

“To provide education and leadership in the conservation and sustainable use of soil- and water- related resources through cooperative programs that protect, restore and improve our environment.”



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# Natural Currents

## SEEING THE FOREST AND THE TREES

One of the kinds of assistance the District can provide is helping landowners learn more about their forests. Individuals with 7 or more acres of land that is forested or “capable of growing trees” are eligible for this assistance and can receive a “Forest Stewardship Plan.” Forest Stewardship Plans are provided at no cost to landowners, because we all benefit if forestlands are managed in ways that maintain or increase their long-term productivity and environmental quality.



**An overstocked stand with many dead trees**

The first step taken in developing a Forest Stewardship Plan is to meet with the landowners and find out from them what their goals are for their forestland. Then trained personnel conduct site visits to measure tree size and density, assess forest condition, and identify insect or disease threats. Observations about wildlife use of the forest are made, as are observations about what landowners can do to reduce the risks of wildfire. *(Continued on pg 5)*

## HOMER DISTRICT BENEFITS FROM GOOD DEEDS OF EAGLE SCOUTS

The Homer District has been on the receiving end of some pretty amazing accomplishments by Boy Scout Troop #555 as a couple of their members have sought to earn their Eagle Scout honors. Eagle Scout is the highest rank a Boy Scout can earn, to achieve this status a scout must be responsible for developing and managing a community service project, thus proving leadership skills and providing a benefit to the community. Only about 5% of all Scouts achieve this honor, so we consider ourselves very fortunate to have the opportunity to work with a couple of ambitious young men as they develop their service projects.

Kyle Wentz spent the better half of last summer designing, constructing, fundraising for material costs, and then installing foot bridges along the Calvin and Coyle Woodland Park Nature Trail. The Calvin and Coyle Trail is one of the only *(continued on pg 3)*

# MAKING GARDENS TO HOLD RAIN?!

If you've ever watched water gurgling out of the downspout of a rain gutter, you have a sense of how much water runs off a roof during rainstorms or periods of snow melt. As much (or more) water runs off driveways, walkways, and other impervious or compacted areas (including many lawns). Much of this runoff carries pollutants, particularly from roads, driveways, and parking areas, but also from yards, work areas, and dog runs, to name a few other sources. This surface runoff—and whatever pollutants it carries—enters the city's storm ditches and drains, flows downhill in ever increasing amounts as multiple sources combine, and eventually empties into local wetlands, streams, lakes and ponds, and finally, into Kachemak Bay. Sometimes surface runoff exceeds the capacity of storm ditches and drains (and natural channels) and then—as happened dramatically in fall 2002—flooding occurs.

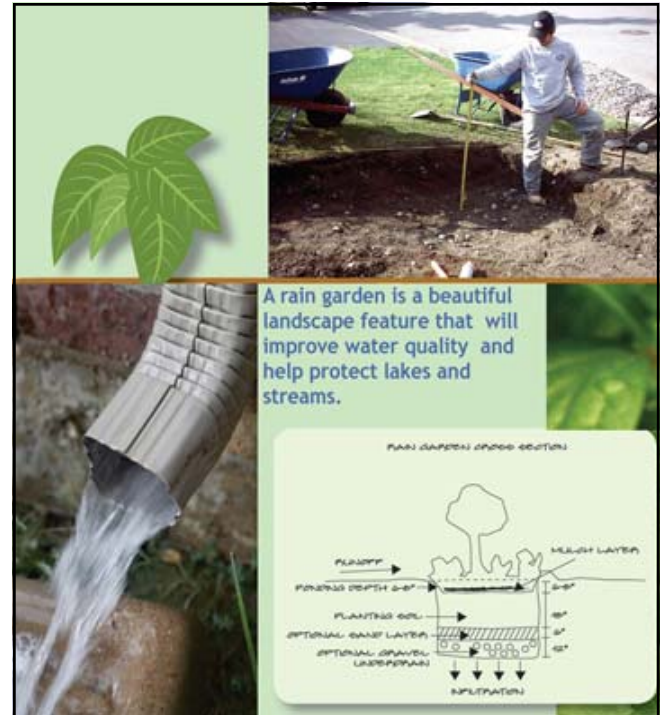
It's clear that any actions that reduce surface runoff will also reduce the risks of flooding and the offsite transport of pollutants. If those actions promote the movement of

rainwater and snow melt into and through the soil, then they also contribute to the filtration of surface waters, which improves water quality and contributes to the recharge of groundwater sources—which feed many local wells. So these kinds of actions save the city money and benefit the community and the environment, including local wildlife.

