

“Quite honestly, it’s a little strange that a school in Texas is involved in making a documentary about Arctic soils. We didn’t really set out for it to be that way,” Weindorf said. “But there were so many positives to producing this film at Texas Tech and we couldn’t ignore that.”

Though the logistical benefits are obvious, the payoff for Texas Tech is that this film will help elevate the university to the next level as a research institution.

“Making a documentary film like this one and being able to say that it was produced, filmed and edited by Texas Tech University is great,” Weindorf said. “Having that film go out nationally over the PBS station, be released at film festivals and be shown in classrooms - that is incredible exposure for us.”

Beyond the impact the film will have for the university, is the impact the Alaskan Field Tour will have on its participants and those viewing the documentary.

“We hear all these things about Alaska down here in the Lower 48 and they’re all abstract. It’s just something we hear on the news. That is, until you’ve been there,” Weindorf said.

Students who have participated in the course tend to agree.

“In addition to learning so much in so little time, I was exposed to an entirely new landscape. I was able to feel frozen soil, hike up foot-thick spongy moss as well as touch and feel ice lenses in a soil core,” Taylor Person, a soil science major at Texas Tech and former participant in the Alaskan Field Tour, said. “The exposure to such a unique and incredible environment was the most valuable aspect of this trip for me.”

With the tour beginning in Fairbanks, Alaska, and running north through the state to Deadhorse, Alaska, participants become ambassadors for a state and lifestyle that many people will never have the opportunity to experience.

“Alaska is a big state and you begin to understand just how big when you start in Fairbanks drive the entire length of the Dalton Highway to Deadhorse,” Lynn, a former Alaskan Field Tour participant, said. “Any time you do world travel of any kind, whether it’s visiting a



*One of the greatest opportunities that this film offers is the chance to show people what Alaska is really like and why protecting this vast and topographically-diverse wilderness is so important.*



third-world country or sailing across the ocean, it does lend you a perspective. It can help you sense how small and insignificant you are.”

That sense of awe about the landscape is something that the film hopes to capture and show to children in classrooms across the nation.

“I got to see how fragile the ecosystem is in Alaska, and how we can scientifically view the effects of climate change on the Alaskan soils and the entire ecosystem,” John Sackett, Natural Resource Conservation Service soil scientist and former Alaskan Field Tour participant, said. “The change in soil characteristics sets off a chain reaction of events, such as release of carbon dioxide, for example. I think the film is a creative and effective way for people to see this.”

Showing people the real Alaska is an important part of the vision for this project. Though Weindorf isn’t a filmmaker by trade, he has a sense of the emotions he hopes people feel when viewing the film.

“If I can get that twelfth grade student in some tiny classroom to sit up in their chair and think, ‘Wow, that was cool,’ this project will have been a success.” 

*Lynsey Meharg*

Pensacola, FL

