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Draft Meeting Minutes

September 13th, 2017

5:30 PM

USDA Service Center, 4014 Lake St Homer, AK

- A. Call to order: 6pm
- B. Roll call: Catherine Knott, Gena Grobarek, Chris Rainwater, Meg Mueller, Tim Alzheimer, Devony Lehner (and Chris brought a pen!)
- C. Approval of the Agenda: accepted
- D. Approval of the Minutes: Motioned to approve by Tim, 2nd by Gena, approved
- E. Visitors
 - a. NRCS Report

Conservation Planning and Programs:

EQIP - 44 contracts obligated in Homer, several non-high tunnel projects in three rounds of funding (93 in South Hub, 125 in Alaska). Nine eligible KP applications will carry over to 2018 of funding. New or deferred applications number 61, as of today. Application deadline not able to be announced until payment schedules and ranking tools have been published for 30d.

Conservation Client Gateway is available to entities and individuals. Participants can electronically view, sign and send documents and track payments. Karin's client emailed a glowing review of experience. <https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/national/cgate/>

- *Maybe HSWCD can lead classes for recipients on how to use this resource?*

Local Working Group prep and facilitation tasks can be funded using NRCS cooperative agreement funds, as those are not normal district functions they are Farm Bill functions. Can either include in a new proposal, or if room in one of two current agreements can use those funds. What about a Farm Bill applications seminar? Plan – Eligibility – Application process. Push for planning...

National Conservation Planning Partnership - NCPP represents the efforts of five key national conservation partners, to reinvigorate conservation planning by enhancing and strengthening the planning process and our partnership workforce. (summarized from NCPP Talking Points)

Partners include:

- **Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)**
- **National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD)**
- National Association of State Conservation Agencies (NASCA)
- National Conservation District Employees Association (NCDEA)
- National Association of Resource Conservation and Development Councils (NARC&DC)

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Conservation planning is the foundation for voluntary conservation delivery.

- It helps landowners make informed decisions about where to target efforts so that they can get the greatest return on their investment and make improvements to their land.
- Most importantly, conservation planning helps American farmers, ranchers and foresters make conservation work for them by improving economic, social, and environmental conditions that will benefit all Americans.

Quality conservation planning provides the knowledge and assistance needed to help keep families on their farms.

- High-quality conservation plans can transform our future by giving landowners and operators step-by-step recommendations they can use to improve wildlife habitat, pest management, soil health, and yields while reducing energy and input costs.
- We are working with our partners to expand our capacity to deliver conservation planning and technical services to customers who live in urban areas or on tribal lands, have just started farming, farm organic or specialty crops, or once served in the military.

World class conservation takes world class planners.

- A well-trained conservation planning staff, supported by a cadre of technical specialists is key to providing high quality conservation planning.
- New emphasis will be placed on the economic benefits of conservation, landscape-scale planning, soil health improvement, knowledge sharing across the conservation partnership, and confidently communicating with our customers in a way that leads to an understanding about the natural resources on their land.

Nationally standardized and locally implemented Conservation Planner Role Designations.

- Through improved training and the right set of tools, NCPP will build capacity and experience, and foster an awareness of the benefits of providing consistent conservation planning services to our customers.
- Our workforce will have the ability to seamlessly move across state boundaries while addressing the unique natural resource conditions and challenges our customers face.

Natural resource concerns do not stop at the edge of the field.

- Conservation planning helps to connect what happens on one farm with what happens on neighboring farms so that measurable natural resource improvements *can be realized on the broader landscape or watershed.*

