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# 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.”*

## TWO NEW BOARD MEMBERS

We are excited to welcome two new members to the team of the Board of Supervisors for Homer Soil and Water; Catherine Knott and Tim Alzheimer. Recently retired from teaching anthropology at Kenai Peninsula College, Catherine lives off the North Fork Road where she and David Pruett are starting a peony farm. Though Tim Alzheimer has been working in and out of Homer for years, he recently bought a house just north of Homer and has started a landscaping business called “Inlet Acres Landscaping”.

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Tim moved to Alaska in 2006 and began working at the Forest Service in Moose Pass. He moved to Homer in 2009 and started working at Kachemak Bay State Park doing trail maintenance and construction. He has a degree in Horticulture and has worked in a variety of green industry jobs. He was an organic farming consultant in Moldova under CNFA (Charity National for Agriculture). He has worked and lived in South Africa, New Zealand, and the lower 48 on a variety of organic farms. He is an avid outdoorsman who loves and cherishes our relationship and responsibility concerning nature. He began his landscape company in 2016 to offer an array of services and conservation practices. His passion is conservation and restoration.



Catherine has an extensive background working abroad and with farmers as well. Starting with her Peace Corps service as a forestry extension volunteer back in 1981, she worked on a long list of hands-on projects. At one point she was the director of Heifer International’s North America Program where she directed a team that provided livestock and training in sustainable agriculture to low-income farmers in Mexico, U.S. and Canada. She has also worked with BRIDGES International Training and Education on agritourism projects along the coast of Oregon. In her home life, she has raised everything from bison to goats so she has quite a breadth of experience when it comes to agricultural perspective.

### Board of Supervisors

- Chris Rainwater, Chair
- Otto Kilcher
- Genarita Grobarek
- Catherine Knott
- Tim Alzheimer

### District Staff

- Kyra Wagner, District Manager
- Matt Steffy, Natural Resource Specialist III
- Brad Casar, Natural Resource Tech II

## FARMERS MARKET ORGANIZERS CONFERENCE

The Homer and Kenai Soil and Water Conservation Districts had the joy of collaborating with the Homer Farmers Market this March in hosting the first ever Alaska State Farmers Market Managers Conference. This conference brought together managers from 20 different markets around the state from Kechikan to Fairbanks. Sessions covered topics such as food safety regulations, insurance, employees vs. volunteers, and data collection.

Though sessions covered what topics you would expect, it was not held at a normal conference location. The fifty or so attendees lost all ability to be uptight or withdrawn while sitting in the lavish rooms of the Second Star mansion on Kachemak Drive. The site made for a delightful icebreaker where managers and organizers, board members and local agencies opened up to talk about different program successes and failures.



At the end of three days, new relationships were strong. It was decided that the group would revive the Alaska State Farmers Market Association which had been dormant for 10 years. With the enthusiasm in the room, it was clear that everyone could see the benefit of continued collaboration and communication.

## WEED FREE HAY

Attention hay producers! As the growing season quickly approaches, we'd like to remind you all that HSWCD has a certified Weed Free inspector on staff. "Weed Free" does not mean your crop is free of all weeds, just the injurious invasive plants that we don't want to share with our neighbors. As this program continues to grow, it is now established practice to charge more per bale for Weed Free certified product. It is currently required on BLM land as well as the Kenai National Wildlife Refuge, and its need is growing. The only charge associated with the certification is the cost of the special color coded twine for baling. The District's Invasive Plants Coordinator, Matt Steffy, will be happy to visit your field and provide certification within 10 days of harvest. He is also more than willing to provide Integrated Pest Management Plans to address any invasives if found (also see the article describing our cost-share program in this same issue.) It's also good to keep in mind that if you have invasives in your field, it is still possible to harvest the uninfested portions as Weed Free. Give Matt a call at 235-8177 x117 for more information.



### Cooperative Weed Management Area

## WOODARD CREEK

Woodard Creek is one of only two year-round creeks that run from the ridge above Homer down to the coast (the other being High School Creek.) Many years ago, the Friends of Woodard Creek formed as a community organization to advocate for responsible land use and increased recreation along this beautiful creek. In 2013, a more formal group formed under the moniker of the Woodard Creek Coalition with the goal of engaging resource planners, biologists, engineers, conservationists, private landowners, and local government to create a comprehensive Woodard Creek Watershed Plan. The assistance of the National Park Services Rivers and Trails Conservation Assistance program was enlisted to provide project guidance to the team. After years of work, we now have a professionally developed management plan for the entire watershed. Coalition partners, of which HSWCD staff member Matt Steffy was included, have begun working with the city to encourage the adoption of this document as a management plan. The plan itself contains no proposals for new city code or restrictions in development, but rather encourages careful considerations when development takes place within the watershed. Issues that are addressed include steep-slope development, impervious surface considerations, storm water management, and increased public access through trails and small parks. As residents of this wonderful hamlet, we should take moments like this to be grateful to live in a community so rich in scientific expertise well-tempered with such a heartfelt stewardship.



