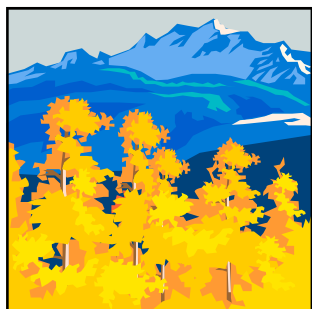


“To provide education and leadership in the conservation and sustainable use of soil- and water-related resources through cooperative programs that protect, restore and improve our environment.”

Natural Currents

FLEX SCHOOL GARDEN



- Flex School Garden
- New CES Agent
- Board Nominations and Elections
- School Yard Habitat
- Nutrient Management Recommendations
- Invasives Across the Bay

Board of Supervisors

- Chris Rainwater, Chair
- Emily Garrity
- Otto Kilcher
- Genarita Grobarek
- Paul Castellani

District Staff

- Tara Schmidt, District Manager
- Matt Steffy, Natural Resource Specialist
- Devony Lehner, Special Projects Coordinator
- Brad Casar, Natural Resource Technician

The People’s Garden at Homer Flex High School supplied food for many people this year. We had five students volunteer their time once a week for a couple of hours to weed, harvest, and plant vegetables. Early in the season we established a partnership with a local caterer who bought up to 8 lbs of greens during three different occasions. Much of this year’s success can be attributed to students showing up regularly and letting people know via Facebook what vegetables were ripe and available in the garden for harvest. People harvested these vegetables in a u-pick fashion, using a measuring scale, bags, and a ledger provided in the garden’s greenhouse.

At the beginning of the year, the summer volunteer students and a few new students helped prepare a welcome-back-to-school lunch using vegetables from the garden. Later, the biology students participated in a fermentation workshop, provided by Homer Soil and Water Conservation District staff. From that lesson they used the sauerkraut and mixed veggie crock, along with roasted root vegetables, cole slaw, and potato salad, for an open house and harvest dinner. Over 40 students and parents showed up for this meal. It was a great success for Homer Flex High School and the garden.

Finally, the students harvested the remaining vegetables at the end of September. Just over 25 lbs of carrots and potatoes were harvested and stored and will be used throughout the year for the school’s Cooking On a Budget class. At the end of the season the students made just under \$1,000 of sales and decided to put all the money in an account that will continue to fund the garden from year to year. Homer Soil and Water staff provided assistance and guidance throughout the entire gardening season. Thank you everyone for your help and support for the Flex School garden.



NEW COOPERATIVE EXTENSION AGENT FOR THE PENNINSULA

The Kenai Peninsula Cooperative Extension Service (CES) welcomed a new Agriculture Agent, Casey Matney. Casey comes to the Peninsula with a diverse background in the fields of agriculture, forage crops, soil science, weeds and livestock. With broad experience and educational background in agriculture, Casey will be available to educate current and future farmers on many issues associated with agriculture.

Pests keep bugging your fields or livestock? Janice Chumley at CES is available to help identify pests and recommend control measures to keep your farm healthy and happy. Janice is sometimes available to make farm visits to address pest issues. Tap into the wealth of knowledge at CES by calling with your questions at 262-5824, or go online to look at their many publications at www.uaf.edu/ces/

BOARD NOMINATIONS & ELECTIONS

The Homer District is announcing the annual call for nominations for its Board of Supervisors. This year we have 2 seats open. 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. Cooperator forms and nomination forms are available online. Please note: nomination forms must be submitted to the Alaska Association of Conservation Districts office (Attention Dee Pond) no later than 5:00 p.m., **Friday, November 20, 2014**. Nominations may be faxed to 907-373-7928 or emailed to Dee at aacd@mtaonline.net. Elections will follow in December.

Conservation Districts work 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 District model was established in the 1930s by Congress as a way to promote coordinated conservation approaches to healing soils during the “Dust Bowl” of the 1930s.

For more information on serving on the Board, contact our office at 235-8177 ext 5, or send us an email. at info@homerswcd.org. Visit our website at www.homerswcd.org to see our programs and activities, or to learn more about the history of Districts.

THANK YOU TO OUR STUDENT INTERN, MITCH BLACK

Throughout this busy summer a number of volunteers gave their time to support the Homer District office and we want to thank them for all their hard work. One student, Mitch Black, arrived from Brooklyn, New York in the middle of the summer, eager and ready to get to work. Mitch was able to join the staff on a variety of projects including trail work, hay studies, the school yard garden, and more over his 6 week internship. Working in Homer’s forests and open pasture was a dramatic change from Brooklyn, but he seemed to like it, giving big smiles all day.

