



# Natural Currents

The newsletter for Homer Soil & Water Conservation District

Fall 2020

## Homer Soil & Water Board of Supervisors

- Chris Rainwater  
Chair
- Otto Kilcher  
Vice Chair
- Juley McConnell  
Treasurer
- Tim Alzheimer  
Secretary
- Jim Engebretsen

### In This Issue:

- A new Micro-Ag Subdivision on the North Fork
- Soils of Local Importance
- Invasive Plant Program Updates: Mayday!
- Boot Brushes and Weed Pulls
- Ag in the Classroom and on the Radio
- Ag Opportunities Online and in Your Email
- Homer Demonstration Forest Updates
- Trails Updates
- Meet the Staff

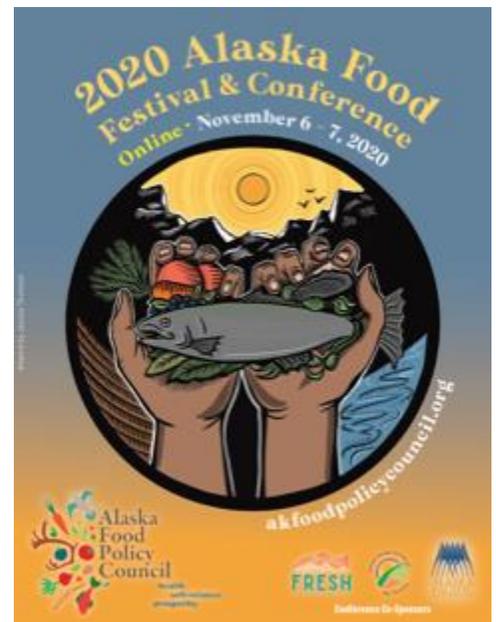
This year has turned out quite a bit different than anyone imagined. Work life and social life for many have changed dramatically. Here at Homer Soil and Water we have been extremely fortunate. We have such a tiny office that we were mostly all used to working at home sometimes so our workflow hasn't changed too dramatically. We have adapted our in-person activities to be online. We have new projects that have come online and we have new personnel. This newsletter is full of all kinds of wonderful stories about the wonderful work we get to do here. Read on and enjoy!

Kyra Wagner  
District Manager

**Registration is open for the 2020 Alaska Food Festival and Conference**, which is going virtual on Friday and Saturday, Nov. 6-7. Hosted by the Alaska Food Policy Council, they certainly know how to celebrate food. Look forward to presentations on food systems in Alaska, food security/insecurity, traditional foods, farmers markets, agriculture, fisheries, food policy, food waste reduction, and more. Check out the [Schedule online](#). There is also an [online auction](#) of goodies from around the state. **And, the annual Alaska Food Hero Awards will be presented during the conference.** [Register here.](#)

Before the conference, the movie *Gather* will be shown from 5:30-7:30 p.m. on Thursday, Nov. 5, using Zoom. [Gather](#) is a film about the growing movement of Native Americans reclaiming their spiritual, political and cultural identities through food sovereignty. There will be a short presentation by director Sanjay Rawal and an Indigenous-led panel after the movie. The movie is free, but registration is required by going to [this link](#).

[Click here](#) for more details about the conference



**Our Mission:** 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.

## North Fork Micro Ag. Subdivision Being Planned by State of Alaska

by Devony Lehner

The group at right gathered on September 17 on Wagon Road (also called Lesher Road) by the Anchor River bridge to share information about a new kind of subdivision being proposed by the Land Conveyances Section (LCS) of the Division of Mining, Land and Water, namely a “micro-ag” subdivision. The group included Homer Soil and Water, LCS, NRCS, as well as Dave Schade, Director of DNR’s Division of Agriculture.



During the visit, the group dug three soil pits and discussed the agricultural suitability of the soils they found—a Redoubt silt loam and a Puntilla silt loam (see article on Soils of Local Importance). The Redoubt soil pit shown below—with its deep silt loam soils and good drainage—was dug in the fireweed – bluejoint meadow shown at right.



This collaborative field visit grew out of a contact made in July by Daniela Fawcett, on DNR’s Land Sales staff, when she invited Homer Soil and Water to comment on a proposed subdivision called North Fork Micro-Ag – ADL 233191. Land Sales planned to offer up to 35 parcels within a 640-ac section of state-owned land along North Fork Road, with a number of these parcels, from 40 ac and up in size, being designated for agricultural title. Non-ag parcels down to 4 acres in size would also be offered.

The Division of Mining, Land and Water (DMLW) in the Alaska Department of Natural Resources (DNR) manages all state-owned land except for trust property and units of the Alaska State Park System. When all land conveyances under the Alaska Statehood Act are complete, the Division will be responsible for over 100 million acres of up-lands. DMLW also manages Alaska’s 65 million acres of tidelands, shorelands, and submerged lands, including some 34,000 miles of coastline, as well as having jurisdiction over the state’s water resources, equaling about 40% of U.S. fresh water stocks.

(North Fork cont....) Because LCS also planned to protect land along the Anchor River and avoid steep slopes and wetlands, the total development area will likely be about half of the 640-ac parcel (see map on the following page).

In response to LCS's request for review, Homer Soil and Water provided additional information that could be used in laying out subdivision parcels and in considering their agricultural suitability. It also invited DNR staff to visit the area with Homer Soil and Water and NRCS soil scientists, forester, and other resource specialists. And as these photos show, that invite came to fruition on a beautiful day in September.

