

“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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Board of Supervisors

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- Tara Schmidt, District Manager
- Todd Schroeder, Trails Coordinator
- Brian Maupin Invasive Plant Program
- Devony Lehner, Special Projects Coordinator
- Karyn Noyes GIS Technician

Natural Currents

HOMER DISTRICT RECEIVES SUSTAINABLE-SALMON-FUND GRANT TO DEVELOP TWO LANDOWNER'S GUIDES FOR FOUR WATERSHEDS

As the flyer included in this newsletter shows, the District is beginning the process of developing two Landowner's Guides for lower peninsula watersheds. As the flyer points out, one of these Guides will cover Deep Creek and Ninilchik River watersheds. The other will cover Anchor Point and Stariski Creek watersheds. The goal is to provide landowners with information that will help them be good stewards of salmon habitats that occur on or near their properties. A wide variety of topics will be covered, including: What do we know about how salmon use these watersheds? How can we recognize healthy salmon habitats when we see them? What effects do various land use activities have on these habitats? What can we do to protect water quality and reduce surface runoff as we develop our properties? How can we protect and improve salmon habitats? How can we prevent invasive plants from degrading salmon habitats?

The District will conduct active community outreach as part of this project so that landowners can identify their own interests and concerns. If you'd like to be on our mailing list for this project, please call District Manager, Tara Schmidt, at 235-8177, ext 106, or email Project Manager, Devony Lehner, at devony@homerswcd.org. And if you know of a group or organization that might like us to make a presentation about this project at one of its upcoming meetings, we'd love to know about that!

KENAI PENINSULA CWMA WEED WORKSHOP APRIL 30TH

The annual Kenai Peninsula Weed Workshop is scheduled for April 27th. This years workshop will be held in Soldotna at the Cool Inlet Aquaculture Association building located off of K-Beach Rd. The event is scheduled to run from noon to 5:00 pm and promises to provide a great opportunity for private landowners, landuse managers, or citizen scientist to learn about current management strategies for invasive plants on the Kenai Peninsula. To view a full agenda please visit the KP-CWMA's website at www.kenaiweeds.org.



HAPPY 25TH BIRTHDAY HOMER DEMONSTRATION FOREST!

What were you doing in August 1986? Your Homer Soil and Water Conservation District was celebrating the official birth of the 360-acre Homer Demonstration Forest on state land just west of Homer. That August, the Interagency Land Management Agreement (ILMA) that created the Homer Demonstration Forest was signed by the Alaska Department of Natural Resources. It had taken over 15 years of effort for the District to be able to celebrate that moment. This May, the 1986 ILMA expires. As the District works towards renewing it for the next 25 years, we thought you'd enjoy a quick look back at how the



A photographer explores spring along Diamond Creek in the Homer Demonstration Forest

Demonstration Forest was created. Much of this history can be found in the current version of the HDF Management Plan (download a copy at: <http://www.homerswcd.org/forestry/prgms/hdf.htm>), but some of it was pulled from the original “framework” plan for the HDF, completed in 1992. And by the way, Homer Soil and Water is now working cooperatively with the City of Homer to develop a management plan for the 270-acre parcel on the western boundary of the HDF. Through the efforts of the Kachemak Heritage Land Trust, this “Diamond Creek parcel” was purchased with Forest Legacy funds. KHLT then turned the parcel over to the City, which intends to manage it in a way that ties into, and complements, the HDF.

The idea for an educational demonstration forest in the Homer area took root in January 1971 when the Homer Soil and Water Conservation District (then the Homer Soil Conservation Subdistrict) contacted foresters with the Alaska Department of Natural Resources (DNR) and the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) (then the Soil Conservation Service) for assistance in “...the reservation of a block of state forested land for permanent timber management demonstra-

tion.” The District’s goal was to educate the community about forest resources and proper forest management practices on the lower Kenai Peninsula. The prime mover behind this effort was former Anchor Point-resident Pat Marquis, who at that time was Chairman of the Homer District Board of Supervisors.

