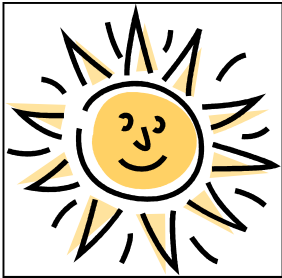


# Natural Currents

“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.”



## SUMMER ISSUE:

- Stariski Creek Bridge
- Caribou Hills Trails Update
- National Trails Day
- NRT Class update

## Board of Supervisors

- Chris Rainwater, Chair
- Jim VanOss
- Devony Lehner
- Otto Kilcher
- Pete Roberts

## Alternate:

- Steve Gibson

## District Staff

- Tara Schmidt, District Manager
- Al Poindexter, Education Coordinator
- Caleb Slemmons, Natural Resource Specialist
- Seth Ex, Special Projects Coordinator

## STARISKI CREEK BRIDGE CONSTRUCTION

You may have noticed some significant road work going on at Stariski Creek the last time you traveled the Sterling Highway. In April, the Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (ADOTPF), with contractor Twin Peaks Construction, began the process of removing 2, 10 foot diameter culverts, which will be replaced with a new bridge by the end of the summer.

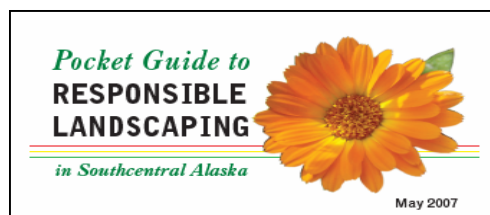
The Homer Soil & Water Conservation District has been actively involved in monitoring road construction projects on the lower Kenai Peninsula over the last few years. Earlier this year the Homer District released a report on the Bartlett/Hohe Street Rehabilitation Project in downtown Homer and last year reported on water quality conditions in streams and creeks around the East End Road Construction Project.

One of the Homer District's partners has taken the lead on the Stariski Creek Bridge Construction Project; ADOTPF is contracting Cook Inlet keeper to measure turbidity and stream

discharge weekly above and below the project site. In addition to regular in-stream monitoring, ADOTPF and Twin Peaks is utilizing a number of erosion control measures to reduce sediment reaching Stariski Creek, a salmon-bearing stream. So far, these measures, called best management practices (BMP's), are proving to be effective in protecting water quality. Temporary BMPs, such as silt fences and straw bales, have been effective barriers for keeping sediment out of the stream. Seeding, mulching and rolled erosion control products ("waddles") are being successfully used to create vegetative buffers. In addition to employing BMPs properly, the lack of rain at the project site has helped to minimize instream turbidity.

Although great effort was taken to minimize construction impacts during removal of the lower sections of the culverts, sediment plumes were evident. Increased stream sediment can harm fish gills and smother incubating eggs so minimizing instream construction impacts should be a top priority.

So why bother replacing two culverts with a bridge? In general, bridges are better than culverts for salmon. Culverts can act as a barrier to fish passage. On Stariski Creek, the north culvert was perched above the natural stream level creating a cascade of fast moving water which was a concern for upstream migration of chinook, coho, and pink salmon and steelhead trout. In addition, you might remember seeing pictures of Stariski Creek during the Floods of 2002 (*continued on page 3*)



*The pocket guide for landscaping alternatives to invasive plants is now complete. Free copies are now available at the Homer Districts office. Help spread the word not the weed.*

## NATIONAL TRAILS DAY



Emily Schneider and Jessica Jones volunteer at HDF

Homer Soil and Water District celebrated National Trails Day by sponsoring a work party to prepare the Homer Demonstration Forest Summer Trail System for the upcoming season. With a great turn out of volunteers we were able to haul and spread wood chips on the Self-Guided Nature Trail, remove downed-trees, and start the dirt-work for a new section of trail near Diamond Creek..

While lingering frost in the ground limited tread work, the event was productive overall, and attendees had a great time in the mild early summer weather. Look for more improvements on trails in the Homer Demo Forest as summer wears on, and thanks a million to those that donated their time on National Trails Day.

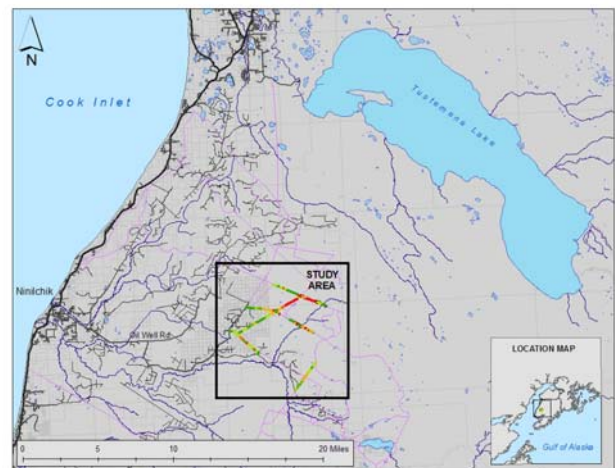
## CARIBOU HILLS TRAIL ASSESSMENT UPDATE

The stage is set to plan trail improvements on the southern Kenai Peninsula now that the Caribou Hills Trail Assessment has been released for review. This Homer District Project is funded by an Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation's Clean Water Action grant, which is administered by the EPA.