Land within the proposed North Fork Micro-Ag Subdivision is currently designated for "Settlement" in DNR's [Kenai Area Plan](#), and the micro-ag subdivision represents a proposed amendment to



that plan. As part of the subdivision process, DNR also plans to close Mineral order No. 1241. Homer Soil and Water is excited to be part of this process to create new agricultural parcels on the southern peninsula and looks forward to helping DNR share information about the micro-ag subdivision as it becomes available.

**Above:** Daniela Fawcett (on left), from DNR Land Sales, talks about soils with Steph Schmidt, NRCS Soil Scientist.

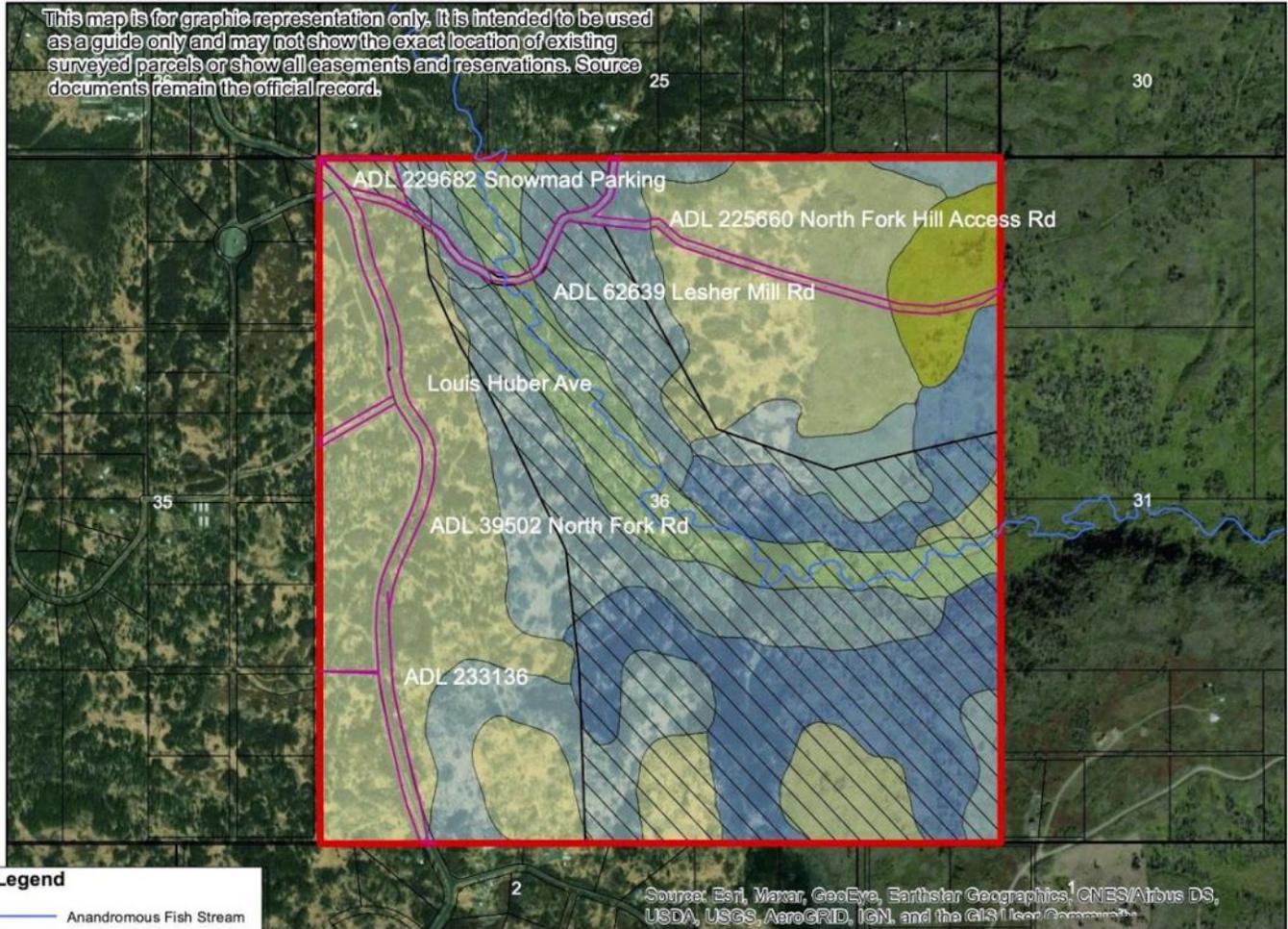
**Below:** Dave Schade, Director of the Division of Ag, enjoys the view with Div. Ag. photographer John Whipple.





# Attachment A: Vicinity Map North Fork Micro Agriculture ADL 233191

This map is for graphic representation only. It is intended to be used as a guide only and may not show the exact location of existing surveyed parcels or show all easements and reservations. Source documents remain the official record.



Source: Esri, Maxar, GeoEye, Earthstar Geographics, CNES/Airbus DS, USDA, USGS, AeroGRID, IGN, and the GIS User Community

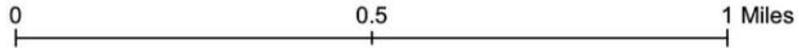
**Legend**

- Anadromous Fish Stream
- Easements
- Project Area
- Retained\_WHB

**Ag Soils**

Class

- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6
- 7



## Section 36, Township 4 South, Range 14 West, Seward Meridian.



**USGS QUAD 1:63,360**

Seldovia C-4  
 For more information contact:  
 Daniela Fawcett  
 Department of Natural Resources  
 Division of Mining, Land, and Water  
 Land Sales Section  
 Phone 907.269.5639  
 Fax 907.269.8916  
 Email: [land.development@alaska.gov](mailto:land.development@alaska.gov)

DF 01/14/2020

# Invasive Plant Program

## 2020 Field Work

by Katherine Schake

### Bird Cherry Tree Program has Successful First Year

Thank you to participants of the European Bird Cherry/Chokecherry Tree Program this year!

