

FALL 2022

NATURAL CURRENTS

Newsletter for the Homer Soil & Water Conservation District

District Manager Notes

BY KYRA WAGNER

We always have such amazing projects going on down at the District office. From trail work to farmer support, habitat improvement to invasive weeds, we have our hand in many aspects of our local landscape. We have the opportunity to answer the unmet conservation needs of our area and that takes many forms.

We could never do all this alone. We have the opportunity to work with an array of partners, building trust, building projects and building community. We have great staff who get to work on awesome projects with amazing partners. We couldn't ask for more. You'll see what I mean as you glance through this newsletter. Enjoy!

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Watermelon Trail Reroute

BY MATT JAMES

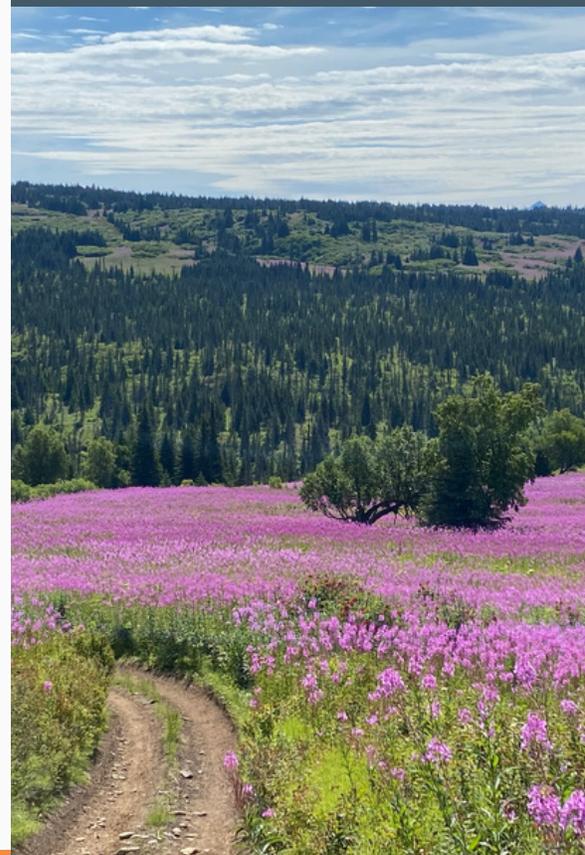
Alaska Department of Fish & Game has partnered with Homer Soil and Water Conservation District to oversee a trail improvement grant for work located within the Anchor River-Fritz Creek Critical Habitat Area and the Fox River Flats Critical Habitat Area. Topping the list of Fish and Game's projects is rerouting a portion of the Watermelon Trail that passes over lands owned by Cook Inlet Regional Corporation or CIRI.

The Watermelon Trail is a well-established trail that has been in continuous use since the 1950s. It currently serves as a multiuser, public recreation and access route into the Caribou Hills South Trail System. This popular trail begins at a parking lot trailhead off Ohlson Mountain Road in Homer and extends for about 14 miles on mostly state-owned property.

The trail starts off on Kenai Peninsula Borough land and enters the Anchor River-Fritz Creek Critical Habitat Area about 2 miles past the parking lot and continues within the Critical Habitat Area for about 4 miles. After exiting the area, the current route passes through private land owned by CIRI for about 1.7 miles. A re-route is planned within the Critical Habitat Area to divert the trail around CIRI land to resolve trespassing issues. The re-route will exit onto state land and then reconnect with the existing path.

The first phase of the trail reroute will be establishing a 24-foot-wide corridor cleared of all trees and brush. The corridor will be just under 3 miles in length and constructed with hand tools and mulching machinery. Homer SWCD will provide project oversight and contract management of the company that will be doing the clearing operation. Work on this project may begin as early as November 2022 or as soon as target frost depth conditions are met.

Once the corridor has been established the actual trail can be designed, engineered and constructed into a sustainable trail for all user groups. These future steps will be completed as funding becomes available and in collaboration with the Snomads. The Snomads are working tirelessly towards getting management authority on the trail through state easements and a Community Trail Management Agreement with the Kenai Peninsula Borough to ensure that the trail is upgraded and maintained locally.





Spruce Tree Revetment

BY DEVONY LEHNER

Spruce tree revetments slow stream velocities along the bank and reduce erosion. They catch sediments, allowing other plants to root along the bank. They also provide habitat for juvenile salmon. Spruce tree revetments are effective for 1 to 3 years, giving time for other plants to establish.