The Caribou Hills Trail Assessment was initiated following public meetings in 2006 that identified priorities for trail improvements in the area. The 2006 meetings identified lack of legal access to trails as the first priority for the area, followed by problems associated with trail alignments, lack of trails power within the Kenai Peninsula Borough, and shortfalls in user education.

This assessment addresses trail alignments by quantifying trail conditions in the area, which will assist in planning physical improvement efforts. High-traffic trails were evaluated using a system that assigns numeric scores to trails based on characteristics such as drainage capacity, slope, width, and depth of ruts. Data for this project were obtained by field visits, and GIS analysis of the Western Kenai Soil Survey.

The Caribou Hills wildfire has temporarily stalled efforts by the Homer District to revisit the study area and compare assessment results with actual site conditions, but plans to install 100-feet of porous pavement on the Water Hole Trail are still on-track for late summer of 2007, conditions permitting. This short section of porous pavement will allow the Homer District to evaluate the effectiveness of porous pavement as trail hardening in the Caribou Hills. If this treatment is deemed durable and cost-effective, the Homer District plans to install an additional 2,275-feet of porous pavement on the Water Hole Trail in 2008 and 2009.



Project study area, located east of Ninilchik and accessed by Oil Well Road

## NATURAL RESOURCE CLASS UPDATE

### Homer's Natural Resource Class Brings Home the Gold

The Homer High School FFA Chapter recently attended the Annual FFA Conference of which one day was devoted to the Alaska State Envirothon at Chena Hot Springs. Envirothon is an all day hands on event developed by the NRCS and State Forestry. The Homer team preformed incredibly well in this natural resources knowledge competition sweeping the top three places in the following categories: Soils, Aquatics, Forestry, and Energy, as well as the top two places in Wildlife. Overall there were 12 teams and 85 individuals participating.

Envirothon's final test was a team presentation of their solution to an energy problem. The challenge was to develop a plan for a sustainable and economically viable energy program for Akutan. Homer's winning solution was a proposal to enlarge and update the existing hydro plant, use fish oil from the fish plant to substitute for diesel, and a plan to develop geothermal and the wave energy. The project would pay for itself in a 20 year period and provide enough energy to power the fish plant providing economic growth and supply sustainable energy source for years to come.

As State Champions they will be representing Alaska at the North American Canon Envirothon in Geneva, New York this summer. With three returning teams members from last year they hope to better the 10<sup>th</sup> place finish the Homer team came home with last year. Winners of the National Competition will a \$5,000 scholarship.

Along with their successes with the Envirothon the Homer group also came home with the first and second place teams in Floriculture, which includes areas of plant science, soil science, marketing, plant ID, plant diseases, plant propagation and of course flora design. This finish qualified the team for national competition in India polis later this fall. Anna Duz earned a first place finish in the prepared public speaking and Lilli Conner took first in Creed Speaking, both students also qualifying for national competition.

Three students also received recognition and scholarships from Caring for the Kenai competition. Chelsey Nieman and Crystal Billings worked on an ecology project to determine if global warming would



Homer High School FFA class:poses for a photo on the UAF campus.

affect the timing of macroinvertebrate emergence. Katie Conner was recognized for her planning work on the north side of Kachemak State Park.

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(continued from pg 1) when one culvert was standing up on end. In the weeks following the floods, the culverts were replaced but the need to install a bridge climbed higher on ADOTPF's priority list.

Perhaps the greatest challenge during this project has been to ensure fish passage during periods when all the water has been channeled into one culvert. Deep frost above the culverts slowed down work progress which pushed back the timeline for diverting the stream into one culvert into late May when chinook salmon are heading up Stariski Creek. By June 1<sup>st</sup>, adult kings were seen above the work zone.

In the months ahead, the permanent bridge will be constructed; the temporary bridge and the last 25 feet of culverts will be removed. The majority of revegetation of stream banks has been completed ahead of schedule and should green up quickly as the summer days continue. The expected completion date for the project is August 15, 2007. Stream monitoring will continue until Stariski Creek freezes up this Fall.

To find out more about the HSWCD education program visit our web site at [www.homerswcd.org](http://www.homerswcd.org) and go to the education tab.

## UPCOMING EVENTS & DEADLINES

- July 11—\_ District Broad Meeting 3:00
- July 13-15—Weed Pull at Kenai National Wildlife Refuge  
(sign up at [alaskarefugefriends.org](http://alaskarefugefriends.org))
- July 9-13—HDF Board walk installation
- July 15th \_\_ Caribou Lake Dash Bike Race
- July 29-Aug 4—Homer Natural Resource Class competes at North American Canon Envirothon in New York

## NEW ADDITION TO DISTRICT STAFF

Tara Schmidt has been hired as District Manger. She has previously work for the NRCS in the Homer Field Office, and as a Program Technician for the Homer FSA.

Shirley Schollenberg will be stepping down from the Managers positions after 8 years, she will remain active with the Board of Supervisors. Thank you to Shirley for her years of dedicated service.



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