Homer Soil & Water Conservation District

Homer Soil & Water Conservation District Fall 2010

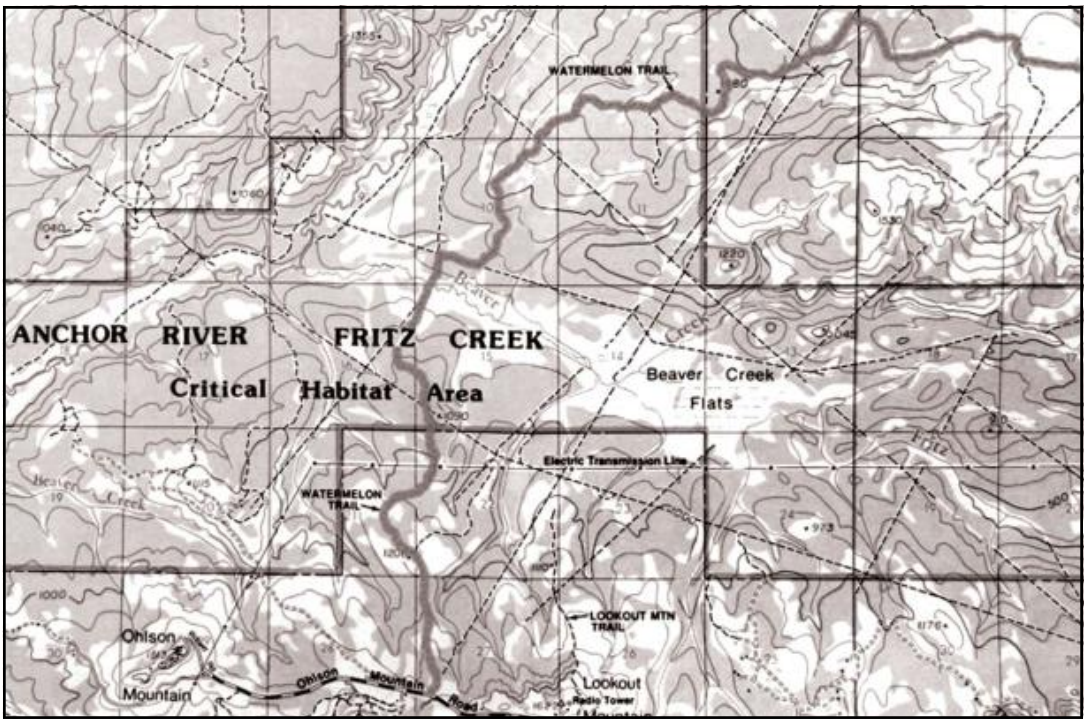
Natural Currents

"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."

Take a Walk on the Wild Side
the Watermelon Trail

The Homer area has a lot of trails that are worth exploring. One trail that the Homer District has been working to improve is the Watermelon Trail. As the map below shows, this long-established trail takes off from Ohlson Mountain Road and leads deep into the Anchor River watershed and the Anchor River-Fritz Creek Critical Habitat Area. The Watermelon Trail tends to be used seasonally by folks with ATVs and snowmachines, but there's no reason not to "take a walk on the wild side" to explore this beautiful area on the "back side" of Homer. Hikers and back country skiers will be pleasantly surprised by the expansive views of both Ohlson and Bald Mountain. This trail is kept open through the winter by the Homer Snomads, an ORV group that contributed significantly to trail upgrades recently completed.

A good destination for a half-day hike is the Beaver Creek Flats, located about 3.9 miles north from the trailhead. Where the Watermelon Trail crosses Beaver Creek, the trail has been re-routed so that instead of wading the stream, trail users can now cross Beaver Creek on a bridge. This protects the creek banks and *(continued on pg 3)*



The well- marked trailhead to the Watermelon Trail is located off of Ohlson Mountain Road.

Homer Soil and Water Conservation District has been working with the Kenai Peninsula Cooperative Weed Management Area to aggressively manage common tansy (*Tanacetum vulgare*) and perennial sowthistle (*Sonchus arvensis*) across the Kenai Peninsula. Common tansy was likely introduced to Alaska as an ornamental flower, and perennial sowthistle may have arrived as a contaminant of hay and/or feed grain. Homer District has targeted these invasive weeds for two reasons. First, both invasive species have a tendency to escape cultivation and form dense stands that can degrade agricultural and natural habitats. Second, both invasive species are locally rare, which leads Homer District to believe eradication of these pests is possible with rapid and persistent management.