- Over 650 infestations were observed peninsula-wide and across Kachemak Bay. These reports ranged from 1 to 30 trees per site, and does not include the residential areas of Soldotna/Kenai. Over 1,900 trees were surveyed this year.
- Over 27 people participated in the cost-share program, resulting in removal of approx. 90 invasive *Prunus* trees, greatly reducing the amount of cherries adjacent to vulnerable habitat such as creeks and wetlands in local neighborhoods, at the head of Kachemak Bay and along McNeil Canyon.

**Conclusions:** Many landowners reported exponential growth of their Mayday/Chokecherry trees in the past 5 years, observed them suckering throughout the lawn, and noticed new saplings sprouting in their neighborhoods. From the spring surveys, we know these trees are spreading outward from residential yards and competing with native vegetation – the building blocks of our ecosystems that support wildlife across the Kenai Peninsula. Next year we will prioritize removal of trees based on density of known infestations and

proximity to valuable salmon & moose habitat, and public lands.

Still interested in participating in the cost-share program? It's not too late, contact Katherine to get on the list for next spring: [katherine@homerswcd.org](mailto:katherine@homerswcd.org)

The State of Alaska has proposed a ban on the sale of *Prunus padus* and *Prunus virginiana*, and this may be finalized next year. We recommend refraining from purchasing these trees for 2021 nursery stock.



(above): Mayday tree competing with native trees/shrubs along neighborhood creek on Homer Bench. Likely spread by birds regurgitating cherries.



(left) photos by Casey Greenstein. Removal techniques and landowner contributions to the program have been varied, to say the least...



(left): Spring photo of local property heavily infested with European Bird Cherry (Mayday) trees planted over 20 years ago.



(below): Same property as above, after removal assistance by Homer Soil & Water and local contractors. Efforts like this reduce the amount of cherries that birds transport to vulnerable habitat that support local wildlife.

# Boot Brush Stations Up and At'em

While wandering around the Spit you may encounter a new addition to the boardwalk: a lovely sign and boot brush to clean your boot and your conscious of spreading nasty invasive plants to the Kachemak Bay State Park and Kachemak Bay State Wilderness. These boot brush stations have been planted at the top of ramp 2, bottom of ramp 3, and also out at the Homer Demonstration Forest off Rogers Loop Rd. The informative signs provide pictures and little lessons on why we need to be keeping these invasive plants from spreading into our precious wildlands. Next time you make your way across the bay or into the Demo Forest be sure to give your boots a scrub.

*Photo by Brad Casar: New Boot Brush Stations at the Homer Harbor and Homer Demonstration Forest. Please use them to prevent the spread & introduction of harmful invasive plants!*



## General Invasive Plant Updates

Check out our [video compilation of fieldwork snapshots here.](#)

**Bird Vetch (*Vicia cracca*)** eradication efforts continue across the Kenai Peninsula. Southern peninsula sites include: Stariski Creek, Islands & Oceans Visitor Center, and just a few neighborhood properties are being monitored and controlled annually. A huge THANK YOU to Homer Soil & Water staff and volunteers who pulled over two truckloads of Bird Vetch this summer! *(photos on right)*



**Bradley Lake:** Unfortunately, an infestation of Reed Canarygrass (*Phalaris arundinacea*) was discovered at Bradley Lake Hydroelectric Site. The Kenai Peninsula Cooperative Weed Management Area (CWMA) is collaborating with HEA on herbicide treatment this fall to eradicate this infestation before it has a chance to invade salmon streams across Kachemak Bay.



## Got Soil Samples for Testing?

[Click Here to Get Started](#)



### Soil Testing Services have GONE ONLINE!

That's right. Fill out the information form and pay online. Then bring the soil samples to our handy-dandy, outdoor drop-off station. Brad and Jessica will get you your test results and soil nutrient recommendations in about three weeks. Easy peasy!

Find it all on our website [www.homerswcd.org](http://www.homerswcd.org).

If you don't have a computer, you can still bring your samples in, you will just fill out a form from the drawer at the drop-off station and leave a check in the box.

Even though the ground is freezing, it's worth chipping it out for samples in the fall! If you wait for it to thaw in the spring, the delay in the time it takes to get the results can make it difficult to get your soils prepped in time for planting. Know your soils!

### You are Invited to Attend The Board of Supervisors Meetings Come See What's Happening in the District

The HSWCD Board of Supervisors meets on the second Wednesday of the month at 5:00 pm. Meetings are normally held in the NRCS conference room next door to our office at 432 E. Pioneer Ave. in downtown Homer, AK...but these days they are more often held by Zoom or outside or in some big space. So please feel free to join us, just check in so you know where we will be.

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

### Call for Nominations and Notice of Election

**NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN** to cooperators that nominations by petition will be accepted to fill two eligible seats on the Homer Soil and Water Conservation District Board of Supervisors. Seat C has a three-year term that expires on December 31, 2023 and Seat E has a one-year term that expires on December 31, 2021

Candidates wishing to fill any board seat must be a cooperator of the Homer Soil and Water Conservation District. The nomination period runs until 4:30 p.m., Thursday, November 19, 2020. **Petitions for nomination must be:**

- Signed by the nominee certifying the nominee's willingness to serve, if elected.
- Signed by at least three (3) cooperators in the District who appear on the certified cooperators list.
- **Received** by the Alaska Association of Conservation Districts no later than 5:00 p.m., Thursday, November 19, 2020.

