

Natural Currents

“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.”



WINTER ISSUE:

- Caribou Lake Road Access
- Protecting Water Quality In the KPB
- Natural Resource Technologies Class Update
- Recreational uses of the NRCS Snow Survey

Board of Supervisors

- Chris Rainwater, Chair
- Jim VanOss
- Devony Lehner
- Otto Kilcher
- Pete Roberts

Alternate:

- Steve Gibson

District Staff

- Tara Schmidt, District Manager
- Al Poindexter, Education Coordinator

CARIBOU LAKE REMOTE PARCELS: LOOKING FOR GOOD ACCESS

Homer Soil and Water Conservation District hosted a public meeting in November to support efforts to acquire legal, long term access to properties in the Caribou Lake subdivisions. The Homer District has worked with many land owners in this area during the construction of the boardwalk trail that leads to the individual lots in the nearby area. During the past several months individuals have come into the District's office seeking recommendations on how to best address the increased recreational use of the area, and the subsequent impact to the area's sensitive soils and water quality.

Approximately 85 landowners showed up at the Homer City Council Chambers to hear what others had to say. Also present were three representatives from the State Department of Natural Resources (DNR), a representative from the Borough Road Service Area, Borough assembly member Milli Martin and legislative aides for Rep. Paul Seaton and Senator Gary Stevens. The discussion at this meeting was primarily centered on the need to upgrade the existing road from Basargin to the parking lot at the trail head, and to establish adequate parking for recreationalist. It was agreed that if traffic could be directed along a single route to the trail head this would decrease the amount of ATV traffic crossing the swamps to get onto the trail.

(see page 2)

District Assesses Current Borough Ordinances

The Homer District recently met with Kenai Peninsula Borough and state agency personnel to assess the needs of local ordinances to ensure protection of salmon stream water quality. After much discussion, three issues came out as clearly needing some modification; a need to update the existing flood plain mapping, the Borough's river set-back ordinance and the Borough subdivision ordinance.

Currently the KPB does manage a flood plain ordinance to minimize flood risk and associated economic losses. This ordinance is based on the National Flood Insurance Program (set by FEMA) which measures risk of damage to structures in flood plains based on the 100-year flood. It was pointed out early in the meeting that this ordinance is limited in both scope and expanse *(see pg 2)*

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since flood plain mapping only exists on the Anchor, Ninilchik and Deep Creek Rivers below the Sterling Highway bridges. Due to expanding development upstream of the bridges it was clear that more mapping was needed. Extensive flood plain mapping would allow the Borough to develop a flood plain management plan to protect and enhance the value of our flood plains. A comprehensive flood plain management plan would help to minimize impact on water quality due to further development in these areas.

Borough ordinance 21.18, Anadromous Streams Habitat Protection, addresses development within 50 feet of streams identified in the "Atlas and Catalogue of Waters Important for Spawning, Rearing, or Migration of Anadromous Fish" published by Alaska Dept of Fish and Game. Twenty five streams in KPB (including 10 tributaries to the Kenai River) are catalogued, and thus covered by this ordinance. The ordinance was originally written in 1996 to protect water quality and riparian habitat along the Kenai River, specifically walk ways that were being installed to protect the river bank. In 2000 the ordinance was expanded to include all catalogued rivers, however due to the varied stream morphology across the river systems in KPB, this one-size-fits all approach may not be adequate to truly ensure the protections this ordinance was written for. Whereas the Kenai River flows in an entrenched riverbed, Deep Creek, the Ninilchik and

Anchor River naturally migrates across a wide flood plain and through wide wetlands so a 50 foot set back would not be enough to protect these streams.

The third issue of concern that came up during this discussion was the proposed KPB ordinances targeted at improving current road standards. There was consensus that in the upcoming work sessions addressing road standards, culvert installation needs to be prioritized. Currently stream crossings are not adequately addressed, often times this leads to substandard stream crossings when culverts become crushed due to not enough gravel cover, or culverts are not wide enough, significantly altering stream hydrology, resulting in the development of a "perched" culvert. Poorly designed culverts impede the migration of salmon, limiting their habitat.

The outcome of the meeting was to encourage the Borough Assembly to pass a resolution in support of salmon stream protection, and agreeing to address issues that compromise the aquatic ecology of our rivers. One suggestion was to convene a task force with representation from across the Borough to address the needs for water quality protection. The District will continue to work closely with Borough Assembly members to improve local ordinances.