By October of that year, an ad hoc committee of Homer SWCD Supervisors, local school leaders, and staff from the NRCS and the Alaska Division of Forestry (DOF)¹ were meeting regularly to pursue establishment of a demonstration forest. (This group eventually became the HDF Steering Committee that oversees the forest today.) Early in the process, the Alaska State Forester suggested that the committee look at a 530-acre site along Diamond Creek northwest of Homer. The site was enthusiastically approved by the ad hoc group. NRCS agreed to provide a soil survey of the area, and it was recommended that DOF conduct a timber resource inventory. Planning, however, couldn’t begin in earnest until the selected parcel received formal designation as a demonstration forest. That process, as it turned out, would take far longer than anyone expected. Over the next 12 years, the Homer District undertook a number (*cont. on pg. 3*)

(cont from pg. 2) of actions to improve the area chosen as the future HDF and promoted public awareness of the potential demonstration forest. The District sponsored tours of the area, distributed a questionnaire to get public feedback on forest goals, encouraged Homer Community Schools to use the forest for educational day camps, assisted the NRCS to develop a snow survey course in the forest (data from which has been gathered since 1973), and improved access to the area along a section line from Rogers Loop Road. As part of this process, the SWCD in 1975 signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Alaska State Forester and the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) for assistance in “developing the State Demonstration Forest into an outdoor classroom.”

Despite these activities, this parcel of state land still had no official designation when, in 1978, the Kenai Peninsula Borough selected as part of its municipal entitlement 20 acres in the proposed forest to use as a sanitary landfill. (This is now the Homer Landfill, just north of Rogers Loop.) The following year, and despite SWCD efforts, the Borough selected the rest of the 530 acres that the District had chosen for the demonstration forest. The state, however, had at about that time published a report entitled *Public Interest Land Report, Kenai Lowlands*. This report identified the parcel as a demonstration forest. In 1982, the state finished reviewing the situation and transferred to the Kenai Peninsula Borough roughly 170 of the 530 acres (including the 20-acre landfill site). The state retained ownership of the remaining 360 acres, which had been classified as “Resource Management.”

With borough selections resolved, the Homer SWCD renewed its efforts to have the remaining acreage designated for forestry. In response, DOF sent a request to the Division of Lands that the remaining 360-acre parcel of state-owned land be reclassified from “Resource Management” to “Forestry.” By 1984, the Division of Lands had not reclassified the area as requested. As a result, the ad hoc HDF committee sought to obtain an Interagency Land Management Agreement (ILMA) to formally transfer the remaining acreage to the Division of Forestry for use as a demonstration forest. Finally, in August 1986, the Division of Lands signed an ILMA that transferred the 360 acres along Diamond Creek to the DOF “...in order to make use of the land for...a demonstration forest...” An attachment to the ILMA specified that the DOF work “...in conjunction with the U. of A. Cooperative Extension Service, Homer High School, and the Homer Soil and Water Conservation

District, assisted by the USDA Soil Conservation Service.”

With formal designation in hand, the NRCS and DOF began collecting inventory data needed for forest planning, while the Homer District solicited additional public input on directions for forest management. In the fall of 1988, the HDF Steering Committee began work on what became the 1992 HDF Framework plan. Once that plan was approved by the state, several parties signed a Memorandum of Understanding establishing cooperative management of the HDF. In this document, the Homer Soil and Water Conservation District, DOF, NRCS, USFS, and the Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G) agreed to promote “forestry education and other compatible uses” of the area, with each accepting specific responsibilities. Although DOF was identified as the primary management authority, as required by the ILMA, all parties agreed that decisions relating to the HDF be made by mutual consent. The state further recognized the HDF in the Kenai Area Plan, which was adopted in January 2000 (see <http://dnr.alaska.gov/mlw/planning/areaplans/kenai/index.htm>). In that plan, which identifies management goals for all state lands on the Kenai Peninsula, the HDF was noted as “one of the unique parcels of state land in the area, which is used for research, education, and recreation.” Finally, as we mentioned at the beginning of this article, in 2006, an updated Homer Demonstration Forest Management Plan was completed and made available online.