**NOTICE IS ALSO GIVEN** that an election will be held in December 2020, unless no new nominations are submitted.

Homer Soil and Water is and Equal Opportunity Provider and Employer. Download a Nomination form [HERE](#).

For more information, contact Kyra Wagner, District Manager, at [kyra@homerswcd.org](mailto:kyra@homerswcd.org) or (907) 299-4920.

### Knights of the District

*We are full of gratitude for these amazing volunteers!*



**Sir Jason Ritter:** Thanks to Jason for helping us implement our lime study in Nikolaevsk and out East End Road.

Jason's fertilizer spreading equipment was key to our success, but his super-helpful and easy going attitude made the whole process go so easily. Thanks Jason!

**Sir Jack Strydom:** sure he was getting credit for high school community service hours, but Jack's focus was unequaled as he helped pull bird vetch out of a local field. Four trips were taken to the dump with the dozens of bags of bird vetch that were pulled. Thanks Jack!

**Lady Jill Burnam:** Also known as Jack's mother, Jill got so obsessed with the hope of eradicating bird vetch that she put in almost as many hours pulling the weed as he did. Thanks Jill!

# From the Ag Side

## Ag in the Classroom

By Nicole Arevalo

HSWCD Utilizes EPA Grant to Assist Local Schools for Spring and Fall 2020



Staff from Homer Soil & Water have been collaborating with teachers at Homer High School and Little Fireweed Academy to create lessons for kids on agriculture and local natural resources. Originally, the focus was in-classroom demonstrations on indoor growing and school gardens, but the global pandemic led HSWCD staff and teachers to shift focus. Getting creative, the teachers and our team came up with fun ways to engage kids with videos, presentations and the Kenai Peninsula Borough parcel viewer's interactive GIS maps.

This spring we teamed up with Kim Fine at Little Fireweed to create short videos for the K-2 students (one of which was shared with the 3-6 graders over at Big Fireweed). One video showed the kids how "soil smoothies" (a blend of soil amendments) will help all the vegetables in the school garden grow. Another showed kids how to make little greenhouses at home out of a plastic salad container from the grocery store.

This fall we are participating with Kendra Nelson's Natural Resources class at Homer High, and in coordination with Linda Rourke, substitute teacher extraordinaire. We gave a presentation on the local agriculture scene (based from what was learned in our 2019 Food System Studies). And two more on local ecosystem services and land use issues. The soils unit is next on our list. It's been great fun helping the kids to better understand their local area.



## Homer Soil & Water Co-Produces New Radio Show on KBBi AM 890

By Nicole Arevalo



The team interviews Shawn Jackinsky

If you listen to the southern Kenai Peninsula's public radio station, KBBi AM 890, or stream it live you may have heard the new show **Homer Grown** on Saturday mornings. Homer Soil & Water staff are collaborating with KBBi to produce the show, which features interviews with local gardeners, farmers and others with knowledge to share.

The main thrust of the show is gardening and farming here in the Kachemak Bay area, but we also branch into topics like invasive weeds and rain catchment for house and garden. There's so much great know-how that community members have curated over the years, it only makes sense to share it. This year especially here has been a spike in interest on backyard gardening and local Ag.

But growing food in our northern, coastal climate with our long hours of summer daylight can be quite different than in the Lower 48. That's where this show comes in. Beyond crops and hay and honeybees, we have the opportunity to talk with keepers of knowledge on all things that grow locally. And we always have a "Tech Minute" with tips on simple steps or tools to help people. All the episodes can be found on the [KBBi website](#).

## Are You Interested in Learning How to Join Zoom Webinars?

If so, reach out to [nicole@homerswcd.org](mailto:nicole@homerswcd.org)

We can help walk you through how to join Zoom meetings and some of the basic features. It's easy, we promise.

We're here to help.

We can set up a quick tutorial so you don't have to miss out on any of the great trainings or community conversations held this winter.

## Online Forums for Alaskan Farmers: HSWCD Teams up for Statewide

In response to COVID-19, this spring our team joined other Ag support organizations and farmers from across the state to host a variety of ZOOM presentations and discussions to help farmers navigate safety and farm sales this season. There were weekly farm chats cohosted by the Alaska Farmers Market Assn. and the Mat-Su Experiment Farm and a webinar on the CARES Act geared specifically for farmers. We offered presentations on online sales options and touchless payment systems. To access recordings from those two presentations from this summer go to the Alaska Farmers Market Association [website](#).



Carey Restino of Homer Hilltop Farm shows a Seldovian family how she manages her high tunnels during a personalized farm tour hosted by HSWCD.

## Upcoming Events

**Know Your Land talks are BACK!** 😊

That's right, the popular series of talks begun last fall is back for another great run for the coming winter/spring.

Co-hosted and created with the Homer USDA-NRCS staff. This year's talks will be held live online, so that no matter what the weather or other things might stand in the way, people can still get together for good conversations on ways to be badge-wearing good stewards of our lands.

### Here's the schedule for November and December

11/10 Fundamentals of Erosion– water, wind, ways to mitigate

11/17 Soil Health

12/1 Firebreaks: The Science and how they work

12/15 Firebreaks: Part 2

Stay tuned for more great topics as the winter moves along.

Stay in the loop. Follow us on [Facebook](#) or sign up for our Ag UPdates monthly e-newsletter.



## Want to keep up to date on local Ag Happenings, like the Know Your Land talks?

Our Ag UPdates monthly e-newsletter lines it out. Just once a month so to help keep your inbox uncluttered. We dish on all the local workshops, presentations and events happening that may interest local Ag enthusiasts. We add info on grants or other opportunities, plus podcasts, articles or apps worthy of sharing.

Sign up by clicking [here](#) .

See our latest Ag UPdates [here](#).