## LAST YEAR OF SCHOOL YARD HABITAT

The HSWCD is gearing up to add another series of USFWS Schoolyard Habitats in the Homer area this year. Our staff has begun meeting with teachers, students, and neighbors at both schools to



outline plans for trail development, habitat restoration, and interpretive sites. Our community has had tremendous success with the SYH at West Homer Elementary, which has continued to serve as an outdoor learning space in all seasons. The Homer Middle School program will revamp the existing trail system on the +30-acre parcel while incorporating fit stations and other amenities. This will not only improve the academic potential of an already excellent school, but provide a better trail system for the cross-country running and skiing programs.

Over at McNeil Canyon Elementary, a school that is also known for its trails, thanks in large part to years of development by the Kachemak Nordic Ski Club, the trails around the

immediate school will be getting a facelift and some new interpretive sites as well. The McNeil staff is also planning on constructing a viewing platform that can serve as an outdoor meeting place and

classroom area. They have secured funding from multiple other sources to leverage the assistance that HSWCD will be able to provide through the USFWS program.

As always with SYH the community benefits not just from what get built or installed, but by the process of doing it. Students from both McNeil Canyon and Homer Middle have been engaged in the conversation in the classroom and in planning sessions with student council. It is exciting to invite students to brainstorm on how their school grounds can be used for educational experiences and outdoor learning environments.

These ideas in combination with staff and community member input create a wide variety of options available for the school to take on.

## TIME FOR SPRING SOIL SAMPLES

Spring is about, the birds are chirping and high tunnel soils are thawing out. We still have a while until your outdoor garden comes out of the deep freeze, but it's a good time to start thinking about getting a soil sample. The relationship of an agriculturalist to his or her soil is intimate, as soil is the fundamental building block of any agricultural system. Understanding how to manage your soils can be complex, fortunately getting a soil sample is simple and provides great baseline information for the gardener or commercial farmer.

Interested in the level of nutrients already present in your soil, or how much fertilizer to give your tomatoes this spring? Trying to figure out how to convert your spruce forest into a productive vegetable garden? Wondering why your beets are just growing big leafy greens and small beet roots? Soils tests can often answer many of the mysteries of soil.

Come on into the Soil and Water District office at 4014 Lake St. in Homer to get a soil sample analyzed for a nominal fee of \$32 for the first sample and \$20 for each additional sample. We get all soils analyzed at Brookside Labs, a reputable processing lab in Ohio. Participants involved with NRCS practices, specifically nutrient management, can get recommendations



through our office. All other soil sample results will be sent to Casey Matney, the Kenai Peninsula's cooperative extension agent who will provide recommendations at no extra cost.

If you want some advice on how to guarantee the most perfect soil sample from your plot, check out the publications online from Cooperative Extension. You can find their "Soil Sampling" publication at <http://www.uaf.edu/files/ces/publications-db/catalog/anr/FGV-00044.pdf>.

Beyond making nutrient management recommendations for NRCS customers, our staff is happy to address any questions or concerns you may have with your agricultural system. Feel free to stop in and get additional information about resource concerns that you are confronting, and we will do our best to provide current knowledge or point you in the right direction.

## MANAGING INVASIVES ON YOUR PROPERTY

Managing invasive plants on your property can be more than difficult, it can be a royal pain. What type of weed are you targeting? What type of soil is it in? How close is it to open water? Do you (or your neighbor) have pets? Can it be pulled out of the ground, or does it need to be sprayed? If herbicide is needed, which of the many to choose from? The Homer Soil & Water Conservation District has long been a resource for invasive plant management to our cooperators. Answering all of the questions above requires the formulation of what's called an Integrated Pest Management Plan (IPM.) The ideal strategy will most likely consist of a combination of mechanical, cultural, and/or chemical controls.

HSWCD is currently working on an agreement with USFWS that will provide a cost-sharing program for private land owners. This program will provide technical assistance through



District staff, in the form of custom IPMs, as well as financial assistance to provide for tarping materials, equipment rentals, herbicide, and/or contract work. A landowner can take the information in their IPM and do all the work themselves, as their efforts count as match in the cost-share. Landowners will also be permitted to contract the work out with a local pesticide applicator or landscape company. There are some plants that get funded at a 50-50 rate; those are typically the well-established ones that have continuous populations across town (i.e. orange hawkweed). Other plants will be funded at 100% due to their discrete populations and greater potential for environmental damage (i.e. Japanese knotweed.)

Watch for notice of the program's implementation, or contact our office anytime with questions about how it can work for you.

## KENAI FOOD HUB

There is a new farmers market in town and it is online. The Kenai Peninsula Food Hub is getting ready for its second pilot year as a new way for local food to get from the producer to the consumer.

If you are the sort of person who can't stand the crowds at the Homer Farmers Market or if you just can't get enough to satisfy your local food fix, the Food Hub is a great way to go. This works for whether or not you are a grower or a buyer. This is how it works:

1. Growers post online what they have to sell
2. Buyers shop online using their credit card
3. Growers get a list of items to harvest
4. Growers deliver sorted bundles on delivery day to a central location
5. Buyers go pick up their orders on delivery day at the central location.

