

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.”



SRPING ISSUE:

- State wide Strategic Plan
- KP-CWMA Annual Weed Workshop
- – Climate and Soil Temperature Data
- Watermelon Trail Updates

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- Chris Rainwater, Chair
- Jim Van Oss
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- Otto Kilcher
- Pete Roberts

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- Steve Gibson

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- Tara Schmidt, District Manager
- Blaine Spellman
Invasive Plant Specialist
- Alder Seaman, Trails Coordinator
- Al Poindexter,
Education Coordinator

HOMER FFA CHAPTER HOSTS PENINSULA WIDE CSTO CONFERENCE

On March 6th the HSWCD, with help from various community members and the Homer High School’s FFA Chapter, put on a Career Technical Skills Organization (CTSO) Conference for high school kids from Soldotna, Kenai and Homer. It was a day of trade workshops for the kids, presented by professionals from the community. Approximately 60 kids attended from Homer, Kenai and Soldotna high schools.



An FFA student participates in the construction competition and workshop. Students were taught basic tool use and were tested on their building skills.

Two inspiring opening speakers started off the event, followed by a full day of rotating skills workshops. The students picked from a variety of these workshops, ranging from cooking skills to job interviews to welding and heavy equipment operation. Lunch was a delicious spaghetti feast, prepared by the students in the cooking workshop. Many of the workshops were designed as competitions, and an awards ceremony capped off the day.

The CTSO conference was designed to be an avenue for these kids to learn skills not necessarily taught in school, since many kids end up choosing paths other than college. Vocational skills are taught less often in public schools, so the conference was a way to introduce and to test various skills outside of the normal curriculum. The CTSO conference could not have been a success without the community members who donated their time and expertise to teach these kids some hands-on skills. All in all, it was a day of fun, learning and friendly competition, made possible by the hard work of volunteers and by the Homer High School FFA Chapter.

Good luck to the 20 kids from the Natural Resources Technologies class who will be participating in this years Alaska State Envirothon. The Envirothon is sponsored by the Alaska Association of Conservation Districts and FFA, offering a unique opportunity to support science education efforts and influence the career path of Alaska’s future environmental scientists and resource managers.

STATEWIDE STRATEGIC PLAN- FOR INVASIVE PLANTS

The Division of Agriculture is developing a strategic plan for management of invasive weeds and agricultural pests. To facilitate the strategic planning process the Division of Agriculture is surveying the public, natural resource managers and other interested persons to determine their perspective on various issues with invasive weeds and agricultural pest management.

The survey takes approximately 30 minutes to complete. You can access the survey from the Alaska Plant Materials Center website (http://dnr.alaska.gov/ag/ag_pmc.htm), by clicking on the link next to the "Strategic Plan for invasive Weeds and Agricultural Pests Survey". If you are a person with a disability who needs special accommodations in order to participate in this process, or you do not have internet access to complete the survey, please contact Gino. Graziano at 907-745-8127 or Gino.Graziano@Alaska.gov

The Division of Agriculture appreciates your participation. Your information is very valuable!

WATERMELON TRAIL/ BEAVER CREEK CROSSING UPDATE

The HSWCD is making progress on improving the Watermelon Trail crossing at Beaver Creek north of Homer. Much thanks to Bruce Flanigan who has donated a 40' by 8' truck bed to use for the bridge structure. We anticipate staging the bridge on site this spring before the ground thaws. The Snomads are donating large amounts of their energy and expertise towards this installation and currently have the bridge structure re-decked and ready to transport down the Watermelon Trail to the crossing.

The rest of the crossing improvements are scheduled to take place during the summer season. The HSWCD has applied for funding through the Department of Environmental Conservation's Alaska Clean Water Actions (ACWA) Grant Program for the rest of the rehabilitation process. This will include rerouting the trail's approach to either side of the newly-installed bridge, creating approach "ramps" onto the bridge, and performing a stream bank restoration using coir logs and willows from nearby sites.



