

“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.”

Natural Currents

THANK YOU TARA SCHMIDT!

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As of April of this year, the District Manager Tara Schmidt has been freed! She transitioned out of the job and handed the reins over to Kyra Wagner. Presently hiking around Nepal, Tara is probably not dwelling on all the great work she did over her tenure of 10 years, but it is appreciated here and around the community.

The list is much longer than could ever be compiled here, but this is a taste of Tara’s work:

- Development of the Fox River Flats Grazing Lease Coordinated Resource Management Plan (CRMP)
- Landowners Guide for Anchor River, Deep Creek, Ninilchik River, and Stariski Creek watersheds
- Salmon-friendly bridge across Beaver Creek
- Salmon-friendly culvert in Beaver Creek and in Stariski Creek
- Informational signage at Stariski Creek turnout
- Improved information signage at Homer Demonstration Forest
- Updated Homer Demonstration Forest nature trail guide
- Rain gardens in multiple locations
- Invasive weed plans
- Co-hosting of Local Working Group meetings
- Assessment and guide of wetland functions and values
- Updating of HSWCD webpage
- Trail work (including a bridge across Beaver Creek, major improvements to the Pratt Museum trail and the Calvin and Coyle Trail, and bridges in the Fox River Flats
- Schoolyard Habitat projects
- Guide and Atlas to the Beluga Planning Area within the City of Homer
- Suitability Mapping project
- People’s Gardens
- Management plan for Diamond Creek Recreation Area

And much more!

Board of Supervisors

- Chris Rainwater, Chair
- Emily Garrity
- Otto Kilcher
- Genarita Grobarek
- YOU?

District Staff

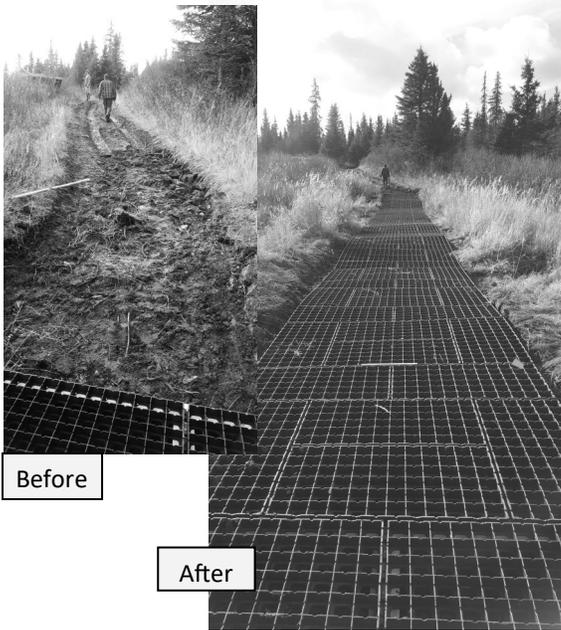
- Kyra Wagner, District Manager
 - Matt Steffy, Natural Resource Specialist
 - Brad Casar, Natural Resource Technician
-

WELCOME THE NEW DISTRICT MANAGER

With Tara’s departure, Kyra Wagner has joined the team. She and her husband Neil have been District cooperators for years and have NRCS high tunnels. Kyra has been involved in the Homer Farmers Market, with high tunnel growers and District projects like the People’s Garden Project.

There is a steep learning curve and big shoes to fill, but Kyra has thoroughly enjoyed getting to work with cooperators from the head of the Bay all the way up to agency folks in Soldotna and Anchorage. And she simply couldn’t do it without the support of awesome people in the office and on the District board.

WATERMELON TRAIL RESTORATION & IMPROVEMENT



Due to drainage issues, and the nature of having an ATV trail through a wetland, there have been some serious erosion problems on the approaches to the bridge causing heavy loads of sedimentation in the anadromous creek. Geoblock acts as a stable substrate for vegetation to grow up through, and a trail stabilization material capable of handling ATV traffic. Additional drainage through the use of log bars has helped reduce ponding and mud holes just before the bridge.

An ongoing hurdle in the recognition of this as a legal trail has been the issue of multiple trespasses on private

Snomads, will be more willing to pursue long term management plans for the trail.

The trail will have a 60 foot easement once surveyed, and the Snomads plan to begin talks with DMLW about development of a wider trail footprint that will accommodate their large track groomer in the winter time.

While the Recreational Trails Program grant has closed on the new construction, our USFWS grant for restoration will continue through the end of 2017. The next phase of the project will include the contracting of a Student Conservation Association crew on behalf of CIRI to conduct field work under the technical direction of HSWCD staff in the summer of 2017.

