**HOMER SWCD WELCOMES A NEW EMPLOYEE!**

Hello! I’m Charlotte, Homer SWCD’s newest employee. I’ve been working here-to-fore with the NRCS Soil Survey team under the employ of an internship managed by the BLM. I’ve been based in Anchorage, in Palmer, and most lately here in Homer over the last couple years. Recently I happily joined your ranks to continue my work as a research and field technician helping with the Soil Survey mapping projects currently underway.

During summers, I travel to representative sites within our mapping projects to help collect the data we need. Working alongside a soil scientist who exhaustively describes the soil profile, I describe the current plant communities and potential for community-changing events (noting things like susceptibility to fire and dating the evidence of old fires). This means that I get friendly with flowers, puzzle with lesser grasses, measure tree girths and rings, and work on making my estimation of their coverage at each site accurate, thereby painting a realistic picture of the scene in numbers and scientific names, written descriptions, and copious photos.

While we’re out, we also compare the sites we visit, noting their successional stages, compositions, and landscape positions, so that the ecologists and soil scientists can group the sites into understandable units of communities and mark their extents on a map. Field work was relatively short this year for me, summing up to about four whole weeks spent on trips to the Nulato Hills (near Unalakleet), Central, and to AHTNA lands just outside of Denali National Park.

In the off-season, there is copious data-entry and management to be done, as well as editing and composing descriptions and reports. This whole process takes years of trips to remote locations in the summers and analyzing data in the winters, which has been slowed further by the recent trend of under-staffed offices, which my position was created to aid. My job description does have flexibility, so hopefully I’ll have the opportunity to get out and about in the local operations of the office over the winter time as well!

*Charlotte Crowder*
LANDOWNERS ARE ENCOURAGED TO PARTICIPATE IN THE NRCS STATE TECHNICAL COMMITTEE MEETING

The NRCS State Technical Committee Meeting gives landowners and managers an opportunity to discuss issues within a variety of NRCS conservation programs and to give feedback on state and local resource concerns. The NRCS State Technical Committee provides recommendations to USDA about conservation programs and local priorities and issues. The meeting will be held on Thursday, November 16th from 9am to noon.

The meeting will be held in Palmer at the USDA conference room, but there are opportunities to participate remotely via either teleconference or video teleconference.

To participate via teleconference, please contact Dee Covalt at (907) 761-7747 or by email at phillma.covalt@ak.usda.gov.

To participate via video teleconference please contact your local NRCS office by Monday, November 6.

Homer NRCS: 907-235-8177

HOMER’S 3-YEAR SOIL HEALTH STUDY NEARS COMPLETION

In the spring of 2016 four farmers in the Homer/Anchor Point area were selected to be part of a soil health study looking at the effects of cover cropping and reduced tillage on vegetable production. Now after two years of trial, farmers are starting to see the positive potential for these practices and thinking of other ways to incorporate them into their management.

Both cover cropping and reduced tillage have been used extensively within the farming and gardening community on the lower Kenai Peninsula. Producers have used cover cropping to increase fertility and organic matter in new plots and to revitalize or “let rest” older garden plots. Cover cropping has also been used for additional benefits such as suppressing weeds or pests and attracting pollinators. Reduced tillage can produce many of the same results, along with building healthy, resilient living soil to support not only plant roots but all the other living organisms that dwell in the soil.

NRCS strongly supports practices that promote soil health and recognizes that documenting benefits of cover cropping and reduced tillage through the soil health study can help increase interest in the community to adopt these practices. These practices can be cost shared in Alaska through the NRCS Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) but are still underutilized. You can look forward next spring to a demonstration at one of the participants’ farms showcasing cover cropping and reduced tillage and some of the tools that help make them possible.

Conducting trials of these practices on each participant’s farm took strategizing and trial and error. Some farmers have difficulty finding space or time for cover cropping within their intense rotations of vegetables throughout the season. For others it is hard to get away from consistent tillage to battle weeds and pests in the soil. But there are many reasons and ways to incorporate these practices into farm management, it just takes trial and error.