Working Lands for Wildlife

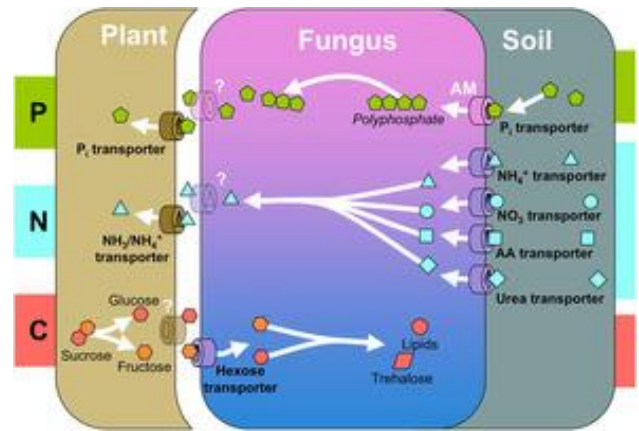
NRCS Engineer and I met with USFWS Kenai staff this week to discuss their progress in evaluating impairments this summer. There were 29 known impairments, the crews discovered many more this summer, though approximately 8 are in particular need of treatment at this time.

Conservation Crop Rotation – changes to the way this is implemented in high tunnels coming in 2018. A small grain will need to be in rotation, either in the fall or spring.

Scenario: -Vegetable crop to late summer 2018,
-harvest and remove residue,
-plant dense cereal grain seeding late summer, fall 2018 or early spring 2019
-grow grain plants to 4”,
-till in or plant into spring 2019.

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Soil Health – Mycorrhizae are All. The. Rage.



Other:

Homer Staffing – Ryan’s replacement advertised sometime after FY. Unclear whether it will be done under a CR (effective til 12/8). No longer discussing additional planners for field.

Reorganization - Includes creation of the Farm Production and Conservation (FPAC) Mission area – a new mission area for the agencies which impact farmers and ranchers most directly: FSA, NRCS, and RMA. The mission of the FPAC agencies is not changing.

The goal for the FPAC mission area is to focus our collective strengths and harness our delivery of services, programs, and benefits more effectively and efficiently to achieve greater customer service.

Proposed changes in our organization to improve customer service by realigning:

- Procurement and transportation of international commodities performed on behalf of the Foreign Agricultural Service and the U.S. Agency for International Development to the Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) consistent with the domestic food aid procurements that were realigned to AMS a few years ago;
- U.S. Warehouse Act activities including licensing, inspecting, and auditing federal warehouses; and Commodity Credit Corporation storage agreements to the AMS consistent with its mission; and
- The national-level administrative functions of FSA, NRCS and RMA to the FPAC Mission Area to improve efficiency, effectiveness, and accountability while providing an enterprise-level strategic view in support of the nation’s farmers and ranchers and the employees who serve them.

Our USDA mission is not changing. We will continue to provide expert service and support solutions even as these functions are realigned for better overall service and effectiveness.

The Agency Heads of FSA, NRCS, RMA and AMS will work together to plan and identify necessary next steps to ensure a smooth transition and minimal disruption to any operations and services to our customers and to you, our valued employees. (summarized from the Acting Deputy Undersecretary agency communication)

Meg Out of Office: Around the Holidays... which are around the corner!

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F. Financial Report: Motioned to approve by Gena, 2nd by Catherine, approved

G. Manager's Report

Trails

- **Caribou Lakes Trail:** No local drone operators with mapping skills have been identified.
- **Watermelon Trail:** A second SCA crew came to town to wrap up work on the Watermelon Trail. The weather did not cooperate, but they were able to get a few days in. Of particular note was their trip out after the big storm of September 5th. A couple dozen trees had fallen across the trail in many different areas, including the new reroute. The crew used our GPS camera to document the locations. Snomads plan to clear the trail. A meeting with all the stakeholders is planned for the end of Sept.
- **School Yard Habitat Trails:** School Yard Habitats are moving along. Brad & Matt cleared all the trails at the start of the school year. A load of gravel has been delivered to a trail access point and typar or weed block will be provided for running club volunteers to begin patching up sections of damp or uneven trail. Designs are complete for the bridge that will be going in behind the middle school. If no interest is shown by staff soon, Matt & Brad will get it built. McNeil Canyon Elementary is having wood delivered for an outdoor classroom this Friday, Costal Studies is working with teachers to decide what kind of interpretive signs they would like and Conrad Field is working with teachers to develop the ID cards for the students to take out on field trips and trails at the school.