At the end of June, a stretch of bank on the Anchor River in Silver King day use area in the Anchor River State Recreation Area got its own spruce tree revetment. Keep an eye on what changes come about with this new addition.



Special Thanks

TO THE DIVISION OF WATER

for providing funding for our continued work on the Anchor River through ACWA grants.



Weed Free Gravel Certifications

BY JEN CHAUVET

With funding from the City of Homer, we inspected and certified three local gravel pits through the Alaska Division of Agriculture's Weed Free Gravel Program. The voluntary, statewide program assures gravel producers that their products meet national and statewide standards to reduce the potential transport and spread of the most invasive plants. It also gives consumers – from private homeowners and contractors to public land managers – the option to source certified weed-free gravel for projects.

Largely prompted by the city's recent decision to require certified weed-free gravel on city projects, the inspection and certification process does more than certify gravel pits. It has provided an unexpected opportunity for us to engage with gravel pit operators and managers about bigger-picture invasive plant issues and offer tips for plant identification, prevention practices, and options for responding to potential infestations. Kudos to the City of Homer for initiating this effort!

If you're a gravel producer or pit manager interested in learning more about certification or a landowner/land manager looking to purchase certified weed-free gravel, get in touch! Email jen@homerswcd.org.

Bird Vetch Weed Pulls

BY JEN CHAUVET

In July, interns from the Center for Alaskan Coastal Studies (thank you, thank you!) joined Homer Soil & Water Conservation District staff to remove invasive bird vetch from a local property. Hand pulling the plants after they have flowered but before they produce seeds helps prevent the spread of this notoriously tangly plant. We also traveled to Seward for the annual Seward Community Weed Pull, where volunteers pulled 106 pounds of bird vetch!





Invasive Chokecherry Wood Carving Workshop

BY JEN CHAUVET

In partnership with Homer Council on the Arts (HCOA) and the Kachemak Heritage Land Trust (KHLT), we hosted an invasive chokecherry (a.k.a. European bird cherry or mayday) tree wood carving workshop at HCOA in early October. Woodcarver Tony Perelli guided participants of all ages through the process of transforming blocks of chokecherry wood into wooden spatulas. The coolest part? The wood used for the carvings came from chokecherry trees removed from along the Calvin and Coyle trail during a volunteer event back in May! We're grateful to have been a part of this exciting project, which brought together art and conservation groups and the local community to address the problem of invasive plants with a creative solution – making something sweet out of a sour situation. If you'd like more information on invasive chokecherry trees, visit our website: kenainvaisves.org/species





Bradley Lake

BY JEN CHAUVET

Bradley Lake Invasive Plant Surveys and Control
With funding from the US Fish and Wildlife Service, Homer SWCD and the Kenai Watershed Forum (KWF) visited Homer Electric Association's Bradley Lake Hydroelectric Site to control and survey for high-priority invasive plants. We surveyed the entire dam access road, plus the newly built Battle Creek Road. The new road, and a water pipeline, were installed to divert runoff from Battle Creek into Bradley Lake to increase the lake's hydroelectric capacity. Battle Creek Road was entirely free of invasive plants, and the older access road has seen a significant reduction of invasive plants over the three years Homer SWCD and KWF have been working at this site. New roads are notorious for introducing invasive species to remote areas of Alaska, so annual monitoring of the Battle Creek Road is critical to prevent the establishment of any invasive plants that may have hitched a ride across the bay.

For more information about the hydroelectric facility:
<https://www.homerelectric.com/my-cooperative/power-generation/bradley-lake-project/>

For more information about the Battle Creek Diversion project:
<https://www.homerelectric.com/my-cooperative/power-generation/battle-creek-diversion-project/>



Mark your calendar!

The Alaska Invasive Species Partnership (AKISP) Annual Workshop: November 1-3, 2022

Join us for the 2022 Invasive Species Workshop. This year the workshop will be held hybrid-style with the option to tune in virtually or attend in person at the BP Energy Center in Anchorage. Visit alaskainvasives.org to view the agenda and register.

Invasive Species Discovery Lab

BY JEN CHAUVET

On the heels of the recent discovery of invasive European green crabs in Metlakatla in Southeast Alaska, we teamed up with the Kachemak Bay Research Reserve and Alaska Maritime National Wildlife Refuge (AMNWR) to host an invasive species-themed discovery lab at AMNWR's visitor center. Through hands-on activities and conversations with invasive species professionals, visitors explored invasive species topics. From rats in the Aleutians to aquatic invasive species, and terrestrial plant identification to prevention and management practices, there was something for everyone!