The district will continue to work closely with the broad and dynamic group of agencies involved with this process to address habitat degradation issues and facilitate collaborative strategies.

The Homer Soil and Water Conservation District has been involved with a long ongoing project on the Watermelon Trail over the past decade. Nearly five years ago a bridge was put in place over Beaver Creek with the oversight of the district. This crossing was identified as a priority issue for the area in Cook Inlet Keepers Anchor River Watershed Action Plan. This year, to continue addressing the sedimentation of Beaver Creek and the erosions of soils within the critical habitat, geoblock has been installed on the northern and southern approaches to the bridge.

land. This project has initiated an agreement with one landowner to convey a recreational trails easement, and brushed out several miles of trail to reroute around another landowner, the Cook Inlet Region Incorporated (CIRI). The reroute was first brushed out 10 years ago by HSWCD staff, but the old trail was never sufficiently blocked off. This project will include restoration and rehabilitation work on the old trail to see that it's native state is returned. Once the legal trail is established under the Division of Mining, Land, and Water, user groups, such as the



GeoblockTransport



A HUGE THANK YOU TO THE SNOMADS!

On October 22nd a crew of folks went out to the Watermelon Trailhead and worked for hours on the trail clearing back branches and filling ruts. They even dragged the District's dead four wheeler up from down by Beaver Creek. They know how to have a work party: they also had chili, hotdogs, and hot drinks available. Shelly Erikson said her 83 year old mother was out there and went through 4 tanks of gas for her chainsaw. Snomads ROCK!

The Snomads have been super supportive with all kinds of aspects of this trail project. We couldn't pull it off without them. Together we are going to create a wonderful trail into the backcountry for community use.

WEED WORK IN PORT GRAHAM

On a sunny day in late July, HSWCD staff member Matt Steffy traveled to Port Graham to conduct a community workshop and community weed pull. For the past several years, HSWCD staff have been working with the village of Port Graham to conduct an invasive vegetation inventory, as well as an outreach program to educate residents about invasive impacts, and provide them with some tools for control. This trip, Matt teamed up with CES agent Janice Chumley and USFWS habitat biologist Kyle Graham.

Residents noted that they were seeing more invasives and the general consensus was a desire to halt the spread. Orange hawkweed is definitely a focus of concern for many residents. Having been introduced as an ornamental plant several years ago, residents have watched it spread very quickly across town reaching peak density in places like the cemetery, while maintaining a variable yet constant distribution around the towns' roadways.

After the workshop, Janice and Matt were accompanied by a group of residents, young and old, to carry out a community weed pull on a patch of com-



mon tansy that had previously been identified. The spot was a great fit, as it was the only patch of common tansy in town and small enough to be dug up in one session. The group filled up dozens of trash bags full of tansy to be transported to the village waste site.

It takes a community united to move forward with a plan that will effectively address the invasives in that quiet, beautiful corner of the Kachemak Bay, but Port Graham has a unified vision and a strong desire to maintain the native wilderness that surrounds their historic village.



DEVELOPING GOLD MINE SITE RECLAMATION PROTOCOLS

For over a century, gold mining in Alaska has sustained a viable industry for Alaskans around the state. Many mining practices have not changed since the early days of mining in Alaska, but the standards and protocols BLM enforces for mine land reclamation have started to become a touchy issue for some miners around the state.

Over the years BLM has had difficulty defining mine land reclamation standards for the state. The mining division of BLM recently developed a protocol to certifying reclamation status, and put the protocol into action this year for miners around the state. This protocol is helping BLM mining division staff maintain a uniform assessment of mines around the state and their current reclamation status. The reclamation standards and protocol is straight forward and informative for miners to understand what needs to be done in order to improve the reclamation status to a reclaimed site.

This summer Brad Casar was involved with soils data collection to be used in conjunction with vegetation and ecological data for mine land reclamation monitoring. The team used the newly developed monitoring protocol for the mine sites they visited, looking at vegetation coverage and species diversity, as well as sand, silt, and clay content in the "topsoil" and characterizing soil pits. Data was collected on reclaimed sites and reference sites to compare reclaimed status to undisturbed areas.

We greatly appreciate the cooperation with BLM and look forward to providing technical expertise for years to come.

FIRST YEAR OF THE SOIL HEALTH STUDY

The Homer District, with funding from USDA, Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), has completed the first of a 3 year study to help determine the benefits of two conservation practices, cover cropping and reduced tillage, on soil health. With the participation of four cooperators, we have established trial plots in both outdoor and high tunnel production space to study the effect of these practices on soil health.