Congratulations to Andie Sonnen, 1st Place winner for the HSWCD Poster Contest. Andie is currently a 3rd grade student at West Homer Elementary School, and an aspiring young scientist. Thank you to all students who submitted poster entries to our office.

KP-CWMA ANNUAL WEED WORKSHOP

The Kenai Peninsula Cooperative Weed Management Area is hosting the annual weed workshop this year in Seward. This all day event is scheduled for April 28. The day kicks off with a plant identification workshop focused on invasive weeds most likely found on the Peninsula. This workshop will be lead by Helen Cortez-Burns of Alaska Natural Heritage, preparing participants to readily identify and report unwanted weeds.

Slated are several speakers with topics to include integrated pest management techniques, invasive plant curriculum for K-6th grade, and impacts invasive plants can have on habitats in Alaska. This year's keynote speaker is Dr. Ralph Whitesides, Professor at Utah State University and extension weed specialist. Dr. Whiteside brings an extensive background to weed management.

YOUNG SCIENTIST COMPETE AT LOCAL SCIENCE FAIR



Blaine Spellman, HSWCD Invasive Plant Program Manager, interviews a young scientist, fifth grader Gerald Altman, about his science project. Gerald ran a series of tests to ascertain the most effective brand of cotton swabs for cleaning out the human ear. Included in his display were samples of tested swabs.

West Homer Elementary school hosted a school wide Science Fair, inviting several local science-based professionals from around Homer to interview kids and judge the displays. The students were judged on following the scientific process in carrying out their experiments, as well as their knowledge of the subject studied. Every child in the school (over 250 kids in grades 3 through 6) participated.

Each child was interviewed by one of the judges and had an opportunity to explain their project and what they had learned. The projects were original and interesting, varying from what kind of music causes fowl to lay more eggs; what do pea plants grow the best on – tea, orange juice, soda, or water; what kind of toothpaste takes tea stains off egg shells the best; and what causes nails to become more powerfully electro-magnetized – insulated or un-insulated wires? The answer to the last one is insulated, and if anyone knows, I'd sure like to know why that is!

USEFUL LINKS FOR UP-TO-DATE CLIMATE AND SOIL TEMPERATURE

Would you like up to date weather and climate data? The NRCS maintains the following websites with data including soil temperature and moisture at various depths at near real time, and many of these sites are located on the southern peninsula. There are two installations just outside Homer that are part of the national water and climate center Scan data network, Schorr Gardens and Moose Inc. located at <http://www.wcc.nrcs.usda.gov/scan/Alaska/alaska.html>

The NRCS operates two local SNOTEL (snow pack telemetry) sites that uses meteor burst technology to collect and communicate data, found at <http://www.ak.nrcs.usda.gov/Snow/data/>. This data is used to forecast spring runoff, summer stream flow and potential groundwater recharge.

And of course there is the useful Web Soil Survey where data and maps about the recently completed Western Kenai Soil Survey (and many others) are available at <http://websoilsurvey.nrcs.usda.gov/app/>

Congratulations to Mike Mungoven! Mike has recently been named the National Soil Scientist of the Year by the National Cooperative Soil Survey program. Mike has been recognized for the completion of all field work and soil business for the 9.7 million acre Western Interior Rivers Area, Alaska. This is the largest survey area in the United States. This survey is the first to successfully use multi-scale, multi-order mapping to efficiently map large areas of varying land-use intensity. Mike works out of the Homer NRCS Field Office.

To find out more about the various programs the Homer District is involved with visit our website at www.homerswcd.org.

UPCOMING EVENTS & DEADLINES

March 27-28 Alaska Association Of Conservation Districts Spring Meeting—Anchorage

April 23-25 Alaska State Envirothon—Palmer Fair Grounds

April 28th Kenai Peninsula Cooperative Weed Management Annual Workshop—Seward

May 13th HSWCD Board Meeting @ USDA Service Center –Homer 5:00

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



4014 Lake Street, Suite 201
Homer, Alaska 99603

Phone: 907-235-8177 x 5
Fax: 907-235-2364
Email: hswcd@xyz.net
www.homerswcd.org

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