The Homer Demonstration Forest received a great deal of work thanks to Mitch. Trails were brushed out, boardwalks were repaired, signage was improved, and the community showed its appreciation for all his hard work. Having just one year left of high school, Mitch will be able to use knowledge and experience gained this summer to help him decide what to look for during his upcoming college decision. We would like to thank Mitch for all his hard work and good company. We always maintain open doors for individuals looking for an internship with the district.



SCHOOL YARD HABITAT UPDATES

The district is proud to announce that we have hired a part time staff member who will be dedicated primarily to facilitating our growing School Yard Habitat Program. Jeff Szarzi has a long history as a school district teacher and is well known throughout the community. The district received additional funds to keep momentum going for the school yard habitat, and we have just the right person in charge.

A big project this year has involved installation of outdoor exercise equipment at West Homer Elementary. The equipment had been purchased by the City of Homer years ago but was never installed. The Parks & Recreation Advisory Commission asked the city to donate the equipment, and Public Works was happy to pass it on to a group that would put it to use. Flex School students have been partnering with West Homer students to clear brush and haul away debris in the area selected for installation. The kids have also been working with Jeff and school staff to plan and map out installation for 10 stand alone components. As always with SYH the community benefits not just from

Potential New RTP Project!

HSWCD will be pursuing a Recreational Trails Program grant to install a wooden ADA accessible boardwalk within the Schoolyard Habitat at West Homer. This boardwalk will run from Soundview and connect with the existing boardwalk. Improvements will include upgrades in the amphitheater such as a large wooden platform with an ADA picnic table. If you have comments or suggestions please contact the office at 235-8177 x5.

DISTRICT STAFF NOW AVAILABLE FOR NUTRIENT RECOMMENDATIONS

Homer Soil and Water now has staff to support NRCS in implementing programs assisting farmers and ranchers in the area. NRCS provides technical and financial assistance through programs benefiting the environment, including cost share programs. Many participants in NRCS programs benefit from a knowledge and expertise in maintaining healthy soils. The relationship of an agriculturalist to his or her soil is intimate, as soil is the most fundamental building block of any agricultural system. To maintain healthy soils, NRCS assists in providing soil management recommendations to agricultural producers participating in its Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP).

With the new hire this spring of Brad Casar, Homer Soil and Water now has staff with the education and experience to help make nutrient management recommendations for local NRCS participants. Recommendations are commonly made for vegetable producers, but recommendations can assist a wide range of production from berry patches to hay fields.

Any individual, whether involved with NRCS programs or not, can come into the Soil and Water District office at 4014 Lake St. in Homer to get a soil sample analyzed for a nominal fee of \$32 for the first sample and \$20 for each additional sample. We get all soils analyzed at Brookside Labs, a reputable processing lab in Ohio. If the soil sample is not from a participant in NRCS programs, Janice Chumley, the Kenai Peninsula's cooperative extension agent can provide recommendations at no cost.

Beyond making nutrient management recommendations for NRCS customers, our staff is happy to address any questions or concerns you may have with your agricultural system. Interested in gathering local resources to feed your garden, concerned with your plants not getting the proper nutrition, want to learn more about rotational cropping systems to feed your plants and keep out the weeds? Feel free to stop in and get additional information about resource concerns that you are confronting, and we will do our best to provide current knowledge or point you in the right direction.



INVASIVES ACROSS THE BAY

This season, district staff have been working on an extension of last year's efforts conducting vegetation surveys and creating an invasive plant management plan for Port Graham and Nanwalek. This year's work has focused on the village of Nanwalek. This project aims to establish baseline data before work begins on a major DOT project to connect the two villages with a road and shared airport. Homer District pest specialist Matt Steffy traveled to Nanwalek this summer and conducted vegetation surveys along all roadways and priority sites. A few species of concern were identified, namely fall dandelion and orange hawkweed, with a few others noted and mapped. A management plan is being prepared, and Matt will return soon to conduct a community workshop and speak with school staff and students about invasives.

As in all our interactions with the communities on the south side of Kachemak Bay, the people of Nanwalek were gracious hosts. A local, Christopher, escorted Matt around town showing him known infestations and introducing him to many residents. Matt was invited into people's backyards, given a tour of the historical churches, and a guided visit of the museum containing many fascinating historical items and photographs.

We look forward to continuing to work with all residents on the south side of the bay to educate individuals and communities to stop invasives in their tracks.

To find out more about the programs and projects, visit our website at www.homerswcd.org.

The HSWCD Board meets on the second Wednesday of the month at 5:00 pm. We meet at the USDA Service Center, 4014 Lake St., Homer. We welcome all visitors! Feel free to call our office to confirm date & time.

UPCOMING EVENTS & DEADLINES

Community for Noxious and Invasive Plant Management (CNIPM) annual conference will be held on October 27th—29th in Juneau, AK. The districts Invasive Coordinator, Matt Steffy, serves as vice-chair on the board and will be hosting several sessions.

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



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