This study is promoting NRCS practice Adaptive Nutrient Management, a practice used to evaluate and adjust the management of soil health and nutrient loads for plant production. These practices are being studied in the Homer and Anchor Point area to get a sense of their capacity within current vegetable production and gather data on their effect on the soil health.

Cover cropping, one component of the soil health study, can have a significant benefit for the soil and plants. Maintaining cover crops helps retain soil moisture, reduces weed and pest issues, improves nutrients and organic matter in the soil, and more. Incorporating cover crops into a garden can

be simple and beneficial for any size farm or garden. Cover crops can also greatly reduce farm management by reducing weeding, irrigating and tillage as well as reducing costs of organic matter and fertilizer inputs.

The second conservation practice this study will assess is reduced tillage which produces many of the same benefits as cover cropping (retaining soil moisture, weed control, and improved organic matter). Additionally, reduced tillage helps maintain a good soil structure, the building blocks of your soil. Many vegetable producers in the Homer area are raising two to three successions of crops in one season using intensive tillage and management practices. Conservation practices addressed within this soil health study will help maintain good soil health and crop productivity for intensive vegetable producers.

This year all four cooperators involved in the soil health study grew a vegetable crop up until late August or September, and then followed it with a cover crop mix of oats, field peas, buckwheat, and tillage radish. Thanks to our talented farmers and great weather, all the cover crop beds germinated with great success and have stayed green and lush up to early November. Plots studying reduced tillage will



maintain cover crop production into winter, or until hard frosts kill off the stand.

Stay tuned for year two of the Soil Health Study and a big thank to our cooperators involved in this study.

BOARD NOMINATIONS

The Homer District is announcing the annual call for nominations for its Board of Supervisors. This year we have 2 seats open. To be eligible, an individual must be signed up as a District "Cooperator" and have the official nomination form signed by at least three other cooperators. Becoming a cooperator is easy and painless, there are forms on our webpage under the "About SWCD" tab. A nomination form is also included in this newsletter.

Please note: nomination forms must be submitted to the Alaska Association of Conservation Districts office (Attention Dee Pond) no later than 5:00 p.m., Monday, November 21, 2014. Nominations may be faxed to 907-373-7928 or emailed to Dee at aacd@mtaonline.net. Elections will follow in December.

For more information on serving on the Board, contact our office at 235-8177 ext 5, or send us an email at info@homerswcd.org. Visit our website at www.homerswcd.org to see our programs and activities, or to learn more about the history of Districts.

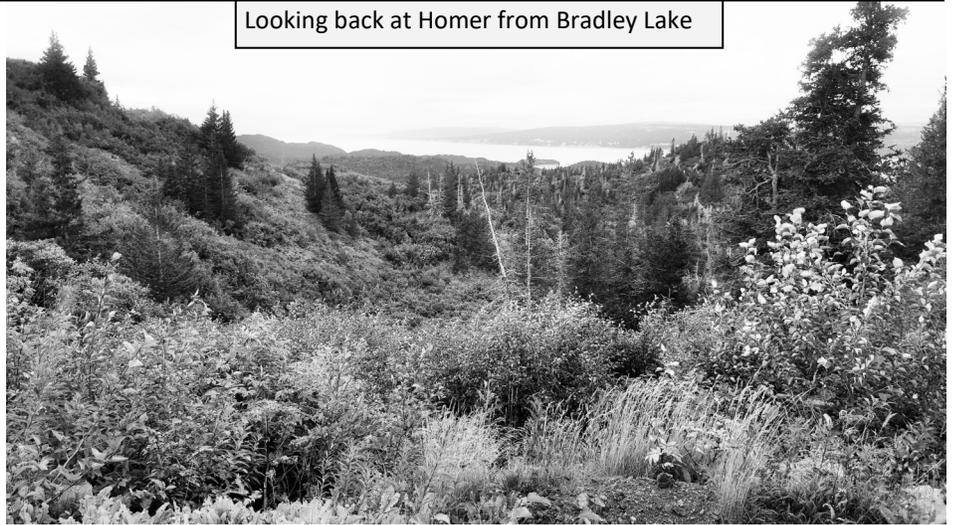
Conservation Districts work as a grassroots form of local governance authorized under state law. They create bridges between individual cooperators (landowners committed to sustainable use of the natural resources they manage) and other partners, including non-governmental organizations and all levels of government. The aim is to combine and coordinate resources to achieve shared conservation goals. The District model was established in the 1930s by Congress as a way to promote coordinated conservation approaches to healing soils during the "Dust Bowl" of the 1930s.