## How Do I Find Good Ag Soils Near Homer (soils of local importance)?

Folks interested in growing things know that choosing what to grow where depends on their soils. On the Kenai Peninsula, soils range from soggy mucky peats to dry and dusty sands and gravels. Good ag soils are unlike either of these—they are neither too wet nor too dry. On the southern peninsula, the best ag soils are usually deep, well-drained, relatively level silt loams. If they slope a bit (ideally less than 5 percent), they tend to slope to the south and warm up early in the spring. They have thick organic layers (sometimes as thick as 7 inches or more) on the surface, made up of grasses, fallen leaves, and lots of dead plant material that turns into humus over time—plant and animal material that has decomposed and decayed into a rich, brown earthy layer that contributes nutrients to the soil and helps retain soil moisture. Roots can grow inches deep into the porous, friable layers beneath the surface organic layer. (“Friable” describes soils that crumble easily—ideal for the movement of water and air and worms and insects and microorganisms that mix and fertilize soils.) Friable soils have both larger clods that break up easily and smaller soil aggregates that resist compaction, which creates pores of many shapes and sizes to hold moisture and oxygen available to plant roots. In well-drained ag soils with silt loam textures, water infiltrates easily and percolates downwards all season long, so these soils don’t become waterlogged (and oxygen deprived) during periods of heavy rain. Layers—like clay or coal—that might block the downward movement of water are too deep to be found in the 60-inch-deep holes that soil scientists dig to describe soils for local soil maps. And local water tables (below which soils are totally saturated and into which wells are dug) are too deep to inhibit root growth. Two examples of good ag soils are shown to the right.

So how do you find these good ag soils? You find them using two tools: (1) a list of “soils of local importance” and (2) a local soil map. If you have these tools, you can figure out pretty quickly whether soils in a particular area are potentially good for growing things.

“Soils of local importance” is one category in a nationwide system used to identify the ag lands most worth protecting. In the Lower 48, the most valuable ag soils are designated as either “Prime” or “Unique” farmlands. But in Alaska—which has neither—the soils most capable of ag production are designated “soils of local importance.” In the Lower 48, good ag soils are assigned to Capability Classes 1 and 2 by the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) when it maps and assesses local soils—which it does nationwide in local “soil surveys.” Here on the peninsula, however, the best capability classes found are Capability Classes 3 and 4. Locally, even certain soils in Capability Class 5—Beluga silt loams—are considered soils of local importance because of their long history as highly productive pastures and haylands. In 2014, Homer Soil and Water identified soils of local importance based on data in the [Western Kenai Peninsula Soil Survey](#). Following NRCS review and approval, identified soils became the official list of Soils of Local Importance. For a copy of the list, click [HERE](#). For

an overview map showing southern peninsula soils in land capability classes 3 and 4, as well as Beluga Soils, click [HERE](#)

Once you have a list of good ag soils in your area, you can use local soil maps to see where these soils are found. Soil maps of the Kenai Peninsula are available online using NRCS’s [Web Soil Survey](#) (WSS). That website includes instructions, but a simple tutorial can be found [HERE](#). After you click the big green button that starts Web Soil Survey, the fastest way to get where you want to go is to click the **Address** tab under **Quick Navigation** and when the address window opens, just type in your nearest community (e.g., Anchor Point, AK; Homer, AK; Fritz Creek, AK; etc.) Then you can find

the specific area you’re looking for, create an AOI (Area of Interest) with one of the AOI buttons, click the **Soil Map** tab to open a soil map, and compare the soils shown in your AOI to the list of soils of local importance.



Top photo: Brad Casar digging a soil pit in a Redoubt silt loam.

Bottom: Puntilla silt loam, which is coarser and sandier than Redoubt





BEFORE: A portion of trail out on Fox River Flats that has challenged four wheelers for years.



AFTER: In an attempt to give some structure to the muddy drainage, the trail crew installed Geoblock.

### Improving Area Trails

*by Kyra Wagner*

This summer has been a productive one for getting repairs on different stretches of the Watermelon Trail and out at Fox River Flats. The Watermelon Trail has several zones where the trail has deteriorated to the point that four-wheeler users have to skirt huge mud holes, therefore constantly enlarging the trail and often creating more mud holes. In an attempt to clean up a few of these zones, Homer Soil and Water has been installing Geoblock panels that create a hard surface for wheelers to run on yet also allow grass to grow.

The Snomads, our local off-road recreational vehicle club, has also been working with state agencies to try and get the permissions needed to develop a groomed winter trail along the Watermelon Trail. Since this trail crosses many different landowners, it has been a long and frustrating process to sort out. On August 27<sup>th</sup>, Homer Soil and Water hosted a Zoom meeting to get everyone in the “room” talking about how to best move forward. Snomads now can move forward with more information about the varied expectations and requirements for the zones of the trail managed by the Borough, AK Department of Natural Resources (DNR) or Alaska Fish and Game.

### Moose Habitat Restoration

*by Matt James*

Alaska Department of Fish and Game and Homer SWCD have entered a partnership where Homer SWCD will design and administer several moose habitat restoration projects here on the Kenai Peninsula. The intent of the project is to encourage vigorous new growth in older, decadent and over-browsed tree and shrub species in moose wintering areas.

Due to the lack of natural disturbances here on the southern peninsula, such as wildfire, much of the moose browse in the wintering areas is in poor condition. These treatments, to be completed by machinery and primarily to willow shrub by mowing them to within a foot of the ground, will encourage the vigorous new growth that moose prefer. All three treatment sites in the Homer area are located within the Anchor River Fritz Creek Critical Habitat Area.



A curious bystander visiting the habitat assessment crew.