A Special Thank You

TO LARSEN FELLOWS

Larsen usually is out commercial fishing in the summer, but this year she has been spending some time volunteering with Homer Soil and Water. She has been game for anything, from planting cover crops to editing "Know Your Lands" videos. Thanks for being part of our team Larsen!



A Newly Revived District

BY KYRA WAGNER

This has been a big year for Alaska Soil and Water Conservation Districts. After years of inactivity, the Anchorage Soil and Water Conservation District has been revived and rejuvenated. And Homer Soil and Water has been intricately connected.

The main connection we have is to their new District Manager, Jessica Sharp. If that name is familiar, it is because Jessica has been on our staff list for years. Working remotely, she has done soil nutrient recommendations for us as well as joining in strategic planning discussions.

As we say goodbye to a coworker at Homer Soil & Water, we say hello to a new partner. As Jessica learns to navigate the world of grants and project management, we have already been able to collaborate on grants for invasive species.

She has a wonderfully supportive and professional board for the new district and has already started hiring staff. It's a lot to take on, but I can't imagine anyone better. Congrats Jessica!

Ag Program Updates

BY MONICA KOPP

There have been some exciting happenings in the agriculture world at Homer Soil and Water. Last spring we were busy applying for grants and we received a few that we are excited about. We received continued funding for Technical Assistance from the National Association of Conservation Districts, which we will use to keep running our soil testing program and offer farming and gardening advice to our communities. In addition to that, we have a few other things we are excited about. We are loving the collaboration that is happening around here and hoping to do much more in the near future.



Food Hub Grant

In collaboration with the Alaska Food Hub, we were granted funding through a Rural Business Development Grant to help bolster our local online farmers market. The goal is to focus on support and empower producers to sell more food on the online platform by providing more opportunities for producers to receive assistance in navigating the online platform, and to spread the word about this promising market through promotional materials to hook more producers. In addition, we'll release a few "Tricks of the Trade" videos highlighting current Food Hub vendors to show different ways that producers strategize selling on the Food Hub. We are very excited to be partnering with the Alaska Food Hub to expand this invaluable resource we have on the Kenai Peninsula.



Seed Saving Grant

In partnership with Saskia Esslinger, the Homer Seed Library, and Foundroot (seed company in Haines) we received a Specialty Crop Block Grant focused on local seed production and supporting the Seed Library. We will be working with Saskia and Leah Wagner along with five local producers to gain and spread knowledge about growing, harvesting, and storing seeds in our northern climate. We are very excited to be able to provide a series of free classes that will be open to the public on saving seed as an outcome of this grant. Stay tuned for the release of dates and topics to be covered in this series later this winter/spring.

The producers we will be working with come from a variety of backgrounds and have varying interests around saving seed. One producer will be focusing on early childhood education and will be growing and saving seed with little kiddos. Another wants to focus on high tunnel seed crops like tomatoes, peppers, and cucumbers. And one participant will be focusing on native seed, which could help us gain valuable information on the viability of using native plants for restoration and pollinator plots. This grant will be focused on learning, experimenting, and sharing knowledge, but we also hope that it leads to creating and sustaining commercial markets for seed as well.



Cover Crop Field Day

BY MONICA KOPP

In September, we hosted our second annual Cover Crops Field Day, where we invited the public out to our cover crop variety trial at the Walker hayfield. We are in our second year of the trial, which is meant to test 23 different varieties of cover crops for seeding rates, phenology, biomass and ground cover, and a number of other factors. Our Field Day was September 8, and despite a grim forecast of wind and rain, we had surprisingly mild weather and had about 20 people stop by to walk around the field and learn about cover crops and how they can be utilized to achieve various goals.



Soil Health Expert Visits

BY KYRA WAGNER

Back in July, the Salcha-Delta Soil and Water Conservation District held their annual Soil Health Day and invited guest speaker and soil guru Jay Fuher. Fuher is a world-renowned expert in soil health management practices from Bismark, North Dakota where he works on a 150-acre demonstration farm.

While touring the state, Fuher made it to Homer. On July 27th he was joined by local growers as well as NRCS and Homer Soil and Water staff out at the Walker Field at the site of the cover crop variety trials.

Fuher described the methods that the Menoken Farm uses to keep their soils vibrant and alive. They are a no till farm that utilizes cover crops, compost and vermiculture, rotational grazing and a high tunnel.