Anchor Point has the only known infestation of perennial sowthistle in the Homer District. The landowner mentioned that roots of sowthistle were intentionally planted in their garden under the assumption of it being horseradish. After tilling occurred the following spring, which tends to spread the rhizomes of this invasive, a massive sowthistle infestation was observed. For more than 5 years, the landowner had been unable to control the spread of this invasive. While applying herbicide is an ideal control technique, the landowner was resistant due to a preference for organic farming practices. Homer District crafted an integrated cost-share plan, which involved laying geotextile fabric over the garden and applying herbicides outside the garden. In the future, the homeowner plans to place raised beds over the fabric for gardening. After two years, the sowthistle infestation has been reduced from a 0.5 acre infestation with 80% sowthistle cover to 0.1 acre infestations with 1% sowthistle cover. Complete eradication will likely occur only with 1-2 years of additional management.

In 2009 and 2010, Homer District made use of a youth crew to seek out and mechanically control common tansy infestations in Seldovia. At first, control in Seldovia proved difficult largely due to gaining landowner permission. While the city of Seldovia and Seldovia Native Association were open to control, numerous infestations occurred on private lands (see map below). As mentioned earlier, common tansy was likely introduced to Alaska as an ornamental flower, and getting permission to remove an ornamental from lawns proved difficult. To achieve success, Homer District held a city meeting to inform local residents about the problems associated with common tansy and offered an invasive-swap program. Private residents who allowed Homer District to control tansy on their property would be awarded with a $15 dollar gift certificate to the Seldovia greenhouse. During the spring of 2010, all private property owners known to have common tansy were contacted and all expressed willingness for the youth crew to control infestations. *(Continued on pg 5)*

Aerial image of Seldovia showing infestations of common tansy. Infestations were mapped and land ownership determined using the Kenai Parcel Viewer. Infestations occurred on city, tribal, and private properties.

the creek from being damaged. Much of this work was completed through funding received from the Alaska Clean Water Action grant administered by the AK Dept of Environmental Conservation.

Beginning of Watermelon Trail

Just downstream from the bridge, the Homer District also installed "vegetated geogrids" (also called hedge brush layering) on both sides of the creek where use of the old in-water crossing had worn away the streambanks. "Soil burritos" were made by wrapping geotextile fabric around soil "lifts" to build up new banks where the old ones were destroyed. Willow cuttings were sandwiched between the soil lifts to create banks that would revegetate quickly and have surface "roughness" (willow branches left sticking out) to slow erosive streamflows. Willows between the lifts were leafing out only weeks after installation. Soon willow roots will replace the geotextile fabric in the role of stabilizing the streambanks. Overhanging branches will again shelter salmon and drop leaves and insects into the water to add to the aquatic foodweb. Underwater stems will again provide salmon fry with places out of the current where they can rest and feed. Sediments from eroding banks will no longer fill in spawning gravels. Why not "take a walk on the wild side" to see for yourself!.

BOARD OF SUPERVISORS ELECTIONS

It's time again for the annual call for nominations to fill seats on the Homer District's Board of Supervisors. Currently, three seats are open for election. Nominations need to be received in the **DNR Commissioner's office (attention NRCDB Executive Director) no later than 5:00 p.m., Friday, November 12, 2010.** Included in this newsletter is the required form that will need to be submitted by interested individuals. The election will be held through the month of December.

Board Supervisors Chris Rainwater and Otto Kilcher consulting with District Cooperators on a project this past summer.

To be eligible to serve on the Homer SWCD Board of Supervisors, individuals need to be signed up as "cooperators" with the Homer District and nominated by at least three other District cooperators. As a board member, you would attend monthly meetings, currently scheduled the second Wednesday of each month at 5:00 pm. This schedule could change if you are interested but are not available on this day .

The District Board of Supervisors is comprised of local citizens who volunteer to represent landowners, farmers, businesses that use land, educators, and all citizens within the District boundaries. The Board provides a local voice in natural resources related issues. Please feel free to contact our office for more information.

DISTICT INVASIVE WEED CREW UPDATE

It's been another quarter rotation around the sun, and that means the Homer Invasive Weed Crew, which started in June, has completed a season of hard work. We had another stellar year traveling to hundreds of sites throughout the Kenai Peninsula. Five Homer area college students were employed to do the dirty work, and in the process were able to increase their knowledge of the importance of invasive weed work. These students are now motivated to both eliminate invasive species and educate others about them.

Joan Hansen, Chelsey Nieman, Ben Blue, Tyler Haas, and Doug Koester after devastating a field of Oxeye daisy in Seward

Despite the rainy summer the Homer crew lived and worked outside for days at a time. We used shovels, hoes, rakes, and our bare hands to remove noxious weeds in the 100+ sites we worked on. Sites we worked stretched from Bradley Lake, on the south side of Kachemak Bay—where an invasion of white sweet clover was identified and pulled—to Seward—where we collected bags of oxeye daisy and white sweet clover for appropriate disposal. In total we bagged up and disposed of 889 garbage bags full of invasive weeds. These efforts went a long way towards eradicating the weeds altogether at some of these sites.