## BLM Field Botany Contracts

by Charlotte Crowder

It will come as a surprise to no one that this year was odd for a field season.

The outlook for field work was lean to start, and COVID-19 and the subsequent necessity for distancing waylaid two large trips that were located off the road system (It's hard to distance inside a helicopter, and a few of the field staff partners were from out of state). Those trips included a continuing AIM (Assessment Inventory and Monitoring) project in Nome, as well as a soil and vegetation mapping contract for the Tanana River area that would have lasted a month.

Among the delayed projects, another opportunity for a productive season arose. An ongoing forest inventory (FORVIS) project near Tanacross was on the road system and only required a small group or pair to operate, and being so, suddenly became one of the few projects feasible and safe enough to attempt. It was an excellent contender for something to knock out this year in the vacuum left by COVID cancellations. The project was approved, carried out, and successfully completed by the end of the summer. BLM and Soil and Water staff worked together to tackle the forestry work over the course of three week-long field trips spanning from June to late August.

In the landscape of a global pandemic, these three field trips were not only something productive to do that ended in a finished project (always something to



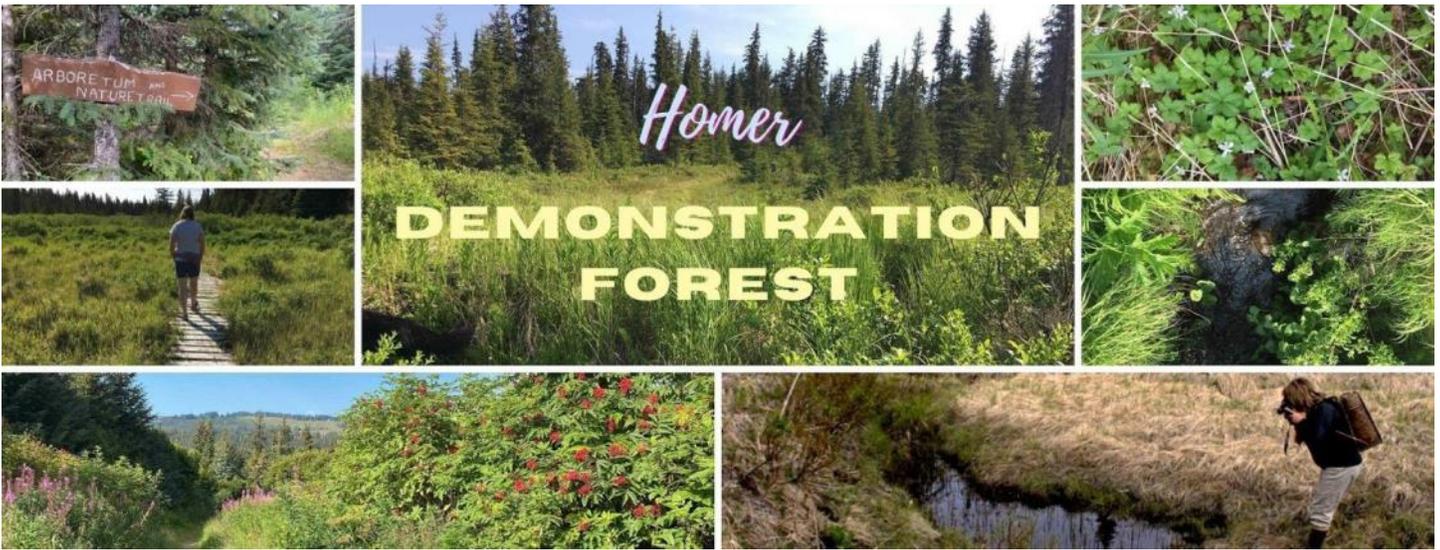
celebrate in Alaska, when multi-year projects can get mired by changing staff, challenging logistics, and competition with other projects during a limited season), but were also a welcomed escape from the day-to-day challenges of being sequestered at home. Fieldtrips have the effect of putting the rest of the world on pause, if only for a week at a time, and were enjoyed by all the participants.

Next year will see a return of stress-laden helicopter-supported work in more remote Alaska. But the serenity of surveying the forest around this airstrip in this secluded spot was a welcome change of pace. The completed FORVIS inventory can now be used by the BLM to make any needed fire breaks in the forest parcel to protect the village of Tanacross and other nearby residences.

### ***Cover Crop Trials Seeking Land***

Homer Soil & Water Conservation District is on the hunt for a piece of land to perform cover crop trials in 2021 & 2022. These trials will be a planting of a wide range of cover crop species and varieties to determine their growth patterns and productivity in our climate. The district is looking for a plot of land that has reasonable access, non forested, and not a wetland. If this is something you may be interested in becoming involved with please contact Brad at 907-235-8177 ext.111.