Invasive Pest Coordination

- **Chugach National Forest/RAC grant work:** Field staff have been working on the USFS RAC project on the northern peninsula, treating multiple sites on USFS land and DOT ROW.
- **Cooperative Weed Management:** WE GOT FUNDING! We are in the initial stages of drafting a Cost-Share program that will allow for the use of herbicide. The City of Homer and KHLT have already expressed enthusiasm to get on board. Matt will be meeting with the City of Homer beginning in October to draft a comprehensive invasive plant management plan and conducting a presentation to the City Council in November. Matt assisted KHLT with invasive surveys on three parcels for their stewardship program, including a new 302 acre property in the Bridge Creek Watershed. Matt is registered for the annual Committee for Noxious and Invasive Pest Management conference on October 24-26 in Anchorage
- **Elodea:** Permitting is moving forward on the two small unnamed lakes in North Kenai where Elodea was recently detected. An emergency exemption has been issued by the commissioner and we are hoping to apply as early as next week.

NRCS

- **We got funding to bring Devony back on board!** She will be working on contracts with NRCS, helping with various aspects of compliance work.
- **Snow Survey:** Clearing of snow survey sites has begun, with only Eagle Lake and McNeil remaining. Tony came down from Palmer and brought some new posts for the sites that are missing them.
- **Technology:** Matt has received his LinkPASS card and level 2 eAuth account, but is still having trouble accessing the federal computers to begin assisting NRCS. Troubleshooting continues. Hopefully Devony's process will go more smoothly. Also in the process to get another NRCS computer

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Local Food

- **Consumer study:** Kyra and Jessica are in the planning stages.
- **Producer study:** Brad and Kyra starting planning discussions.

Grants

- **Fish and Wildlife:** Yeah! \$40,000 for this year, with \$40,000 for next year written in even if it's not yet obligated.
- **USDA:** (grant for identifying producer needs for business development for direct to consumer sales) Part of a larger grant hosted by Cook Inletkeeper. It's looking like we might get it. ? It's a maybe.
- **BLM:** All funds available now. Charlotte Crowder is our new employee on board now.
- **NRCS:** The new certified technical assistance agreement for NRCS will come to \$50,000. Funding in Oct.
- **ACWA Grant:** (Anchor River streambank erosion project) Still waiting to hear. Planning to apply for a Kenai Fish Habitat Partnership grant to replace some of the steps listed in this grant.

Upcoming events

- November 3-4 Alaska Farm Bureau in Homer. Kyra presenting on the KP Food Hub
- Kyra will then immediately take off for two weeks of vacation

Rhodiola Update

- Looking at the old paperwork, there is no indications regarding expectations for the future use of the equipment.
- Al has been processing for one other grower, Stas Kalugin, and will do about a a ton and a half between his and Stas' roots. They have built a dehydrator and are using that as well. No other Rhodiola grower has contacted him about harvest.
- MOA? Should we set up something like the People's Garden rototiller?
- Just FYI: Al has sold 11,000 lbs of produce off his place this year. 3500lbs of tomatoes, 3500lbs of cucumbers, 640 of cabbage just yesterday.

4Wheeler!!!! What do we do to get it fixed? Chris will take it to Jason.

H. Old Business

- a. **Cooperator List!!!** All board members to work in finding contact info

I. New Business

- a. Borough Comp Plan Ag section
 - i. Food sovereignty words, highlight education more, on "where are we now" should have footnotes, conservation chapter?
 - ii. Resolution: *Be it resolved that HSWCD support further collaboration on this product with KSWCD through consultants Agnew Beck to develop the Kenai Peninsula Comprehensive Plan.*
Motion to approve: Tim, seconded by Cathy, passed
- b. DNR land offering: tabled till next meeting
- c. Other: Chris reports fees going up statewide 1200% (Mo Johnson). Will confirm specifics

Adjourned 9:15, next Meeting October 11th, 2017, 5pm???

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