Pilot Program for School Market Gardens

This past spring the District entered into an agreement with the Kenai Peninsula School District to establish a school market garden pilot program during the 2014 growing season. District Board member Emily Garrity coordinated with the Homer Flex School to get this program running. The goal of this project is to provide an educational site to teach about local food production, farm operations, business plans, and marketing. The hope is that this program will serve as a pilot for schools on the peninsula. The following article was submitted by one of the Flex student interns, Crystal Campbell.

2014 was the first fully successful summer-long harvest for the Homer Flex Garden of Eatin’. This was made possible by a partnership between the Homer Soil and Water Conservation District (HSWCD) and the Kenai Peninsula Borough School District.

Our season went very well. The vegetables that we grew turned out great and we even had some sunflowers that bloomed!

We started plants in the school, transplanted them into the outdoor garden, and erected a high tunnel. The high tunnel housed squash, herbs, tomatoes, and cucumbers. The outdoor garden hosted a large variety of Alaskan hardy crops from turnips to lettuce.

The produce we grew was used in many different ways, including sales to local restaurants (Two Sisters, Homestead, and King’s Kitchen), one Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) subscription, and in the school.

One great success was the Flex open house where students researched recipes utilizing the crops in the garden and made broccoli casserole, borscht, kale chips, and a vegetable platter. Parents of the students, along with the Homer community, were invited to attend. Homer News even published a story on the occasion.

The fall harvest of vegetables has been utilized by the new student Culinary Program (continued on pg. 3)
BOARD NOMINATIONS & ELECTIONS

The Homer District is announcing the annual call for nominations for the Board of Supervisors. This year we have one seat open to fill, Neil Wagner is stepping down as he has big plans for travel in the coming year. To be eligible, an individual must be signed up as a District “cooperator” and have the official nomination form signed by at least three other cooperators. Please note: nomination forms must be submitted to the DNR Commissioner’s office (Attention NRCDB Executive Director) no later than 4:30 p.m., Friday, November 14, 2014. Nominations may be faxed to 907-745-7112 or emailed to Franci.Havemeister@alaska.gov, Lora.Haralson@alaska.gov, or Rebecca.Jeffers@alaska.gov. Elections will follow in December.

Conservation Districts function as a grassroots form of local governance authorized under state law. They create bridges between individual cooperators—landowners committed to sustainable use of the natural resources they manage—and other partners, including non-governmental organizations and all levels of government. The aim is to combine and coordinate resources to achieve shared conservation goals. The US congress created the District model in the 1930s as a way to promote coordinated conservation approaches to heal eroding soils during the “Dust Bowl.”

For more information on serving on the Board, contact us at 235-8177 ext. 5 or email us info@homerswcd.org. Also, visit our website at www.homerswcd.org.

DISTRICT LOOKS TO ADDRESS WATERMELON TRAIL NEEDS

The Homer District would like to continue its efforts to address both environmental and access concerns along the Watermelon Trail. We are currently putting together an application through the State Parks Recreational Trails program to seek funding that will help us make some much needed trail improvements along this popular trail. The goal of this proposal is twofold: to address habitat degradation at the crossing at Beaver Creek (2 ½ miles north of the Watermelon trailhead on Ohlson Mountain Rd) and to address trespass-related issues along two sections of the current trail that cross private property. The work plan we are submitting includes installing approximately 700 ft. of permeable surface on both sides of the ATV bridge to harden the surface. We believe this will help decrease soil compaction, rutting, and erosion, and encourage regrowth of native vegetation. We are also looking to establish new routes on portions of trail crossing Kenai Peninsula Borough land and a 5-acre private inholding. The new trail will be located about 100 ft. to the west and reconnect to the trail on the other side of the private property. The final section of trail we are hoping to address is an additional 3 miles north from Beaver Creek; the trail here crosses Cook Inlet Region, Inc. property. DNR has previously mapped an alternative route so that this trail will stay on state land. For more detailed information on this proposal, please go to our website at www.homerswcd.org.

HIGH TUNNEL 101: NRCS AND CES TEAM UP TO OFFER THE BASICS

Is a high tunnel the right growing system for you? Are you considering applying for a high tunnel through USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service? If yes, then this FREE class is for you! The Cooperative Extension Service and NRCS are teaming up to present valuable information to help guide you. Topics covered by NRCS will include the application process, required record keeping, and construction considerations. In addition topics ranging from snow load, irrigation systems, and nutrient management will be covered. CES staff will present information on integrated pest management (IPM), pest control ideas, vegetable and fruit varieties, and more.

This class is for NEW high tunnel folks to introduce concepts about high tunnel selection, installation, and operation, and to provide information to help make decisions easier. Space is limited and registration is required.