OUTDOOR EDUCATION - MATT STEFFY

In our district’s ongoing endeavors to fix and protect the natural world around us, it is important to keep in mind who will someday be taking our place. One of the fantastic opportunities my position affords me is the ability to interact with the youth in our community both in and out of the classroom. Kids have been learning about plant ID, digging out invasive weeds, learning about parasitic plants, snow surveys, and visiting future project sites for streambank restoration. As I return to classrooms year after year, I am always pleased with how much they remember from the year before. There is boundless enthusiasm for the outside world in the eyes of our children. At West Homer Elementary and Big Fireweed, we have been able to make extensive use of the School Yard Habitat which was built by our district, with help from the kids at the school. The students always have so many questions and stories to share that I never get all the way through my lesson plan. Which is fine: I am there to learn as well!
“BUILDING ALASKA’S AGRICULTURE”

ALASKA FARM BUREAU

FRIDAY FORUM & ANNUAL MEETING

November 2-4 at Lands’ End Resort

Nov. 2 at 7pm—Free Workshop on Managing Farm Risk (see P. 4 for details)

Nov. 3 Friday Forum
8am Registration
8:30 Welcome
8:45 Division of Agriculture
9:10 Why Accurate Ag Stats are Important to Farmers
9:30 Bogard Food Hub: Growing Ideas & Your Wealth! Road Stories of Mobile Poultry Processing & Business Incubators
10:00 Break—Silent Auction
10:20 Keynote Speaker: Zippy Duvall, President of American Farm Bureau Federation
10:40 Moving Forward with FSMA Produce Safety Rule
11:20 Keeping Bees and What to do with All Their Goodies
11:45 Lunch and Silent Auction
12:45 Using an Online Food Hub to Reach Markets
1:15 Starting a Business: Basic Issues Faced When Starting a Small Business
2:15 Update on the Mycoplasma Ovipneumonae Study in Sheep and Goats
3:00 Break—Silent Auction Ends
3:20 Future Land Sales: New Idea—Phased Ag
4:00 Marketing with Social Media, Website and Print Material
4:45 Closing
5:30 Cash Bar opens in meeting room
6:00 Awards Banquet & Auction

Saturday, Nov. 4: Annual Meeting of the Alaska Farm Bureau
8am—4pm

Sunday, Nov. 5: ‘The Business Side of Growing Peonies’ Growers Workshop
9am-4pm (at Land’s End)

$35 for Farm Bureau Members and $75 for non-members for this workshop. To sign up call Rita Jo at 907-235-8116

Click Here to Register Online

THE FOOD HUB FORGES ON

In its second year, the Kenai Peninsula Food Hub continues to provide fresh local goods from producers around the peninsula. Peninsula farmers, ranchers, and fishers are able to post weekly updates on the Food Hub of produce, seafood, shellfish, flowers, or crafts available from them, opening up online shopping to the whole Kenai peninsula.

Never has it been so easy to order all your fresh veggies for a potluck, or to provide a new bouquet of flowers for your bed and breakfast. With product pickup conveniently located in the back of the Wild Berry Emporium in Homer, folks can swing by after work and pick up their ready-to-go order.

With the growing farming community in Homer, new growers, small and large, have an easily accessible market open to the entire community. This is a great opportunity for producers to sell directly to restaurants, bed and breakfasts, and cafeterias of schools, churches, or the hospital, all of which purchase large volumes of food.

The Food Hub is seeking new customers and new producers for next season to build the extent of the online marketplace. Contact Robbie Mixon at the Cook Inletkeeper if you have any questions regarding the Food Hub.
robbi@inletkeeper.org
Phone: 907-235-4068 Ext 23

UPDATES FROM THE NRCS

For landowners enrolling in the conservation practice Crop Rotation (328), there is a new requirement starting in FY2018. The crop rotations must include a small grain which is grown to a height of at least 4” in the entire growing area at the beginning or end of the summer.

Starting in FY 2018, there is a new rule regarding payment on high tunnel contracts. Landowners must fully complete the building of their high tunnel (including sides, tops, and end walls) before NRCS will issue a payment on the contract.
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.

Join us as a cooperator! It is similar to membership in your favorite group. Being a cooperator says that you use good practices on your land (like the ones demonstrated in the Soil Health Study) but it also gets you the benefits of a voice at the District level through your vote or your presence on our board.

FREE WORKSHOP ON MANAGING FARM RISK

November 2 at 7pm
Lands’ End Harbor Room, Homer

AgriLogic Consulting, LLC in partnership with the USDA Risk Management Agency, will be presenting on the topics of crop insurance programs and other risk management tools that are available to assist Alaska agricultural producers to remain in business in the event of damage or loss.

AgriLogic will also be offering FREE consultations and will provide FREE premium quotes for all those who are interested in learning about solutions to mitigate farm risk. To schedule an appointment, please email: alaska@agrilogic.com. For more information on AgriLogic visit: www.AgrilogicConsulting.com.

Sign up for this workshop when you register for the Farm Bureau Annual Meeting.

THE ALASKA FOOD FESTIVAL & CONFERENCE IS ONLY ONE MONTH AWAY!

November 3 & 4
Pikes Waterfront Lodge, Fairbanks

The Alaska Food Festival & Conference is an opportunity for presenters and attendees to learn more about -- and engage in -- the various issues affecting Alaska’s food system.

