

Pitching in for power to Hope Willow Ranch

Description

BY DONN LISTON (2019@donnliston.co)

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Must Read Alaska: <http://mustreadalaska.com/pitching-power-hope-willow-ranch/>



CONGRESSMAN YOUNG TO ATTEND SATURDAY FUNDRAISER

BY DONN LISTON

SPECIAL TO MUST READ ALASKA

A dream for many who have developmental disabilities is to do things most people take for granted. Too often they're parked in "assisted living" venues to mark their days on a calendar.

Hope Community Resources' Willow Ranch is different. And when Congressman Don Young heard about the remarkable model of living from the land, he had to see it.

"Representative Young is always interested in sustainable lifestyles and sustainable food sources," said Roy Scheller, Hope executive director, who is credited with the sustainable ranch idea.

Scheller has a big worry, however: The ranch runs on generator power, and therefore it's always at risk. In the winter, so are the lives of the disabled men who live at the ranch. Keeping the generator going keeps him awake, worried about the disabled men.

Willow Ranch needs to hook up to Matanuska Electric Association power — and that's going to take

some cash that neither government nor grants have been able to provide.

“The people who live at the ranch are relatively independent, with homes off to the side so all can live independently, doing things men like to do, with necessary assistance,” Scheller said.

Rep. Young was impressed enough with the operation that he has confirmed he will attend a barbecue fundraiser, Saturday, May 26 from 11 a.m. – 3 p.m. Sens. Lisa Murkowski and Dan Sullivan have also been invited.

THE BLOWN-OUT GENERATOR. WILLOW RANCH NEEDS PERMANENT POWER.

THE RANCH RUNS ON GENERATOR POWER

Last fall, Young met and formed a bond with Frank Forpahl, the original Hope Ranch manager.

“I’ve stayed awake nights knowing the generator can kick off at any time requiring immediate action to save our families and stock from the bitter cold,” said Forpahl, who was there 11 years ago when Hope purchased the 70-acre property that only had a modest house with a couple of out buildings.

“In December, the primary diesel generator blew—shooting its dipstick across the room—and spewing oil everywhere,” Forpahl said.

This was another in a long line of generators, a windmill, and solar panels, that have been inadequate for the needs of this growing enterprise seeking independent living and self-sufficiency.

Intrepid souls here live off the land and market products they produce. Over the years, as the program has expanded, Hope has built a large barn, a work building, a small saw mill, a duplex, and single-family home.

A backup generator has been providing electricity since the main one blew up. Previously a rental for NC Machinery, this generator served fine as backup, but it’s inadequate as a solution. Unpredictable energy needed for activities in woodworking, warming of buildings or basic computer operation, create hour-by-hour uncertainty.

To hear stories of how the three original managers of the ranch were able to survive and make progress toward their goals in temperatures as low as -54F, attend the fundraiser. RSVP to 907-355-2494 or willowranchfundraiser@gmail.com.

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COMMUNITY CAN HELP HOOK UP THE POWER

The area around West Kenny Blvd., off Willow Fish Hook Road, doesn't have Matanuska Electric Association power.

Over the years of creating a sustainable ranch, electric power has required a huge investment in fuel, batteries, alternative energy sources, and constantly running generators to be marginally habitable and productive. The possibility of consistent power has been only a dream.

This is about to change. The goal of this fundraiser is to hook up to MEA power. Cost is expected to be \$150,000 to \$175,000 and surveyors are now marking the route for those lines. The annual savings for the ranch will be \$25,000 to \$35,000.

I met four of the five men who are currently residents and workers at the Willow Ranch during a May 18 visit. They are all characters, with unique needs and abilities. None has a criminal background and all are justifiably proud of what they are doing to create a sustainable enterprise as part of the Willow community. All have Alaska Native heritage and participate actively in hunting, fishing and trapping activities after training in necessary safety measures required for such outdoor pursuits.

The ranch promotes animal husbandry, gardening, wood-working, mechanics raising and selling livestock, as part of this living-off-the-land project. Hope has other regional service programs in Barrow, Dillingham, Kodiak, Kenai, Mat-Su and Seward.

As the largest investment of the Hope network, this ranch is also a destination for activities of many other agencies and individuals.

Donn Liston has lived in Alaska since 1962 and writes about Alaskans and the Alaskan experience since statehood.

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donn

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