To help people take actions that reduce and filter surface runoff, the Homer Soil and Water Conservation District is working with the US Fish and Wildlife Service and the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service to establish a “rain garden” program in Homer. The program would help people learn about rain gardens and how to create them, as well as providing some cost-sharing for landowners who establish rain gardens that meet certain criteria. The program would be modeled on the rain garden program in Anchorage, and some very useful materials are available on the Website: [anchorageaingardens.com](http://anchorageaingardens.com).

What, exactly, is a rain garden? A rain garden is a low area in your landscape—a depression—that's been designed and modified so it will receive, hold, and filter rainwater (and snowmelt) running off your roof, driveway, lawn, or other “impervious” surfaces. In Anchorage, a rule of thumb for sizing a rain garden is that, in well-drained soils, the rain garden should be about 10 percent of the size of the area that's delivering runoff. So, for example, if your roof and driveway added up to 1500 sq ft., a rain garden designed to receive, hold, and filter their combined runoff should be about 150 sq ft, that is, 10 by 15 ft or 12¼ by 12¼ ft. In soils that drain more slowly, rain gardens should be closer to 20 percent of the area that contributes run off. Recommended sizes for Homer rain gardens are likely to be larger than in Anchorage because Homer receives more precipitation and tends to have soils that drain relatively slowly. Tailoring rain garden design recommendations so that they better fit Homer conditions will be one of the tasks performed by the rain garden program planned by the District.

Setting up the program has only just started; the Homer District is looking for a good “demonstration site” for Homer's first rain garden. By the end of the end of summer, folks in Homer should be able to see what a rain garden looks like and how it functions. The District will be photo-documenting all the steps in the process and uploading them to our Website. This way, anyone in the community can check out how the demonstration rain garden was created and what it looks like. Look for regular updates in this newsletter about the progress of Homer's rain garden program.





Eagle Scout Kyle Wentz receives the State Park's Director's Service Award from DNR, Parks and Outdoor Recreation for the project he completed along the Calvin and Coyle Trail. Steve Neel, Grants Administer, was on hand to present to this award to him over the Memorial Day weekend.

(continued from pg 1) nature trails in close proximity to Homer city limits that provides easy access for trail users of all ages and abilities. However this trail had fallen into disuse and was in terrible need of repairs. The Homer District, in partnership with Kachemak Heritage Land Trust, received a grant from the State of Alaska Trails Recreational Program for trail upgrades. As part of the grant requirement the Homer District needed to come up with a 40% match for funds received. Kyle was instrumental in helping us achieve this goal, and along the way contributed greatly to the Homer community with trail upgrades, bringing this trail back on-line for use.

Kyle's work was so impressive the grant administer for DNR-Parks and Outdoor Recreation nominated Kyle for a State Director's Award. Over the Memorial Day Weekend Kyle received acknowledgement for his work and for "providing exemplary service for Alaska State Parks visitors" from Steve Neel, the grants administer and Bill Luck, the Trail Coordinator for DNR.

This spring the Homer District is again benefiting from the hard work of Troop 555, as scout Jake McLean has been working on the construction of an informational kiosk that has recently been installed at the trailhead of the Watermelon Trail. This kiosk will be used for educational material on the Fritz Creek/Anchor River Critical Habitat Area, as well as trail etiquette for ATVs. It will also provide information about the streambank restoration project the District has been working on over the past year (see related article). Jake has designed the kiosk based on input from both the Homer District and the Homer Snomads, an area-wide motorized trail organization. The Homer District greatly appreciates the work completed by both these scouts, as there projects will benefit our community for many years to come



Jake McLean takes a bit of a rest during the installation of his kiosk in the Snomads parking lot at the trailhead of the Watermelon Trail. Jake organized a sizable work party to install this mammoth informational kiosk



# Got Weeds?

The Homer Soil and Water Conservation District has funding available for private landowners who are interested in working cooperatively to eradicate high priority invasive plants on their property. The District will fund non chemical control methods such as hand pulling, mowing, tarping and other cultural practices for: Thistles, Reed Canary Grass, Bird Vetch, Common Tansy, Fall Dandelion, Sweet Clover, Buttercup, and others. Please contact our office for additional information or to set up an appointment.