November 3rd (Friday) will be a food systems conference with speakers presenting on a variety of food security, production, business, and community issues. November 4th (Saturday), will be a fun and educational food festival, which will include Alaska food vendors, taste testing, food demonstrations and hands-on interactive workshops on raising, harvesting and preparing food.

Click Here for More Information

BOARD NOMINATIONS

Looking for a way to make a difference in your community and help work toward the conservation of our valued natural resources? Becoming a board member might be the opportunity you are looking for!

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.

Becoming a cooperator is easy and painless, there are forms on our webpage under the “About SWCD” tab. A nomination form is also included in this newsletter. Please note: nomination forms must be submitted no later than 5:00 p.m. Monday, November 20, 2017. Elections will follow in December.

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.

INTERACTIVE ALASKA GEOLOGIC MAP

The Alaska geologic map (USGS SIM-3340) is now available on the internet as an interactive map! Check it out at: https://bit.ly/AKGeologicMap

The Alaska Food Policy Council

Click Here for More Information

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ATTENTION PRODUCE GROWERS!
FREE FOOD SAFETY WORKSHOP

The State of Alaska, in cooperation with the Cornell Produce Safety Alliance, is holding a Produce Growers Food Safety Workshop.

Thursday, November 2 from 9-6
Alaska Maritime National Wildlife Refuge (Islands & Oceans) Seminar Room, Homer AK

Course and materials are free! This FDA-approved course satisfies the Grower Training curriculum requirements under the Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA) Produce Safety Rule. Growers can receive a certificate of attendance for $35.

Hosted by the Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation, Office of the State Veterinarian.

The workshop will give participants a basic understanding of how to identify microbial risks, practices that reduce risks, how to begin implementing food safety practices, the requirements of FSMA, and how to develop a Farm Food Safety Plan.

To register, or for more information, please call Barbara Hanson at the DEC Office of the State Veterinarian at (907)375-8278 or email: barbara.hanson@alaska.gov.

KIDS & COMMUNITY WORKING TOGETHER TO BUILD OUTDOOR CLASSROOMS

Bridge at Homer Middle School

The Homer Soil & Water Conservation District has been working with three southern peninsula schools to develop outdoor classrooms since 2012.

In September of 2017, these projects were completed. We have been so grateful to partner with the US Fish & Wildlife Service on this project, but they are discontinuing the program. The purpose of this program has been to get the students, teachers, and administrators involved in the planning, construction, and maintenance of their outdoor classrooms. This initial momentum and excitement is sure to carry over into future years.

During this past summer and fall, we were able to get funding transferred to McNeil Canyon Elementary to assist in the construction of a viewing platform, the construction of many bird boxes, and the development of a series of interpretive materials coordinated through local naturalists Beth Trowbridge and Conrad Field. The students and staff at McNeil have benefitted greatly from a very involved local community.

Over at the Homer Middle School, our staff spent several days clearing trails behind the school that had been reviewed and flagged by school staff the previous spring. This effort was greatly assisted by the day of trail work that the students put in before school got out. Lots of branches were cut, brush hauled out, and parts of an old bridge repurposed. School staff and community members have expressed gratitude and the trail has been getting extensive use by the cross country team, the running club, and other locals. District staff constructed a new bridge over a small creek ravine that makes access to the trail system as easy as walking out the back door. Now classes do not have to hike up the hill or up past the new SPARC building to access their wonderful trails.

Even though the funding has ended, our staff will continue to provide general assistance and coordinate events. For example, Matt Steffy visits classrooms to teach students about invasive species. He utilizes the Outdoor Classroom to teach the kids to identify invasive plants and remove them. We look forward to watching these outdoor classrooms continue to grow.

We Can Do It!

November 18, 2017
Women in Agriculture Conference
WomenInAg.wsu.edu
The HSWCD Board meets on the second Wednesday of the month at 5:00 pm. Well, except for this November. We are meeting the first Wednesday in November. But NORMALLY we meet on the second Wednesday of the month at 5:00 pm. We meet at the USDA Service Center, 4014 Lake St., Homer. Well, until we move to a new office location. But that won’t be until December or January. Stay tuned. We welcome all visitors! Feel free to call our office to confirm time & location.

GOT EMAIL?

You are receiving this newsletter because you are a District Cooperator and we want to keep our Cooperators informed. There is so much happening in our office regarding

- Trails and Outdoor Education
- Invasive Weed Management
- Agriculture and Local Food
- Habitat Conservation

that would be great to put in our newsletters, but it would be a lot cheaper and waste a lot less paper if we emailed them rather than snail-mailed them. Then we could send out newsletters easier and more often, keeping you better informed! So....

PLEASE SEND US YOUR EMAIL ADDRESS!
Write us today at info@HomerSWCD.org and we will put you on our new newsletter list.

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

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