If you have a special memory associated with the Homer Demonstration Forest, or you'd like to write a letter supporting renewal of the ILMA, we'd love to hear from you via mail or email. We'll share some of these HDF memories in a later edition of this newsletter, and we'll keep you posted on the ILMA process.

¹After Statehood, The Alaska Legislature created a Division of Lands within DNR and charged it with managing all state lands and waters. Over time separate divisions were split off to manage specific resources. The Division of Forestry, for example, was actually created in 1982. The Division of Lands is currently known as the Division of Mining, Land and Water (MLW).

BATTLING AN INVASION (OF INVASIVE PLANTS)

During the 2010 field season the Homer District, with support from the US Fish & Wildlife Service and funding through the American Reinvestment and Recovery Act, was able to hire a 5-person youth crew. This team worked throughout the District to conduct Early Detection and Rapid Response (EDRR) activities to eliminate small infestations of invasive plants before they could become big problems.

One of the many successes of the Homer Invasive Plant Team was a scouting trip to the Bradley Lake Hydroelectric project, at the head of Kachemak Bay. The youth crew, led by the Coordinator, camped for 2 nights near the power plant. They spent 3 days inspecting the 8-mile road system, and all areas disturbed by construction and operation of the facility.

The team was pleasantly surprised to find very few non-native plants in the area. Commonly found weeds such as common dandelion and narrowleaf hawksbeard were present in disturbed areas. Although a low priority in the district, these plants are still of concern. In addition, white sweetclover was discovered near the plant. White sweetclover (*Melilotus alba*) is common in the Fairbanks and Anchorage areas but, has only been found twice before in the Homer area. This aggressive plant flourishes in gravel areas, and the main concern is that it could colonize gravel river bars, potentially having adverse effects on riparian ecosystems. The IP team discovered and hand-pulled a 1/4-acre infestation in a gravel pit. HSWCD suspects this plant initially arrived around 3 years ago, probably carried in on construction equipment. Later in the summer the Homer IPC revisited the site, and destroyed approximately 200 plants that had sprouted since the initial visit.

Through early detection and rapid response, a potential detrimental infestation was stopped before it got out of control. This effort was successful because of the cooperation and assistance of Homer Electric Association, particularly site engineer Jim Kingrey. HSWCD would like to sincerely thank Mr. Kingrey. Without his help, the District would have been unable to stop some potentially ecologically damaging plants



Homer District's invasive plant youth crew pulls small white sweetclover seedlings from a site across Kachemak Bay near the Bradley Lake hydroelectric dam.

FISH PASSAGE WORKSHOP

OFFERED AT ISLAND AND OCEAN VISITOR CENTER

The US Fish and Wildlife Service, in partnership with the Alaska Department of Fish & Game, State Department of Transportation & Public Facilities, and Kenai Watershed Forum is hosting a fish passage workshop. This workshop will provide planners, NGO staff, biologist, hydrologist, project and environmental managers the necessary background to understand fish passage needs, designs and potential impacts. Participants in this interdisciplinary workshop will learn: the basic concepts regarding stream processes and habitat in relation to road-stream crossings, the basic of modeling fish and fish passage in different areas of the State, how to read and evaluate various designs, and how to minimize interferences with stream processes and aquatic species movement. Regulatory and current standards across Alaska will be presented and discussed. This is a hands on workshop— as information is presented in stages, participants will work in teams to resolve the realistic scenarios. There is no charge to attend this workshop, but registration is requested. To register please contact Gillian O'Doherty at Gillian.odoherty@alaska.gov or call (907)267-2146.

KENAI PENINSULA AG FORUM

Setting a new key stone for Kenai Peninsula agriculture, the Kenai Peninsula Resource Conservation & Development District will be hosting a Kenai Peninsula Ag Forum on Saturday, April 2nd, at the Kenai Peninsula State Fairgrounds in Ninilchik. This event will provide for presentations from a variety of local and state agricultural producers and will provide a facilitated forum to identify priority actions for the development of a "Strategic Plan for Agriculture on the Kenai Peninsula".

