

Memorandum to: Department of Natural Resources
From: Homer Soil and Water Conservation District
Subject: Annual Report
Date: August 19, 2008

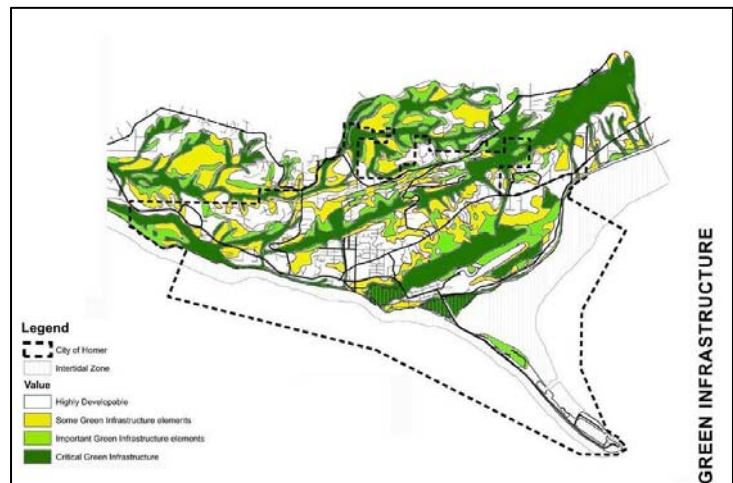
This represents the annual report of the Homer Soil and Water Conservation District (HSWCD) for fiscal year 2008 (July 1, 2007 – June 30th, 2008). This report fulfills a component of the cooperative agreement between the Alaska Department of Natural Resources and the Homer Soil and Water Conservation District, as specified in cooperative agreements with the Department of Natural Resources and the Alaska Association of Conservation Districts.

Program Goals

The Homer District conducted its annual assessment of progress toward completion of the 2008 plan of work.

Goal 1: Land Use Planning

Watershed Planning: The Homer District completed the first phase of a 2-year, EPA funded project to develop GIS-based landscape suitability maps that could help guide development in the Homer area. The suitability maps are designed to integrate economic, ecological, and recreational land use patterns into the planning process. These maps identify highly developable land, based on physical features providing either “green infrastructure” functions or affecting construction costs, as well as prime conservation lands that are beneficial to watershed resiliency. Mapping these two land categories in a GIS allows users to view overlapping areas, providing a tool that facilitates land use planning maximizing both economic and ecological values. The green infrastructure map was included in the City of Homer draft comprehensive plan.



Generalized Green Infrastructure map created for our Landscape Suitability map series. This map was adopted into the draft comprehensive plan for the City of Homer. To view all maps and the certification program visit the project's website www.suitabilitymaps.org

The Homer District is finalizing a Certification Program that trains developers to use these maps when planning projects. The program will also provide incentives to

encourage use of “best stewardship practices.” Possible financial incentives have been identified to encourage developer participation in the certification process. Stewardship practices promoted by the program focus on landscape functions, such as stormwater storage or slope stabilization, and on public amenities and landscape “connectivity” provided by trails or wildlife habitat. The Homer District held a series of public workshops in early summer 2008 to introduce these maps to land use managers, developers, and regulatory agencies. This mapping project provides a template for developing similar GIS-based suitability maps and certification programs for other communities. The Homer District has received several inquiries from other Alaskan communities interested in developing similar programs.

The Homer District, in partnership with the USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service, managed the 2008 snow survey. Snow pack was measured and data recorded January through March at several sites across the lower Kenai Peninsula. This data is used for streamflow forecasting.

District staff continued its participation in the Kenai Peninsula Wetland Working Group strategic planning sessions, chaired by the Kenai Peninsula EPA project manager for Southcentral Alaska. The goal of this working group is to identify local needs to better manage wetlands and to address water quality concerns. Participation in this group has allowed the District to develop key partnerships with local agencies and has led to collaboration on research efforts.

Recreational Planning:



Trail crew, working on the installation of boardwalk in the Homer Demonstration Forest. This project was completed in the summer of 2007.

