

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.”



SPRING ISSUE:

- Homer to host 8th Annual CWMA Weed Workshop
- Anchor River/Fox Creek Critical Habitat Area Educational kiosk
- Open Sign-up Period for weed management cost share
- Fox River CRMP Update

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8TH ANNUAL WEED WORKSHOP APRIL 30TH—KENAI PENINSULA COLLEGE, HOMER CAMPUS



Invasive weeds getting you down? We may have just the thing for you, the annual KP-CWMA Weed Workshop. The tradition of this workshop has been to bring together land managers, non-profit organizations, and concerned citizens for a day-long dialogue on the problems invasive plants can bring to the Peninsula. This workshop, on a Peninsula-wide rotation, will be hosted this year in Homer. Speakers are lined up to address topics including: orange hawkweed control, reed canary grass management, and the use of herbicides. The keynote speaker will be Dr. Tim Miller from Washington State Extension Service. Dr. Miller will be addressing the EPA requirements for herbicide application in sensitive habitats.

Our goal is to raise awareness of what is currently happening in Alaska and to reach across boundaries of ownership, stewardship and management to open conversation on control methods and to help stop the spread of invasive plants on the Kenai Peninsula.

Come join us for the day, a half day, or even to listen to a single speaker. There is no cost to attend the workshop, and we encourage any interested individual to participate. After all, invasive plants are everyone's problem.

HOMER STUDENTS EARN STATEWIDE RECOGNITION



Poster submitted by 4th grade student Andie Sonnen. Several posters were submitted focusing on this year's theme: healthy habitats.

Congratulations to all the students who submitted posters to the Homer District this year for our annual poster contest. We received several outstanding entries covering three age groups. The first place posters were all sent to the Alaska Association of Conservation Districts for judging in the statewide contest, and Homer area students fared quite well at that level of competition, bringing home two 3rd place ribbons and one 1st place. The winning entry by Jessica Sonnen, first grade student from Paul Banks Elementary School, is on its way to Washington DC to compete in the National Contest.

INVASIVE WEED COST SHARE PROGRAM NOW OPEN

The sign-up period for the Homer District *Invasive Weed Cost Share Program* is currently open. We are looking for local private landowners interested in controlling non-native plants. The program, funded through the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Services' *Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program* will provide financial assistance to landowners to control invasive plants that have the potential to impact wildlife habitat. Interested landowners who qualify will work with a district employee to develop an integrated management plan for control of these non-native plant(s). The program will provide the landowners with funds for non chemical control methods such as hand pulling, mowing, and tarping.

Some invasive plants that are good candidates for the program are Canadian thistle, reed canary grass, bird vetch, common tansy, sweet clover, and fall Dandelion.

One invasive plant that is going to be priority this summer for the district weed control program is Fall Dandelion. It is an invasive plant that is spreading in pastures and yards, decreasing forage value and competing with lawn grasses. Fall Dandelion (*Leontodon autumnalis*) is late-summer blooming perennial with a rosette of deeply-lobed leaves. The flower stalks are thin, tough and often branched with two or more flower heads per stem. Flowers are yellow and smaller than the true dandelion. Fall dandelion can be distinguished from true dandelion by the flower and true dandelion has one flower per stalk that is hollow and exudes a milky juice. Fall Dandelion has a shallow rhizomatous root system that could allow for easy hand pulling. One of the best strategies for controlling weeds in yards is a healthy lawn, proper fertilizer application and irrigation will slow the invasion of weeds. Fall dandelion is still at a population level that it can be controlled but we must act now. If you are interested in the cost share program to control any weed on your property please contact our office to schedule a site visit.

ENHANCING BEAVER CREEK EDUCATION

The Homer District has moved into the next phase of a project to protect the health and the quality of a locally important salmon stream, Beaver creek. The District is developing educational material for an informational kiosk being designed and constructed by Eagle Scout and Homer High School student Jake McLean. Once completed, this kiosk will be installed at the Watermelon trailhead parking lot off Ohlson Mtn Road. The Watermelon Trail crosses Beaver Creek, and enters into the Anchor River/Fritz Creek Critical Habitat Area. This critical habitat area was established by the State Legislature in 1985 to protect approximately 19,000 acres north of Homer to ensure healthy fish and wildlife valued by residents of the Kenai Peninsula. This area provides valuable winter habitat for moose, and the fresh water streams of the critical habitat area are vital to maintaining both anadromous and resident fish populations.

