

“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.”



SUMMER ISSUE:

- Caribou Hills Trail Update— Work scheduled for this summer
- Introduction of the Developer Certification Program
- Homer Students Excel at State Envirothon Competition
- Protecting Alaska’s Natural Resources from Invasive Weeds.

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- Jim VanOss
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- Otto Kilcher
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- Tara Schmidt, District Manager
- Bill Steyer, Trails Coordinator
- Sarah Eastin, Invasive Weeds
- Al Poindexter, Education Coordinator

Natural Currents

CARIBOU HILLS RECREATIONAL AREA Trail Improvements on Schedule for this Summer

The Homer District is in the process of assessing trail conditions in the Caribou Hills after last summer’s 55,000 acre wild fire. Because of funding received through the Department of Environmental Conservation Alaska Clean Waters Action Grant (ACWA) the Homer District has been able to prioritize the Water Hole Trail, one of the most heavily used trails in the Caribou Hills, and a critical link to trails that lead to Caribou Lake. In 2007, the Homer District laid out a preliminary reroute of the Water Hole Trail and is currently in the process of obtaining a related public easement. With 8,000 feet of trail identified as in poor condition the primary purpose of trail upgrades will be to determine more favorable routes for trail users that are located on drier ground as opposed to muskegs or bogs and to redesign the trails away from the current straight, steep trail patterns that are common along this trail network.

Many of the ATV trails in Caribou Hills Recreation Area follow seismic lines and decommissioned logging roads. Whereas these trails may be suitable for winter use, offering quick and easy access into the back country, they will not sustain summer use due to the sensitive nature of muskegs and bogs, steep slopes and poorly drained soils. Trail degradation and associated water quality impacts have accelerated with an increase of ATV traffic. The process of degradation occurs when (*con’t on pg 2*)

EARLY DETENTION AND RAPID RESPONSE “Second Line of Defense” Against Invading Weeds

Non-native plants are rapidly becoming a problem in developed areas of Alaska and are spreading into more remote regions of the state. Already Alaska has large infestations of white sweetclover on the Stikin, Nenana and Matanuska rivers. Purple loosestrife, a serious threat to waterfowl habitat, is now present in a wetland in Anchorage. As they have done around the world, invasive plants have the potential to permanently alter Alaska’s natural communities and become a

serious nuisance to land owners, land managers and users of natural resources.

Alaska has an advantage over other areas of the world that are experiencing impacts of invasive plants because we are still in the early stages of invasion. With a changing climate and increased development, trade and tourism more invasions will likely occur. (*con’t on pg 5*)

(*Con't from pag 1*) ATVs continually move farther from the original trail to seek drier ground. This results in an increasingly wide trail and a pattern of braiding through muskegs and bogs. Along some of the steeper trails surface runoff has eroded portions of the trail into gullies, making sections impassable. Consequently there has been an increase of sedimentation into the Deep Creek watershed, leading to a deterioration of water quality and aquatic habitat.

Proposed trail upgrades are scheduled for July and August of this summer. The Homer District will be physically rerouting the trail in July to higher ground. In areas where rerouting is not feasible, such as at the Deep Creek crossing and adjacent wetlands, the District will install trail hardening material referred to as Geoblock. The Homer District plans to install approximately 1,600 feet of Geoblock with the assistance of an USDA-NRCS Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP) grant.

The Homer District will be facilitating trail user and stakeholders meetings to develop a maintenance agreement and plan to promote the preservation of

this project once completed. If you are interested in participating in these discussions or have information you would like to provide please contact our office..