The Homer District completed several trail projects during the 2008 fiscal year. The Homer Demonstration Forest (HDF) was the focus for three of these. The District, with funding from the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program, completed, a 7-km hiking trail, including the installation of 2000 ft of boardwalk. In July 2007, the Homer District began work on a State of Alaska Recreational Trails

Grant for trail improvements and signage on HDF trails. Trail improvements are continuing this summer. Seven large ArcMap-based

signs showing trail routes have been installed at trail junctions, along with corresponding color-coded diamond markers.

An outreach and trail signage project in the Caribou Hills Special Use Area was another District accomplishment for 2008. Funded in part through a State Trails Recreational

grant, this project included an educational component identifying for trail users where trails cross private property. Fifty signs were installed within the Caribou Hills Special Use Area trail system, and informational kiosks were installed at four trailheads. These kiosks outline trail etiquette and provide maps showing landownership and public easement information.

This past winter, the Homer District responded to resource concerns raised by landowners and recreationalists accessing remote parcels around Caribou Lake. The District has taken the lead in facilitating public meetings involving all stakeholders and in developing plans to address soil and wetland degradation caused by the lack of suitable access. In November 2007, the District held a public meeting attended by over 80 individuals. The consensus of those at the meeting was that it is a high priority to obtain a legal easement for the recently completed boardwalk trail to Caribou Lake (developed through District efforts), as well as along the road to the trailhead, as well as to upgrade the existing access road for year-round use.

The Homer District continues to work with stakeholders from the Caribou Lake area to address resource concerns and to ensure legal access to this popular recreational area. Through fund raising efforts by Caribou Lake property owners, money was secured to conduct a resource grade survey along the board walk trail. In June, the Homer District secured funding through the Natural Resources Conservation Development Board to finalize the survey of the existing trailhead road, beginning where it leaves private property and continuing to the trailhead. The Homer District will continue to work with the Easement Unit in DNR to integrate these two surveys and secure public easements.

Goal 2: Water Quality

Monitor water quality: The Homer District has completed several water quality projects in the last fiscal year, from water quality monitoring to habitat improvement in anadromous streams. In June 2008, the District completed a project funded by an Alaska Clean Water Action Grant (ACWA) awarded by the Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation. This project involved monitoring water quality in the Ninilchick River, Deep Creek, and the Anchor River. These streams had been identified as high priority waters because in each, state temperature standards for water quality and salmon habitat had been exceeded. Data collected this past year completes 10 years of baseline water quality monitoring; this information can be used to determine baseline conditions, including natural variations in measured parameters.

Improve salmon habitat: The ACWA grant also partially funded an assessment of water quality impacts associated with trails in the Caribou Hills. This study was initiated in summer 2007 and completed summer 2008. Many trails in the Caribou Hills follow seismic lines or decommissioned logging roads, routes which were not designed for the use they now receive. As a result, wetlands and riparian and aquatic habitats crossed by these trails are now experiencing adverse impacts as a result of trails becoming rutted and braided, streambanks and wetlands being degraded, and erosion being increased.



Typical braided trail from ATV users looking for drier ground, west side of Deep Creek approximately ¼ mile from the crossing.

The Homer District identified the Water Hole Trail as a high priority for upgrading because this trail serves as a main access into the popular Caribou Hills backcountry area. The Water Hole trail lies within the Deep Creek watershed and serves as a primary east-west corridor in the Caribou Hills. This trail becomes of particular concern during the fall months when it experiences heavy use during moose hunting season, a period that coincides

with periods of high rainfall. District staff, working closely with the easement staff of the DNR Division of Mining, Land & Water and the

National Park Service River, Trails and Conservation Assistance, realigned sections of this trail onto more suitable soils where possible. For sections where rerouting is not feasible, the District has secured funding through the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program to install a porous trail hardening product to establish a single corridor for ATV traffic. Further improvements to the Water Hole trail are scheduled to begin in July 2008.

Poorly designed road crossings of anadromous streams have degraded salmon habitats. Such crossings can alter stream hydrology, leading to channel constriction and/or development of “perched” culverts. The Homer District Board of Supervisors identified as a high priority improving fish passage through perched culverts, and subsequently undertook planning for several culvert replacement projects in partnership with the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service and the US Fish & Wildlife Service. The Homer District has identified and secured funding through these agencies to replace three perched culverts within the Anchor River watershed.