Classes will be taught by NRCS and Cooperative Extension Service, in partnership with the Kenai Peninsula College, 6:00 – 8:30 PM, October 23 at the Kachemak Bay Campus and October 30 at the Kenai River Campus. To register, call CES at 907-262-5824 or 1-800-478-5824; or the Kachemak Bay Campus at 235-7743.
(Continued from page 1) by Amy Welty, owner of Vagabond Cafe. The culinary program is still in the development stages but Amy hopes to teach workshops in menu planning, etiquette in the kitchen and dining room, and exploration of recipes using garden produce.

**Rural Business Enterprise Grant Awarded**

Homer District has been awarded a USDA– Rural Development Grant to assist the Alaska Rhodiola Products Cooperative to expand its processing capabilities for future harvests. Funds will be used develop best practices for processing the freshly-harvested root into a durable dried material, and for the research and purchasing of equipment to maximize harvest. *Rhodiola rosea*, shown in the photo below, has a high market value as a beneficial, non-toxic medicinal plant that is becoming increasingly popular. This hardy arctic plant should prove to be a viable and sustainable new agricultural industry in Alaska.

**Certified Pesticide Applicator Available for Assistance**

Did you know that the Homer District employs a DEC certified Pesticide Applicator? Matt Steffy has been with the district for a year and a half, and prides himself on an integrated pest management approach to weed control. While his focus is on invasive plants that many of us are familiar with (fall dandelion, orange hawkweed, bird vetch, etc.) his licensing allows him to provide prescriptive recommendations for remediation of any weed infestation requiring herbicides and other control measures. So if you’re struggling with any of those frustrating yellow composite flowers, concerned about your hay quality because of unknown invaders, or seeking to maintain a healthy high-tunnel environment devoid of unintentional weeds and other invaders, call Matt at 235-8177 x117 for advice. Site visits can be scheduled for our cooperators, and whatever we don’t already know, we’ll find out for you. The health and integrity of the products our cooperators produce is a high priority of ours. Let us help you!

We’ve recently updated our website—check it out at www.homerswcd.org. This is certainly a work in progress, so please send us feedback on the types of information you would like to find on our site. If you have any suggestions on content or organization let us know!

**Trail Updates**

This summer, Homer District staff and a great crew of volunteers helped whittle away at improving trails and doing maintenance at the Homer Demonstration Forest and other local trails. A big thank you to the Homer High School seniors Larsen Fellows and Tisha Lovett for putting in their community service hours at the Homer Demonstration Forest – and the HHS Volleyball team that showed up on a rather dreary Saturday morning to participate in our Trails Day. These kids were a great help to our stalwart trail volunteers, Dave Brann and Robert Archibald. We also benefitted from the USFWS–SAGE crew of 8 trail builders that spent 3 days upgrading the trails behind West Homer Elementary School.
DISTRICT COMPLETES PROJECT TO DEVELOP MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES FOR MAINTAINING WETLAND FUNCTIONS AND VALUES

The Homer District has recently wrapped up a project to develop management strategies for peninsula wetlands. A key goal of that project was also to provide easy access to wetland management information via the Kenai Peninsula’s online interactive parcel viewer and the District’s website. This project builds on wetland maps currently accessible on the borough’s parcel viewer. These maps locate and identify wetland ecosystems. Soon, users of the parcel viewer will also be able to learn the functions and values of each wetland, why these matter, and how to maintain them.

Assessment of wetland functions and values.

The wetland management project was built on a collaborative assessment of wetland functions and values that the District led between 2010 and 2013. That project, like the management project, was funded by an EPA Wetland Program Development Grant. Wetland functions are the processes that a wetland performs—such as storing stormwater or maintaining natural streamflow regimes; values are the beneficial services that humans ascribe to functions—such as reducing flooding of roads and buildings or maintaining good water quality. Values also encompass the benefits wetlands provide by affording us places to recreate, explore, hunt, fish, gather plants, study nature, connect with the past, etc. Functions and values often overlap, so the term function/value is generally appropriate.

Sixteen functions/values were assessed for peninsula wetlands. These were divided into three categories: six biology functions/values (moose winter habitat, salmon habitat support, rare plants, animal species of concern, wetland scarcity/rarity, and habitat diversity); seven hydrology functions/values (recharging groundwater, storing water, transmitting discharge, contributing discharge, maintaining natural streamflow regimes, maintaining (or improving) water quality, and stabilizing streambanks and shorelines); and three community/culture functions/values (places for wetland-related education, recreation, and support of Dena'ina culture). Peninsula wetlands can provide additional functions/values not assessed by Homer Soil and Water, such as sequestering carbon and providing firebreaks. But the functions/values assessed provide a good idea of the many benefits that peninsula wetlands can provide.