One of the key presenters will be Angela Caporelli of the Kentucky Department of Agriculture, here to present information on their Appalachian small farm success stories and mobile processing units. Other key presenters are Michael Paschall, Editor of Alaska Farm and Ranch News; Margaret Adsit, Executive Director of Alaska Farmland Trust; Johanna Herron, Farm to School Program Coordinator, Alaska Division of Agriculture; and Tim Meyers, Meyers Farm in Bethel, Alaska.

The audience for the Ag Forum is expected to be a broad mix of the region's livestock ranchers, market gardeners, small diversified farmers, and special crop producers, as well as community residents concerned about food security, sustainable agriculture and land conservation. A short survey for producers and consumers to identify both concerns and opportunities will be conducted during the month of March leading into this Ag Forum.

SIGN-UP PERIOD FOR INVASIVE WEED COST SHARE PROGRAM NOW OPEN

The sign-up period for the Homer District Invasive Weed Cost Share Program is currently open. We are looking for local private landowners interested in controlling non-native plants. The program, funded through the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Services' Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program will provide financial assistance to landowners to control invasive plants that have the potential to impact wildlife habitat. Interested landowners who qualify will work with a district employee to develop an integrated management plan for control of these non-native plant(s). The program will provide the landowners with funds for non-chemical control methods such as hand pulling, mowing, and tarping. Some invasive plants that are good candidates for the program are Canadian thistle, reed canary grass, bird vetch, common tansy, sweet clover, and fall Dandelion.

ASSESSING FUNCTIONS AND VALUES OF KENAI WETLANDS

As we mentioned in our last newsletter, Homer Soil and Water received an EPA Wetland Program Development Grant (WPDG) to conduct a collaborative 2-year project to identify and assess the functions and values of wetlands on non-federal lands on the Kenai Peninsula. This is the same area where wetlands have already been classified and mapped at a scale of 1:25,000. (These maps can be found online at: <http://mapserver.borough.kenai.ak.us/kpbmapviewer/>. Information about mapped wetlands can be found at www.kenaiwetlands.net/.)

Since the District began the wetlands project last October, we have (1) hired a GIS specialist to help with the project (Welcome, Karyn Noyes!); (2) completed a comprehensive directory called *Kenai Peninsula Wetland Who's Who*, which will be online soon at our website; (3) started identifying and collecting information useful for assessing wetland functions and values; (4) developed three factsheets discussing various aspects of the project (which will also be online soon at our website); and (5) reviewed the Anchorage Wetland Assessment Method, which will provide the basis for our methodology. Because this project is a collaborative effort involving many agencies, non-profits, organizations, and landowner groups, the District is also formalizing agreements with some of those partners who will play significant roles in this project. Finally, the District is organizing a quarterly meeting of the Kenai Peninsula "wetlands working group" to be held March 24 at the Islands and Ocean Center (starting at 10:30). The wetlands working group is an ad hoc assembly of professionals interested in peninsula wetlands. If you'd like to attend this meeting, please let us know by calling District Manager, Tara Schmidt, at 235-8177, ext 106, and we'll send you more information, or you can email Project Manager, Devony Lehner, at devony@homerswcd.org.

To find out more about the various programs the Homer District is involved with, visit our website at 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

April 1-2 — Alaska Association of Conservation Districts Annual Meeting
Embassy Suites, Anchorage

April 2 — Kenai Peninsula Agricultural Forum @ Ninilchik Fair Grounds

April 13 — HSWCD Board Meeting 5:00 @ USDA Service Center

April 27 — Kenai Peninsula Cooperative Weed Management Annual Weed Workshop
Cook Inlet Aquaculture Building, Kenai—10:00– 5:00

April 28-29— Fish Passage Workshop @ Island and Ocean Visitor Center, Homer AK

April 30 — Anchor River : A Story and Some Science —6:00-8:00 @ Chapman Elementary

May 11 — HSWCD Board Meeting 5:00 @ USDA Service Center

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



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