Join us as a cooperator! It is similar to membership in your favorite group. Being a cooperator says that you use good practices on your land (like the ones demonstrated in the Soil Health Study) but it also gets you the benefits of a voice at the District level through your vote or your presence on our board.

BRADLEY LAKE INVASIVE WEEDS UPDATE

Looking back at Homer from Bradley Lake



Nestled in the northeastern corner of Kachemak Bay, and seldom visited by the outside world, lies the Bradley Lake Hydroelectric Project. Positioned on state land, maintained by Homer Electric Association, and owned by a collective of energy cooperatives around the state, the project is a testament to forward thinking sustainable energy development in Alaska.

The habitat ranges from salt marsh to dense lutz spruce canopies on up to rolling alpine meadows blanketed in mountain heather and berries. Just to the east of the project works on the lake, there lays a corner of land ownership where Alaska Department of Natural Resources, Kenai National Wildlife Refuge, and Kenai Fjords National Park meet.

Machinery can carry seeds everywhere.



In 2010, HSWCD staff visited the project and conducted a thorough survey for invasive plants. They identified three priority invasives, including white sweetclover. In 2016, HSWCD staff returned to Bradley Lake and resurveyed the area. Matt Steffy and Brad Casar flew over and spent two adventurous days scouting from mountain to sea for any sign of unwanted plants.

The crew found that the previously identified infestations had not only increased in size, but had taken root in new locations. Also, there were new invasives that had not previously been identified on site.

Of greatest concern is a patch of white sweet clover located in the main gravel

pit and along the road that runs adjacent to the pit. This is a highly despicable plant, with a pungent aroma and strongly competitive overtopping growth habit. It also contains coumarin, which is toxic to grazing animals. This plant has demonstrated that it is aggressively competitive .

White Sweet Clover seed heads



HSWCD is already working with HEA and other partners to establish a plan that will mitigate this risk and hopefully eliminate it.



**TO OUR DEPARTING
DISTRICT SUPERVISORS:
PAUL CASTELLANI &
EMILY GARRITY
THANK YOU FOR THE
YEARS OF SERVICE
YOU HAVE GIVEN THE DISTRICT.
WE APPRECIATE IT!**



The HSWCD Board meets on the second Wednesday of the month at 5:00 pm 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.

SAVE THE DATES: Upcoming Agriculture Events

November 22 Cooperative Weed Management Area Quarterly Meeting up in Soldotna at the Cooperative Extension Office. Call Janice at 907-262-5824 for more information.

November 30 Kenai Peninsula Food Hub Community Meeting 6-8pm at the Best Western Bidarka Inn

December 8 "How to Create a Basic Website Without Going Crazy" 6-7pm at the Homer Public Library, large meeting room

March 2-4, 2017 Alaska State Farmers Market Organizers Conference (for organizers) in Homer. *\$50 fee to cover conference meals; pre-registration required – go to www.homerfarmersmarket.org – Event page

March 4 Post-Conference Talk: "Farmers Market Best Marketing Practices" (for vendors) 3-4:30pm at the Kachemak Community Center

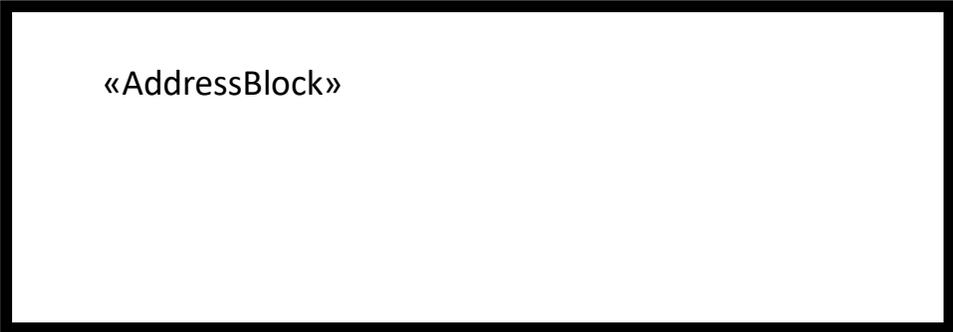
April 7 FamilyFarmed "Food Safety/Marketing/Risk Management Workshop" 9am-5pm at the Kachemak Bay Campus *pre-registration appreciated (email: robby@inletkeeper.org)

Event sponsors include: Homer Farmers Market, Homer and Kenai Soil & Water Districts, Cook Inletkeeper, Kenai Peninsula Food Hub, Cooperative Extension Service, USDA, and FamilyFarmed

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



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