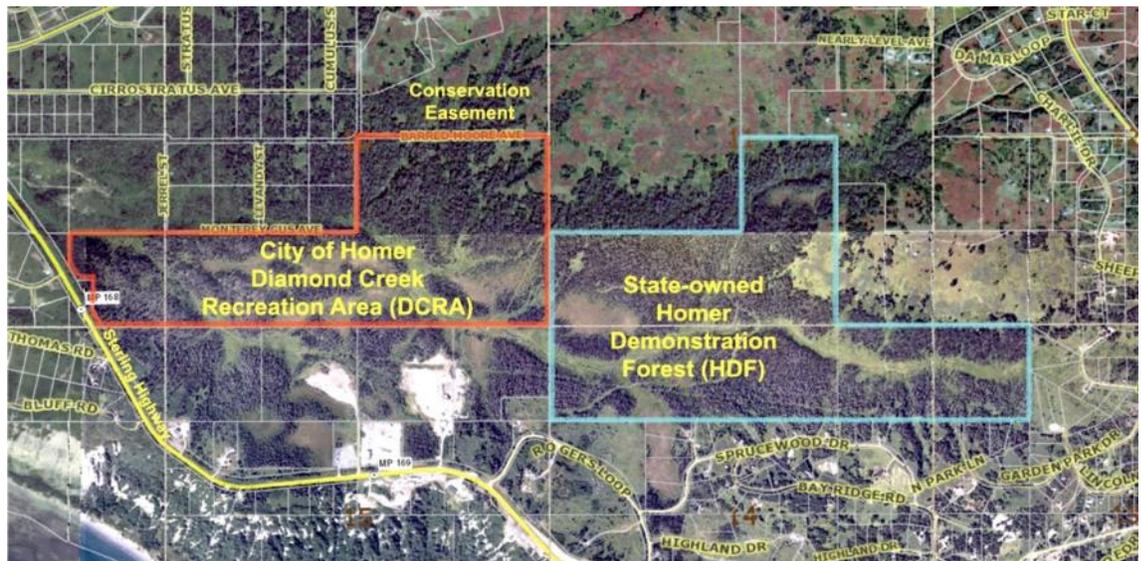


When was the last time you were in the Homer Demonstration Forest? (The Demo Forest or HDF for short.) The Homer area has now had this 360-acre treasure on the western edge of town for nearly 40 years—long enough for little kids who learned to ski there to grow up and take THEIR little kids to learn to ski there. It’s exciting to see more and more locals and out-of-towners discover and enjoy this special educational/recreational wildland along Diamond Creek, in our own backyard. (The HDF was made even more special when in 2007, it was joined on its western border by the City of Homer’s 270-acre Diamond Creek Recreation Area, which is managed in coordination with the HDF. Check out the map below.)

growing system of boardwalks winds through wetlands, drawing visitors deeper and deeper into the beauty and variety found in the woods. New signage appears. Photographers, birders, mushroom hunters, school groups, and more find in the forest something to fire their imaginations and reward their efforts. They discover that the HDF is the perfect place to explore and be inspired.

So after a hiatus, it’s high time that the Homer Demonstration Forest Steering Committee reconvene to look again at the community’s interests in the forest and the forest’s possibilities. The HDF Steering Committee

Cross country skiers of all ages and abilities have used trails in the Demo Forest for decades, but ways to engage with the forest keep expanding as local interests and creativity combine with the forest’s landscapes, plant life, wildlife, and water. For example, the types of trees in the HDF Arboretum keep increasing, illustrating what can be grown locally. Ever-expanding summer and winter trails climb the slopes rising up from the Diamond Creek valley. A



plays a central role in managing the forest and reflects the unique nature of the HDF. Since 1986, when the

In 1986, management of the 360 acres that is the HDF was transferred by the state’s Division of Mining, Land and Water to the Division of Forestry (both within the Alaska Dept. of Natural Resources) by an interagency land management assignment (or ILMA) for 25 years. That ILMA was renewed in 2011 for another 25 years.

(Demo Forest contd...) Division of Forestry acquired management responsibility for the 360 acres, the HDF Steering Community has been the mechanism for bringing community ideas, desires, needs, and expertise into discussions of past, present, and future forest management. Homer Soil and Water chairs the committee and also provides technical guidance on management topics, working closely with both Division of Forestry and the USDA, Natural Resources Conservation Service—DOF provides technical assistance related to forestry, fuel reduction, and hazard tree removal, while NRCS provides technical assistance on topics like soil suitabilities and conservation practices. The roles of these three players—Homer Soil and Water, DOF, and NRCS—are enshrined in the original ILMA and a related memorandum of understanding. But along with these three, the Steering Committee is the fourth critical player in the HDF management team, representing a wide variety of community groups and perspectives during discussions of forest management. Current Steering Committee members—listed to the right—include representatives from the Kenai Peninsula School District, the Kachemak Bay Campus, the Kachemak Nordic Ski Club and other recreational organizations, local neighborhood homeowners, and other locals interested in what happens in the forest. A bit about each Steering Committee member is included in the table.

So we welcome the 2020 members of the Demo Forest Steering Committee. In response to an invitation from Homer Soil and Water, these individuals stepped up via a Zoom meeting on September 3 to begin the ongoing process of reviewing what’s happening in the forest and brainstorming ways to make the HDF an ever-more meaningful and valued community treasure. To follow what’s happening in the forest, check out the recently created [Homer Demonstration Forest Facebook group](#), which will become a central, easy-to-access location for all things Demo Forest. Feel free to contact Homer Soil and Water if you’d like to learn more.

To the right are the current members of the

Demo Forest Steering Committee



Thanks for helping out!