In addition to pulling and digging out plants, our crew hiked and surveyed for invasive weeds on over 70 miles of trails and roads across the bay. A total of 223 surveys of invasive plants were completed. This becomes important information for the future management of invasive species throughout the Peninsula.

On an isolated island in Seward, Doug Koester hauls bundles of white sweet clover in order to pile and tarp it for future burning.

In September, the crew partnered with the Kenai Watershed Forum to map and remove Reed canary grass infestations on the Lower Peninsula. We bushwhacked down many of our local creeks and streams, successfully removing small infestations found along many of the smaller tributaries of important anadromous streams. This kind of ongoing, proactive effort is critical to protect these creeks and rivers from the growing menace of Reed canary grass

Written by Doug Koester, HSWCD Youth Crew leader for the last two seasons.

Homer District youth crew digging and bagging common tansy on private property in Seldovia. Pictured (right to left) are Joan Hansen, Tyler Haas, and Chelsea Nieman. See related article on page 2.

KEEP-WET

HSWCD Receives EPA Grant to Assess Wetland Functions on the Kenai Peninsula

In June of this year, the Homer Soil and Water Conservation District received word that its application for an EPA "Wetland Program Development Grant" (WPDG) had been approved—at least the first 2 years of its proposed 4-year project. (In early 2012, the District plans to apply for a grant to complete the final 2 years of its original proposal.) The budget for the approved 2-year project will be almost $300,000, with the EPA paying three quarters of this, and the District and its partners providing the rest in "match." Two key goals will be pursued:

> **Goal 1:** Help decision makers and land users learn more about and better understand peninsula wetlands—including wetland functions and the values of those functions—so that their decisions and actions can be better informed and more ecologically sound. More particularly, this project will promote better understanding of (a) the benefits and savings associated with protecting peninsula wetland conditions and functions; (b) how wetlands interconnect with one another and with upland and marine environments via environmental processes (e.g., ground and surface water flows, nutrient cycling, geochemical transport, species movements); and (c) how best to manage wetlands given development activities, recreational pressures, invasive species, warming/drying trends, and other agents of change. This goal includes improving coordination among wetland decision makers and land users.
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> **Goal 2:** Maintain long-term productivity and quality of important wetland-related ecosystems and wetland-dependent resources such as salmon, waterfowl, flood storage, clean water, and wildlife.

Four teams of experts made up of representatives from agencies, non-profits, and consulting firms will look at how Kenai Peninsula wetlands perform functions important to the environment and to peninsula communities. Functions will include: (1) "hydrologic functions," such as storing floodwaters, recharging wells, and filtering runoff; (2) "habitat functions," such as maintaining streamflows and water temperatures needed for salmon spawning and rearing; (3) "wildlife population functions," such as providing areas where waterfowl are known to congregate or moose overwinter; and (4) "social and community functions," such as places that are important to local communities and cultures.

Receiving this grant is a reflection of the strength and value of the partnerships forged through the informal Kenai Peninsula "Wetland Working Group." The efforts and support of this dynamic group made the grant award possible, and the District looks forward to working with this diverse group of agencies, organizations, non-profits, and individuals to better understand how our local wetlands contribute to our environments and communities.

(*Continued from pg 2)* Between 2009 and 2010, Homer District's youth crew mechanically removed 33 separate common tansy infestations totaling 4.8 acres treated (see aerial image for some of these sites). 14 infestations occurred on private property and those landowners are eligible for gift certificates. The majority of tansy infestations were small patches and work likely resulted in site eradication. However, some infestations were large and complete eradication of tansy in Seldovia will likely take several additional years of work.

Please visit *www.kenaiweeds.org* for pictures, detailed descriptions, and distributions of common tansy. The integrated cost-share program was paid through a competitive grant from the Alaska Association of Conservation Districts (AACD). AACD was awarded with two grants from The Recovery Act. Grant funds were used to create the Homer District youth crew and to provide technical support for this management project.. The names of the grants were *Alaska Weed Management Project* and *Early Detection Rapid Response – Invasive Plant Management.*

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

Kenai Peninsula Cooperative Weed Management TAC meeting
USDA Service Center, Kenai 11:00-12:30
October 13 — HSWCD Board Meeting @ 5:00 –USDA Service Center, Homer
October 14 — Local Working Group Meeting –2:30 USDA Service Center, Homer
October 28 & 29 —Alaska Association of Conservation District Fall Meeting
Coast International, Anchorage
November 10 — HSWCD Board Meeting @ 5:00 –USDA Service Center, Homer
November 12— Nomination Forms for HSWCD Board due to NRCDB
December 8 —HSWCD Board Meeting @ 5:00—USDA Service Center, Homer

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

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Meeting the needs of the local Land User