It was clear there are new paradigms in agriculture. There is much to learn. Check out the farm's website (<https://MenokenFarm.com>) and fill your mind with more insights on soil with their ample supply of YouTube videos.





Strawberry Towers

BY KYRA WAGNER

This year, thanks to support from a Division of Agriculture Specialty Crop Block Grant, Homer Soil and Water has joined forces with Oceanside Farms and Agrability to identify techniques for growing strawberries that would get them out of the ground. We wanted to see what would be successful here but exclude the back-breaking bending over and hopefully defeat the army of slugs also lurking on the ground.

Don McNamara and Donna Rae Faulkner are trialing three different designs for growing the strawberries above ground. Two are different trough designs from narrow rain gutters or wide roofing and the third design is a tower out of PVC.

The designs will be judged by their ergonomics but also by how different varieties of strawberries survive in them over the winter. The winning design will then be installed in the Kenai Food Bank's high tunnel as well at the high tunnel at the Anchor Point Senior Center.



A Special Thank You

TO DESIREE HAGEN

For producing and collaborating with Homer Soil and Water on her KBBI radio show promoting local agriculture and natural habitats. It's a thing of beauty Des!

Homer Grown
Saturday @ 11 AM
KBBI
AM 890 | KBBI.ORG
HOMER ALASKA

Meet the Staff



Nicole Arevalo, Outreach Coordinator nicole@homerswcd.org

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 and the executive assistant to the President of the Alaska Association of Conservation Districts

Jen Chauvet, Natural Resources Specialist jen@homerswcd.org

After two decades of work as a park ranger, naturalist, and environmental educator, Jen joined the HSWCD invasive species team in the fall of 2021, where she focuses much of her time on invasive species outreach and education. In her spare time, you can find Jen tending her modest garden, purposely getting lost in nature, and chasing her rowdy dogs down the beach.



Casey Greenstein, Invasive Species Specialist casey@homerswcd.org

Casey has her own private business addressing invasive weeds and soil contaminants but has joined the ranks at Homer Soil and Water to bring her expertise to the invasives program.

Patrick Houlihan, Invasives Program Field Coordinator patrick@homerswcd.org

For just over a year Patrick has loved working with HSWCD as Invasives Program Field Coordinator., He also still works with Alaska Department of Fish and Game where he has enjoyed all kinds of salmon and habitat related fieldwork for over 20 seasons.



Matt James, Forester mattjames@homerswcd.org

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

Monica Kopp, Ag Program Coordinator nicole@homerswcd.org

Monica was originally hired for our NRCS Soil Survey field work because of her excellent background in botany and soils. But then we discovered her passion for agriculture and her dedication to the soil of her own new farm. Now she does soil nutrient recommendations and leads our cover crop trials.



Devony Lehner, Natural Resource Specialist devony@homerswcd.org

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.

Katherine Schake, Invasive Species Program Manager katherine@homerswcd.org

Katherine is our Invasive Species Manager. 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 is a new mom and maintains a passion for botany and birding.



Kyra Wagner, District Manager kyra@homerswcd.org

Kyra has now been with the district for six years. After years of experience as a general community volunteer she is now 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 in and what the latest issue may be.

Board of Supervisors



Otto Kilcher
Vice Chair

Charlie Trowbridge
Secretary
(not shown)

Jason Ritter
Treasurer

Jim Engebretson
AACD Rep

Chris Rainwater
Board Chair

Board Elections

A CALL FOR NOMINATIONS

Interested in running for a seat on the board? Now is the time!

Nominations by petition will be accepted to fill eligible seats on the Homer Soil and Water Conservation District Board of Supervisors. Seat A and Seat B have a three-year term that expires on December 31, 2025.

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., Friday, November 18, 2022. 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., Friday, November 18, 2022.

An election will be held in December 2022, unless no new nominations are submitted.

Homer Soil and Water is an Equal Opportunity Provider and Employer.

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

Download a nomination form here:

http://www.homerswcd.org/user-files//Call_For_Nominations_2022.doc

Become a Cooperator

IT'S LIKE MEMBERSHIP

Have you signed a cooperator agreement with the District? The simple, 1-page agreement documents that the individual or organization wants to "cooperate" with District efforts by developing and managing their lands in ways that reflect land and water suitabilities, as well as good management practices. You must own or manage land on the southern Kenai Peninsula.

Cooperators can participate in elections and run for positions on the Board of supervisors. It's free and easy, sign up today!

You can fill out a form online at: <https://form.jotform.com/210335561361043>



Special Thanks
TO ALL OUR
PARTNERS!