Caribou Lake Access Road continued from pg 1

The consensus of those at the meeting was that it's a high priority to gravel the road, ideally improving it to Borough standards so the Borough could maintain it during the winter months. The other high priority action identified at the meeting was getting an as-built survey of the newly aligned Caribou Lake trail in order to get formal road and trail easements from DNR. Once state easements have been granted, raising funds for maintenance and improvements could be much easier.

As a result of this meeting, a working committee was established to investigate potential solutions, including

completing the as-built survey to secure the trail easement, identifying funding sources, lobbying elected officials for assistance and support, and organizing a work force to actually construct the road.

Recently the Homer Snomads has agreed to sponsor this committee so as to collect donations from property owners to be used for completion of the proposed road. The Road Access committee is meeting in the Homer District conference room on Tuesdays. If you are interested in participating call our office for meeting times.

NATURAL RESOURCE TECHNOLOGY CLASS UPDATE

The District sponsored Natural Resource Technologies class, offered through the Homer High School, is running smoothly with 13 very involved students. Students spent a full day at Bear Creek and Trail Lakes Hatchery assisting with catching Coho salmon, taking eggs, collecting sperm, doing kidney biopsies, and all in the middle of a “typhoon.” Students discovered the role of hatcheries in the conservation of salmon and the work it takes to make it happen.

Students also spent a day in Palmer where they milked 74 cows, bottle fed calves, and moved manure and straw at the Havermiester Dairy. They then sorted and bagged carrots at the VanderWheel Farm for three hours and from there spent several more hours doing tissue culture and DNA extraction at the UAF experiment station. These students got a sense of the commitment, skills, and effort it really takes for food production.

Other class projects include time spent with NRCS Engineer Jeff Rypka and Soil Conservationist Craig Saunders learning basic surveying and GPS skills. Many now have the required skills and understanding

to qualify to serve on survey crews as Earth Team volunteers.

Students worked two long afternoons as volunteers assisting the local Share the Spirit program that raises funds for those in need over the Holidays. They have also cut and split three cords of wood they hope to sell as a fundraiser to support their supply and travel needs.

All the while, they are wrapping up the semester completing their plans for a supervised agriculture experience and preparing for a final exam on water, biodiversity, ecology, leadership skills, and other topics. Students say they are looking forward to next semester when they begin preparing for speech contests, the state Envirothon, CTSO conference, winter activities and other activities on their Program of Work.

As a special mark of achievement, a local citizen was so impressed with some of the accomplishments of the program and students that he has donated \$2000 to help them with their activities. Students are very grateful and have pledged that they will gain maximum benefit from the donation.

RECREATIONAL USES OF SNOW SURVEYS

Planning a recreational outing? Need to know how to wax your skis? Take advantage of the NRCS snow survey sites to get up-to-date information. The NRCS operates two local SNOTEL (snow pack telemetry) sites that use meteor burst technology to collect and communicate data in near-real-time. One site is located at McNeil Canyon Elementary School, ideal for skiers heading out to the trails. A second site is located at the head waters of the Anchor River, helpful for those heading out via snow machine and would like to know snow depth. There are several sites maintained throughout the state, including one at Alyeska. You can connect to these sites with the following link: <http://www.ak.nrcs.usda.gov/Snow/data/>

These SNOTEL sites are part of a more comprehensive snow survey program that the NRCS manages in



Maintenance of a SNOTEL site at Bradley Lake

Alaska. In addition to SNOTEL sites, snow courses have been established as sites where snow pack is manually measured throughout the winter for depth, density and snow layering. This data is used to forecast spring runoff, summer stream flow, and potential groundwater recharge. This information is used by area land managers to predict fire danger and water supply. Two sites locally are in the Homer Demonstration Forest and at Bridge Creek.

To find out more about the various programs the Homer District is involved with visit our website at www.homerswcd.org

UPCOMING EVENTS & DEADLINES

- January 9 HSWCD Board of Supervisors Meeting 5:00
- January 12 AACD Board Meeting, Anchorage 9:00
- January 15 Caribou Lake Road Access Meeting 4:00
- TBA Homer Demonstration Forest Steering Committee Meeting

Homer Soil and Water conservation Board Member Appointments:

Two board seats were up for nomination this year, seats A & B. Chris Rainwater and Jim VanOss have been appointed to fill these positions by Dick LeFebvre of DNR. These seats are 3 year terms. Chris and Van have both served previously and their local knowledge is greatly valued.

The Soil and Water Board of Supervisors is made up of local District Cooperators who volunteer to represent landowners, farmers, businesses that use land, educators and all citizens within the District boundaries. The public is always invited to attend our monthly meetings.



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