program is a documentation of experience. It means you have completed a rigorous training in environmental education and Alaska natural history. Local organizations that are involved in environmental, resource and science education are aware of the INCPA requirements and of The Anchorage Committee for Resource Education which ensures that certification standards are upheld.

What if I am already knowledgeable about some areas of environmental education and/or Alaska natural history?

Although no prior experience is necessary, you may be eligible to waive certain requirements. Details can be found in the “Waiver Policy” and “Certification Standards” documents. This program is designed for candidates with a variety of knowledge and expertise.

Who may I contact if interested?

For more details, contact the BLM Campbell Creek Science Center at 267-1247 or check the website at www.incpa.ak.blm.gov. The Anchorage Committee for Resource Education can be reached through the mail at P.O. Box 231642, Anchorage, AK 99523.

How do I find out about training opportunities to meet the standards?

Regularly review the “Upcoming Events” schedule on the website, www.incpa.ak.blm.gov. The Certification Standards document and the Sponsoring Organization Contact Sheets provide information on contacts and some opportunities. Review the ACRE minutes, which will be e-mailed to you monthly when you enroll in the INCPA program. Most importantly, be aware of events in the community. Pay attention to notices and flyers. Call the organizations participating in INCPA and others in the community on a regular basis. This is your chance to familiarize yourself with everything happening in the field.