Santiago Lane, Northeast of Anchor Point, This 24 inch perched culvert creates a barrier to juvenile salmon. The Homer District has the plans completed to replace this during the summer of 2008.

The first culvert replacement project is located northeast of Anchor Point on a tributary of the Chakok River. Engineering designs have been completed and permits obtained for this project, and the anticipated completion date is August 15, 2008. Upon project completion, almost 2 miles of previously inaccessible stream habitat will be accessible to spawning salmon. The Homer District has also

contracted for replacement of two culverts on Beaver Creek, east of Homer, and these projects are expected to be completed in the coming year.

Goal 3: Agriculture

Support agriculture: The Homer District considers it a high priority to provide local agricultural producers with assistance in planning and implementing recommended conservation practices. As part of outreach efforts, the Homer District continued last fiscal year to produce and distribute quarterly newsletters. The newsletter is mailed to all cooperators, as well as to numerous agency and organizational partners, and provides updates on District programs and assistance, as well as on conservation assistance funded through the USDA. The District has continued to provide technical assistance related to farm plans, has provided both soil sampling and forage testing, and has provided hay producers with the opportunity to have their hay crops certified as weed free. The HSWCD Board of Supervisors also developed criteria for identifying “Soils of Local Importance,” and the resulting list of soils was submitted to the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service as part of its effort to catalogue soils important for agricultural production.

Manage invasive weeds: The Homer District in the main lead for the Kenai Peninsula Cooperative Weed Management Area (KP-CWMA). Working closely with the technical advisory committee the KP-CWMA completed and signed off on a Strategic Management plan, the focus of which is to coordinate management efforts on “new” invaders within the CWMA and eradicate small infestations of the highest priority invasive plants.

Last year the Homer District, working with the KP-CWMA, completed a survey along primary and secondary roads to document the extent of invasive reed canary grass (RCG) on Western Kenai Peninsula. In the fall of 2007, the Homer District hosted two leading researchers with extensive experience in the control and eradication of RCG. Using the researchers the Homer District organized field trips with several interested land management agencies to a variety of sites that are representative of the Kenai Peninsula including: wetlands, riparian corridors, agricultural lands, roadsides, and oil and gas pads. The researchers were able to work with the CWMA technical advisory committee to provide recommendations for RCG control methods and also helped design test trials for assessing the effectiveness of control methods. These trials began in the summer of 2008. The Homer District, in coordination with the Alaska Association of Conservation Districts Invasive Plant Program Coordinator, set up the test sites and will continue to monitor them in the coming years.

During the past year the Homer District successfully managed three Invasive Plant Program (IPP) grants, awarded through the Association of Conservation Districts. The first grant showcased the efficacy of best management practices for eradication of orange hawkweed (OHW). This aggressive plant has taken over lawns and road right-of-ways and is now spreading onto pasturelands and trail corridors in and around Kenai Peninsula

communities. Identified as an important local resource issue, due in part to the extent of local hawkweed spread and the volume of requests for information about OHW, the Homer District took on an integrated pest management of OHW and then organized a field trip to speak with local landowners with interest in controlling hawkweed.

The Homer District, working with a local landowner, continues to develop best manage practices for control of this invasive weed.

Canada thistle was targeted as well. Homer reported two infestations and the District responded with an integrated control effort of mowing and fall herbicide applications. This spring the site was assessed, and the density of thistle has been dramatically reduced; only a few patches remain. The next stage is to eliminate these patches and re-vegetate the affected area.



Test plots for orange hawkweed demonstration project. The Homer District, working with a local landowner, continues to develop best management practices for control of this invasive weed

A third IPP grant managed through the Homer District was an education and outreach grant. Two new kiosks were constructed in Homer to hold invasive plant outreach material to both increase awareness and to solicit help in reporting new infestations. Several community weed pulls were sponsored in the Homer area, targeting common tansy, perennial sow thistle, and fall dandelion. The Homer District hosted an informational booth at the Kenai Peninsula State Fair, in Ninilchik, providing outreach material on invasive weeds. The 6th Annual CWMA Weed Workshop was held in Soldotna on May 1, 2008. Over 90 participants listened in on topics such as Climate Change and Invasive Plant Movement and Reed Canary Grass and River Systems. A weed identification workshop, sponsored by UAA Natural Heritage Program was held as well.