Pretty simple! For growers there is the added benefit that you can put information about your farm and growing methods up online for buyers to see. It's also nice to know there is a sale before harvesting unlike a farm stand or farmers market booth.



For buyers there is the benefit of dodging the crowds and being sure that you will get what you want before you arrive at the drop-off location. You still get to buy from trusted farmers and may even learn about more. You also can buy from several growers if you need to get a large quantity of something.

The only drawback is that it does require a little bit of computer savvy. If you have any questions about how to sign up, how to register as a shopper or as a vendor, give us a call at the office here and we can help.

There are also upcoming trainings for vendors to help you understand all the possibilities with the online software. (see [Upcoming Events](#) on the last page)

The Kenai Peninsula Food Hub opens its electronic doors on April 14th. The drop-off location this year will be at the back of the Wild Emporium building on Pioneer. For more information you can check out the website at [www.kenaifoodhub.org/](http://www.kenaifoodhub.org/) or like their Facebook page to get updates and information about what is going on at the new online farmers market!

To find out more about our programs and projects, visit our website at [www.homerswcd.org](http://www.homerswcd.org).

The HSWCD Board meets on the second Wednesday of the month at 5:00pm. We meet at the USDA Service Center, 4014 Lake St., Homer. We welcome all visitors! Feel free to call our office to confirm date & time.

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

## Upcoming Events

**Friday, April 14: The Kenai Peninsula Food Hub** will be opening for sales in Homer! Come into the Homer Soil and Water office if you have any questions about signing up on the online farmer's market.

**Wednesday, April 19: Homer Tree Planting and Tree Care** Head over to the Kenai Peninsula College from 6pm – 8pm for this Co-operative Extension class with Casey Matney. Register at <http://bit.ly/2k53JdS>. Learn how to properly plant and care for a tree. Students will cover topics such as soil preparation, tree placement, planting depth, watering, and other primary tree care practices.

**Tuesday, April 25: Silage Production and Use** Sign up and join instructor Casey Matney for this class from 6 - 8 pm at Kachemak Bay Campus. Fee: \$10. Register at <http://bit.ly/2lma89p>. While hay production is a common and standard practice, using silage as a forage alternative can offer flexibility to producers. This is a two-hour workshop on the science and methods of silage production. Topics: Workshop will cover the following topics (order may vary; subject to change). · Differences between silage and hay · Growing forage for silage · Science of silage production · Methods for silage production · Silage storage · Uses for silage • Fee: \$10 Questions? Contact the instructor, Casey Matney at 907-262-5824 or [camatney@alaska.edu](mailto:camatney@alaska.edu)

**Tuesday, May 2: Alaska Ag Day:** Talk with a group of school children, post pictures of your farm, high tunnel or garden, or invite all your friends to an Alaska Grown potluck!

**Tuesday, May 9th: Making Compost:** Register at <http://bit.ly/2jpWNee> then head over to the Kachemak Bay Campus from 6-8pm. One of the best ways you can improve your garden and improve your soil is to produce your own compost. This is a two-hour workshop on the science and methods of compost production. Topics: Workshop will cover the following topics (order may vary; subject to change). · What is compost? · What can you use to make compost? · Science and methods of compost production · Compost storage · Uses for compost Schedule: • Fee: \$10 Questions? Contact the instructor, Casey Matney at 907-262-5824 or [camatney@alaska.edu](mailto:camatney@alaska.edu)

**Thursday, May 18th: Kenai Peninsula Food Hub Training:** Head over to the Homer Public Library from 5:30 PM - 7:30 PM to get all your questions answered about how to sign up as a vendor on the new Food Hub website.

**Saturday, May 20: How to Manage Invasives: a Weed Workshop for Home Gardeners** Come over to Islands and Ocean Visitor Center from 9am-Noon to hear from experts about what weeds are the most aggressive, which ones you should worry about, and which ones you just need to get used to. Different methods of integrated pest management will be discussed. For more information, contact Matt Steffy at 235-8177 ext 117.

## Job Opportunities

Snomads Trails Director (Homer, Alaska)

Part-time contracted position averaging 20 hours per week with potential for increased hours with successful fundraising efforts.

\$25/hour

Snomads are looking for a self-starter to lead our trails program endeavoring to secure legal easements and trails for back country access. The Director should be personable, diplomatic, and community-minded. Public relations & speaking, land use & planning, grant writing & management, budgeting, time management, organizational and computer skills will be required. The candidate should have a passion for trails and be enthusiastic towards fundraising and community involvement.

For more details, check out the classifieds on the Snomads webpage at [HomerSnomads.org](http://HomerSnomads.org).

To apply please email resume to Ms. Cristin Roehl, President, Snomads Inc., at [Snomads@gmail.com](mailto:Snomads@gmail.com) with the subject line of your name, Snomads Trails Director application. This position will remain open until filled.