- ◆ **Robert Archibald** ([robert.e.archibald@gmail.com](mailto:robert.e.archibald@gmail.com)) Lives near the HDF and grooms its ski trails, is on the [Homer Parks and Rec Commission](#) (Parks, Art, Recreation and Culture Advisory Commission) and [Friends of Kachemak Bay State Park](#) board (including the [Kachemak Bay Water Trail](#) Steering Committee)
- ◆ **Ed Berg** ([edwardberg100@gmail.com](mailto:edwardberg100@gmail.com)) Retired ecologist from [Kenai National Wildlife Refuge](#), active geologist working on a book about Kachemak Bay geology (e.g., [Geologists search for large glacier-transported granitic boulders](#)), skis in the HDF
- ◆ **Dave Brann** ([homerbrann@gmail.com](mailto:homerbrann@gmail.com)) Has been interested in the HDF since 1982 and lives next to it, is a retired school teacher, is active with trails and the HDF arboretum, also on [Friends of Kachemak Bay State Park](#) board and Water Trail.
- ◆ **Diane Campbell** ([diane.campbell@alaska.gov](mailto:diane.campbell@alaska.gov)) Area Forester for the Kenai-Kodiak Area, [Alaska Division of Forestry](#); before joining DOF in 2007, worked as a wildlife biologist with ADF&G and USFWS; newly installed as the Area Forester.
- ◆ **Matt James** ([mattjames@homerswcd.org](mailto:mattjames@homerswcd.org)) Forester with Homer Soil and Water after a 25-year career with Alaska Division of Forestry, is heading up moose habitat enhancement projects on the peninsula; worked with Terry Anderson in the late 1990s in the HDF doing projects, mostly with the arboretum; also helped organize annual DOF tree sales.
- ◆ **Devony Lehner** ([devony@homerswcd.org](mailto:devony@homerswcd.org)) Moved to Homer in 1987 as a Soil Conservationist with the NRCS; now a natural resources specialist with Homer Soil and Water. With Dave and the original HDF Steering Committee, helped develop the original 1992 *Framework Plan for the HDF*, then the current [HDF management plan](#) in 2006, and then the plan for the adjacent City of Homer [Diamond Creek Recreation Area](#) in 2013. Lives near the HDF and helps expand neighborhood trails into the forest.
- ◆ **Hans Rinke** ([hans.rinke@alaska.gov](mailto:hans.rinke@alaska.gov)) Regional Forester, Coastal Region, [Alaska Division of Forestry](#); in 2011 oversaw renewing the Interagency Land Management Assignment that establishes the HDF, he is the land manager of record.
- ◆ **Katherine Schake** [katherine@homerswcd.org](mailto:katherine@homerswcd.org) Invasive weeds specialist for the [Homer Soil and Water Conservation District](#); has led ecology hikes professionally.
- ◆ **Tania Spurkland** ([tmspurkland@gmail.com](mailto:tmspurkland@gmail.com)) Retired biology teacher from Anchorage, grew up on a homestead in Homer, leads extracurricular outdoor science activities with several Homer schools with the school district’s migrant ed program.; Dave helped her and Damara Burnett receive a current Arbor Day grant.
- ◆ **Matt Steffy** ([MSteffy@ci.homer.ak.us](mailto:MSteffy@ci.homer.ak.us)) Runs Parks and Recreation in the City of Homer Public Works Department. Matt worked for many years with Homer Soil and Water, his responsibilities often involved projects and activities in the HDF, and the city owns two parcels of land at the Rogers Loop trailhead.
- ◆ **Debbie Boege-Tobin** ([ifddb@kpc.alaska.edu](mailto:ifddb@kpc.alaska.edu)) Biology professor at Kachemak Bay Campus, leads [Semester by the Bay](#), which focuses on conservation ecology in the spring and marine biology in the fall; organizes student volunteers and interns.
- ◆ **Pam Voeller** ([pamela.voeller@usda.gov](mailto:pamela.voeller@usda.gov)) Came to Homer in 1980, now oversees the Homer Field Office of the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), works with private landowners with a focus on ag, which includes forestry
- ◆ **Kyra Wagner** ([kyra@homerswcd.org](mailto:kyra@homerswcd.org)) District Manager

# Meet The Staff



**Kyra Wagner, District Manager**

Kyra has moved from years of experience as a general community volunteer extraordinaire to the lead juggling acrobat in the office. In charge of accounting, grant writing and other general management, she loves seeing who the next person will be who walks through the door and what the latest issue may be.



**Devony Lehner, Natural Resources Specialist**

Devony is the queen of Web Soil Survey, NRCS programs, and all the resources needed to make wise decisions on your land. With nothing more than the purest intent to inform each and every landowner on the Peninsula of these resources, Devony is OUR greatest resource and institutional memory bank.



**Brad Casar, Soils Guy**

Brad is our soils guy. If you have questions about soils he's the man to talk to. If you've got a fun digging project call him up, he enjoys digging for trails, soils survey, farms, and outhouses. He is active in doing outreach to our community of growers and land managers on the southern Kenai Peninsula.



**Charlotte Crowder, Biological Technician**

Charlotte works with the NRCS Soil Survey team on their mapping projects as well as helping S&W process soil health study samples. As a botanist, she gets friendly with flowers, measures tree girths and rings, and records vegetation coverage at survey sites. And she really likes a nice afternoon tea.



**Nicole Arevalo, Food Systems Analyst**

Nicole was hired in 2018 to conduct the Food Systems Study for the southern peninsula, bringing 18 years work experience in food service and a BA in Anthropology. Since then, she's been our Ag outreach person, Ag in the Classroom coordinator and does other projects to help our local food system thrive.



**Katherine Schake, Natural Resources Specialist**

Katherine is our Invasive Plant Coordinator. She has guided hikes in Denali NP, managed remote-sensing mapping projects, a statewide salmon data synthesis, and coordinated the Mat-Su Salmon Science Symposium. In her spare time, Katherine guides in Iceland, maintaining a passion for botany and birding.



**Jessica Sharp, Natural Resources Specialist**

Jessica is our secret weapon in Anchorage. She worked for us here in Homer after years as the Fairbanks Soil & Water soils guru. After tons of life changes - moving to Anchorage, getting married and having a baby - she's rejoined the team to help us with soil and fertilizer recommendations.



**Matthew James, Forester**

Matt was hired in June of 2020 as a Forester. He'll be working closely with the ADF&G to complete moose habitat restoration projects on the Kenai Peninsula. Matt is a long time Homer resident and has recently finished up a 25-year career of wildland firefighting with the Division of Forestry.