The principal streams of the critical habitat area are the South Fork of the Anchor River, Beaver Creek, and Fritz Creek. Beaver Creek carries a portion of the drainage of Bald Mountain into the South Fork of the An-

chor River. Beaver Creek does support both chinook and Coho salmon, and Dolly Varden.

Under our current Alaska Clean Water Actions (ACWA) grant from the Department of Environmental Conservation, we have already performed improvements to the trail's ATV crossing at Beaver Creek, including the installation of a clear-span ATV bridge upstream of the old in-water crossing and re-routing the trail's approach to the bridge. We will perform a streambank restoration of the old damaged crossing this spring with help from high school student volunteers.

Volunteer youth labor is a huge help to the Homer District. We are always excited to work with local volunteers to complete our projects, but it is especially rewarding to work with area youth, who are provided with valuable learning experiences and community recognition. The Homer District anticipates completing these improvements to the Watermelon Trail by the end of June.

FOX RIVER FLATS GRAZING PLAN GETS AN UPDATE

Homer Soil and Water is helping the Fox River Cattlemen's Association update the plan that guides cattle grazing activities in the state-owned Fox River Critical Habitat Area and surrounding state lands. The plan—a "Coordinated Resource Management Plan," or CRMP—lays out guidelines that the Cattlemen follow to ensure that cattle grazing is in harmony with the needs of wildlife species that use the State lands, including waterfowl and moose. Ongoing monitoring of forage on the Fox River Flats by the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) has even shown that properly managed grazing can increase the palatability and nutritional value of forage plants, which can benefit wildlife species, particularly in the fall. Grazing guidelines include start and end dates for grazing, numbers of cows the flats can accommodate, and recommended areas for fencing.

The CRMP process helps property owners, land managers, and resource users work collaboratively in planning how to use and manage areas and resources of shared interest. This ensures that soils, lands, waters, and other natural resources are used and managed for multiple benefits and in sustainable ways. The Homer District and the Fox River Cattlemen will work closely with state agencies—including ADF&G and the Department of Natural



The image above is a Google satellite image of the Fox River Flats area at the head of Kachemak Bay. Caribou Lake is visible in the upper left corner, and a sliver of Bradley Lake is visible on the bottom of the frame. Sheep Creek is the big river that drains the east side of the Flats, Fox River is the narrower channel to its west.

Resources—as well as with the NRCS, to update the CRMP. An updated plan will be completed this summer

A GUIDE TO RECOGNIZING YOUR WEEDS



Fall dandelion (left) *Leontodon autumnalis*, a perennial plant that spreads from both rhizomes and seed. Leaves are clustered at the base of the plant and are deeply lobed. Plant stems have few leaves and do not exude a milky sap.



Bull thistle (right) *Cirsium vulgare*. Biennial erect plant forms a fleshy taproot. Stems grow 2 to 5 feet tall with many spreading branches. Leaves hairy and prickly on upper side.



Common Tansy (above left), *Tanacetum vulgare*, a perennial that spreads by seed and by short rhizomes, forming dense clumps. Plant grows to 5 ft, and has strong odor. Mildly toxic to grazing animals.



Bird Vetch (top right), *Vicia cracca*, a perennial which reproduces by seed and vegetatively by underground rhizomes. Multiple, branching vine-like stems have small tendrils.



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

Welcome to our new Board Supervisor, Paul Castellani. Paul is a local vegetable farmer and has been an active member of Homer Farmer's Market for the past 10 years. We look forward to him bringing his knowledge to the Homer District.

UPCOMING EVENTS & DEADLINES

- April 21-23 Alaska State Environment & State FFA Convention Palmer Fair Grounds
- April 30 Kenai Peninsula Cooperative Weed Management Annual Workshop
@ Kenai Peninsula College, Homer 9:00-4:00
- May 1 Community Weed Pull @ Homer Public Library 9:00-5:00
- May 12 HSWCD Board Meeting 5:00 @ USDA Service Center
- June 5 National Trails Day- work party, call HSWCD for more information.

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



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*Meeting the needs of the local
Land User*