Development of wetland management strategies

With wetlands classified and mapped and key functions and values assessed, the pieces were in place to develop strategies for managing wetlands so as to maintain their functions/values. Strategies were developed at two levels of detail: the watershed level and the wetland mapping level (1:24,000 scale). In addition, an alphabetical list of wetland management practices was compiled. These can be incorporated into many kinds of projects to help avoid or minimize the wetland impacts those projects might have.

Access to wetland assessment and management information

Now that wetland functions/values have been assessed and management strategies developed, the Kenai Peninsula Borough is making this information available on its interactive parcel viewer. A wetland’s functions/values will be listed when a user double clicks on a wetland to “identify” it with parcel viewer tools. Clicking on one of the wetland functions/values listed for the identified wetland will open a description of that function/value, along with the strategies for maintaining it. In addition, Homer Soil and Water has produced reports available on the District's website that describe in detail both the methods and results of its two wetland projects.
INVASIVE PLANT MANAGEMENT IN PORT GRAHAM

The Homer District has taken on an amazing project this year to support the work that the community of Port Graham is doing to educate its citizens on the invasive plants in their community and what they can do to prevent further introduction and spread. With the support of the Alaskan Association of Conservation Districts, HSWCD staff Matt Steffy and Karyn Noyes traveled to Port Graham to conduct a vegetation survey and a community outreach workshop. The survey work covered almost the entire developed area of the village and was conducted as a roadside and village property survey, with no intrusions on to private property. The community workshop coincided with the annual Cultural Camp conducted cooperatively by Port Graham and Nanwalek. District staff was able to deliver a very important message to a large group of children and adults (about 40) followed by an interactive walk around the village to identify invasive and native plants and discuss the words for these plants in the native language. It is interesting to note that there are no native words for the invasive intruders. The final product of these efforts is a management plan that will assist the residents of Port Graham to control the introduction and spread of invasive plants in their community. This message is particularly important as the Alaska Department of Transportation embarks on an extensive project to construct a road connecting the two villages and an airport between them. The DOT projects will introduce imported fill material, heavy equipment from other locations, and numerous other potential vectors for invasive plants. Port Graham’s project will initiate and maintain lines of communication between HSWCD and communities across the bay, as well as resource contributions. These villages are just as important as larger towns on the road system. We look forward to working with these communities in coming seasons and assisting in every way we can to help them maintain the native vegetation they depend on for subsistence and cultural practices.

KP – CWMA ERADICATION OF ELODEA ON THE PENINSULA

Many of you may have been following the Kenai Peninsula Cooperative Weed Management Area (KP-CWMA) elodea eradication project on the upper Kenai this year. It has been in the papers, the radio, and television news on a regular basis. But did you know that the Homer Soil & Water Conservation District has been an active partner in this process? Elodea is an invasive aquatic plant that many of you may recognize as your classic aquarium plant. It’s unintentional introduction into many lakes around Alaska have created problems for salmon habitat, recreational activities, and native vegetation viability. Many communities around the state have taken an observational and data collecting role in this epidemic, but the Cooperative Weed Management Area of the Kenai Peninsula, coordinated by Matt Steffy with HSWCD, have taken the lead on actually eradicating the plant before it’s too late. The CWMA has capitalized on the strengths of such partners as the Kenai National Wildlife Refuge, the USFWS Kenai Field Office, Kenai Watershed Forum, Cooperative Extension Service, and others to construct a methodical, science based approach to eradication of this horrific invader. Success has already been achieved with a drop from 72% to 12% in one lake, 42% to 0% in another, and the third lake is late in treatment schedule, but similar results are anticipated. As cooperators in a regional non-profit organization, you should feel proud that we are writing the book on how to deal with this new invader. For more information go to www.kenaiweeds.org, or contact the local office at 235-8177 x117 for more information.
To find out more about Homer Soil and Water’s programs and projects, visit our website at www.homerswcd.org.

The HSWCD Board meets 5 pm on the second Wednesday of each month at the USDA Service Center, 4014 Lake St., Homer. We welcome all visitors! Feel free to call our office to confirm date and time; 235-8177, ext 5.

UPCOMING EVENTS & DEADLINES

October 23 and 30: NRCS and CES present a class on High Tunnel 101 
6:00–8:30 @ Kenai Peninsula college campuses. Call CES to register: 262-5824

October 28-30: Committee for Noxious and Invasive Plants Management in Alaska, Annual Meeting, Anchorage, Marriott Hotel

November 6 and 7: Alaska Association of Conservation Districts Annual Fall Meeting
Crown Plaza Hotel, Anchorage

November 10: Homer Soil and Water Conservation District Board of Supervisor Nomination Forms due to NRCDB, contact HSWCD for forms and information: 235-8177 ext. 5

November 19: HSWCD Board of Supervisor Meeting — 5:00 pm @ USDA Service Center

December 10: HSWCD Board of Supervisor Meeting — 5:00 pm @ USDA Service Center

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