Goal 4: Education

Continuation of accredited High School program: The Homer District provided funding for a quarter-time Education Coordinator to teach Natural Resources Technologies class, in partnership with the Homer High School. Enrollment was up from previous years, with 16 students completing the class. The high school students participated in several field trips, beginning with the annual weekend canoe trip in early October. Other field trips included participation at the Alaska Forum on the Environment, a trip to a Stariski oil platform operated by Pioneer Oil and Gas, and student presentations at the West Coast Hatcherys, Manager Conference in Seward and the Alaska Farm Bureau meeting in Homer. The Homer High School students traveled to Chena in the spring to participate in the 2008 State Envirothon, finishing 1st place overall, earning the right to represent Alaska at the National Envirothon in Arizona in the in the



Homer High School students from the Natural Resource Technologies class at the FFA convention in Indianapolis, Indiana. This team of five students placed 2nd in the nation in the Natural Resources competition

summer of 2008. The Education Coordinator also serves as the advisor for the Homer FAA Chapter. This past year, Homer FFA students traveled to the FAA National Convention in Indianapolis, Indiana and placed second place overall in the Natural Resources competition.

The Homer District once again sponsored an annual poster contest in the District elementary schools and a speech contest in the Middle and High Schools. The theme last year was *Water is Life*, over 75 poster entries were entered and 8 speech contestants participated.

Goal 5: Forestry

Research projects: The Homer District received funding through a Community Forestry grant to conduct a mulching experiment in the Homer Demonstration Forest. This project was initiated to address the concerns about the propagation of *Calamagrostis canadensis*, or bluejoint reedgrass. Bluejoint tends to shade and out compete other vegetation and creates a dense, hummocky root mat that insulates the ground, preventing soil warming in spring and early summer. Because of its aggressive, highly competitive growth habit, bluejoint often prevents natural regeneration of spruce in areas where the spruce bark beetle has decimated mature trees.

Maintain interagency cooperation: The Homer District continued to facilitate quarterly meetings of the Homer Demonstration Forest Steering Committee. As part of its interagency forestry efforts, the District has developed a close working relationship with the Alaska Division of Forestry forest stewardship program. Plans have been developed to provide technical support for resource inventories, which are required as part of forest stewardship plans on private, non-industrial forest lands. The District anticipates collaborating with the DOF and the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service state forester on forestry outreach and research projects in the coming year.

Goal 6: Administration and Management

Maintain public presence: In the past fiscal year, the Homer District continued to staff its office during normal business hours so as to better serve its cooperators and the public. The District Board of Supervisor held monthly meetings open to the public, during which it interacted with an array of landowners and land managers, who brought to the District Board a variety of resource concerns. The District continued to maintain its website, and expanded the mailing list for its quarterly newsletter to include over 350 people,

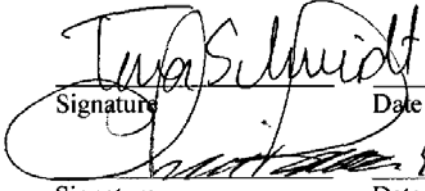
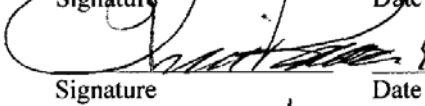

organizations, and agencies. Many District projects were highlighted in local news media, with several stories on local radio stations and areawide newspapers.

Provide oversight and guidance to all HSWCD projects: The District Manger to provided oversight and administration of all Districts projects as well as maintained program budgets, including documentation of expenditures. The District employed 3 full time equivalent staff members, and additional two summer trail crew employees during the fiscal year.

Financial Report

Quick book reports are attached.

Signatures

TARA SCHMIDT Report prepared by	 Signature	9-16-08 Date
CHRIS RAIN WATER District Chair	 Signature	9-16-08 Date
 District Board Member	Devony Lehner Signature	9-16-08 Date