## RESTORATION NEARLY COMPLETE ON WATERMELON TRAIL



Beaver Creek prior to any restoration work. The natural stream configuration had been altered by ATV traffic, increasing the stream width and decreasing the stream depth. In-water crossings such as this can have a variety of negative impacts, including damage to natural vegetation that provides shade for streams and help regulate water temperature.

The second step is to re-establish the riparian vegetation along the damaged banks. The riparian zone, or the area beside the water's edge, is an area that divides the aquatic zone and the upland zone - but is ecologically related to both. Riparian zones serve an important function in that the vegetation filters upland run-off limiting the sedimentation that enters into the stream. With the soil disturbances from ATV use on the trails this function becomes extremely important.

After the placing the coir logs the next step was to plant the willow cuttings. This was done utilizing a bioengineering technique referred to as brush layering, or "burrito wraps". Basically a layer of willow cuttings is placed between a "soil lift". Soil lifts are created using biodegradable cloth used to wrap a layer of top soil and then anchored down with wooden stakes. Willow cuttings are placed between each lift. Banks are better stabilized using this technique, and the plant materials used provide cover and food supply for aquatic species.

Once the coir logs were installed volunteers began the brush layering, a re-vegetation technique which incorporates dormant willows cuttings with top soil. Branches are placed on an angle that follow the contour of the slope.

The Homer District is wrapping up the year long habitat restoration project along the Watermelon trail, north of Homer. After installing a bridge last summer on the popular ATV trail in the Fritz Creek/Anchor River Critical Habitat Area the next step was to close down the in-water crossing (pictured on the left). One of the goals of this restoration effort is to re-establish the streambanks to it's natural state. This was accomplished by installing coir logs, or coconut fiber rolls, that are flexible, allowing them to mold to and protect slopes.



Members of the Youth Conservation Corps placing coir logs along the damaged banks. Coir logs are used for erosion control in areas of low wave energy. Overtime they will disintegrate, leaving the bank completely restored. Note the opposite bank compared to the top photo, installation is completed on that side.





(continued from pg 4) After completion of the brush layering the crew began transplanting native vegetation behind the willows. This vegetation will slow sheet flow, minimizing sediment run-off into the stream, compromising water quality and degrading fish habitat.

This project was funded by an Alaska Clean Water Actions grant, administered through AK Dept of Environmental Conservation. Additional funding was made available for the steambank portion of this project through the newly formed Kenai Peninsula Fish Habitat

Once the brush layering was completed the next step involved was to "harvest" veg plugs. Individuals spread out and then dug out small chunks of vegetation to be transplanted behind the willows. Fortunately we had many volunteers for this chore!



Partnership. The District also had the benefit of 100s of volunteer hours from a few youth groups, including the Homer FAA, the Girl Scouts, and the USFWS Youth Conservation Corps. Having youth groups involved with these projects is a great way to give kids potential career ideas and educate them in a hands-on way about the value of our natural resources.

(Continued from pg 1) Landowner goals and collected information are summarized in a written Forest Stewardship Plan. These plans are designed to help landowners understand the current condition of their forestlands and what actions they might take to achieve their identified goals. These plans do not obligate the landowner to any particular actions, but landowners are asked to sign the plan to show their intention to manage their forests in ways that are consistent with the plan. Certain actions performed by the landowner may be eligible



**This good regeneration would benefit from thinning.**



**Trees thinned, lower limbs trimmed, and a brush pile for wildlife**

for cost-share reimbursement. Some examples are: preparing soils for tree seeding; purchasing and planting trees for forestry or wildlife; and removing dead trees, or thinning and pruning live trees, in order to reduce wildfire hazards to homes. Contact the District for more information about Forest Stewardship Plans.

To find out more about the various programs the Homer District is involved with visit our website at [www.homerswcd.org](http://www.homerswcd.org)

The HSWCD Board meets monthly, during the summer we will meet the second Monday of the month @ 5:00. We welcome all visitors!

## UPCOMING EVENTS & DEADLINES

On Going—Invasive Weed Cost Share Sign –up

July 12— HSWCD Board Meeting @ 5:00 –USDA Service Center

Aug 9—HSWCD Board Meeting @ 5:00—USDA Service Center

Aug 2-6 Cannon Envirothon—California State University, Fresno

Aug 20-22— Kenai Peninsula State Fair

In partnership with USDA-NRCS the HSWCD is an Equal Opportunity Provider and Employer



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*Meeting the needs of the local  
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