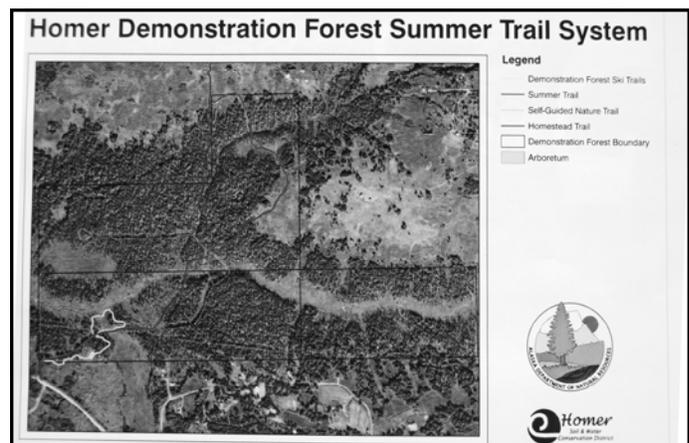


A portion of rutted trail along the Water Hole trail, heading toward the Deep Creek crossing. This section is part of the trail hardening project scheduled for this summer

HOMER DEMONSTRATION FOREST TRAIL SIGNS

The Homer Demonstration Forest and Homestead Trail on Baycrest Hill remain popular and accessible recreation opportunities for visitors and locals alike. And thanks to a grant received from Alaska State Parks The Homer Soil and Water Conservation District will be conducting a combination of trail improvements and added signage along the trail system this summer.

The purpose of these improvements is to better inform users about the trail system and clarify route locations. Summer use options include the Homestead Trail itself, the Summer Trail, and the Self-Guided Nature Trail. Certain spots along these trails are slated for physical re-routing, and seven large ArcMap-based signs showing trail routes will be installed at trail junctures for clarification. Trails will also be marked with corresponding color-coded diamond markers.



Many locals know the trails within the Homer Demonstration Forest as ski trails, if you haven't hiked them in the summer you're in for a big treat. Visit our website for a downloadable copy of the *HDF Self-Guided Nature Trail* brochure.

2008 ENVIROTHON UPDATE

As you may know, the Homer Envirothon Team from the Natural Resource Technology Class provided by the Homer District for Homer High School, is the state winner for the 5th year in a row. Team members include April D'Water, Tyler Haas, Katie Connor, Corinne Ogle, and Ben Blue. Of these students one is in Michigan working in a t-shirt shop and preparing to start college, one is mowing a lot of lawns, one is learning to fly and working for a fish processor, one is working for the District on the trail crew, and one is training as a FFA officer and growing vegetables for the farmers market. In between all of that, the team is studying the ecosystems of Arizona preparing for the international Canon Envirothon at the end of July. Most of their communication with each other and their advisor is through email with an occasional meeting and teleconference. They are very busy young people with a passion about conservation and natural resources.

Other students from the Districts Natural Resources Class are busy mowing lawns, fishing, working with horses, building fences, working for the NRCS soils department, growing vegetables and of course on task doing FFA Chapter fund raising activities to keep their class going and to be able to attend the national FFA Convention in October. It is interesting to note that one graduating student has a goal of majoring in environmental law, another has a goal of becoming an environmental engineer, another is thinking about majoring in soil science. Another will be starting school as an outdoor leadership and recreation major. They have all said that the Natural Resource Class and the FFA has opened doors for them they didn't even know existed until they got involved with the class.

Many students from past Homer FFA programs have gone on to work in resource related fields, one graduate is currently a major landscaper, employing a lot of people in Homer, and another producing potatoes for export in Fairbanks. One is a Forest Service smoke jumper and is looking

into a career in forestry. Another is involved with international commodity marketing. All have said that the Natural Resource Class and or the FFA were the pivotal experience that set into motion their career choices.

By all indications, your Homer Soil and Water District's class, the Envirothon and the State FFA are having a positive impact on our young people who will carry on our legacy that we have for the care and passion of using and taking care of our agriculture and natural resources. In fact, a 1993 FFA graduate from Palmer is now the land manager for the Division of Agriculture in the state.

Whenever you get a chance, support these young people in their projects, fundraising or leadership projects and give your Soil and Water District a thumbs up for helping to make a difference.

FFA State Officer Team Announced

The 2008-2009 FFA officer team was announced during the final session of the 32nd state FFA leadership conference April 26, 2008.

The Alaska Officer Team consists of:

Reporter: Corrine Ogle, Homer High School FFA
 Treasurer: Derek Monarch, Palmer High School FFA
 Secretary: Taylor Berberich, Palmer High School FFA
 Vice President: Jessica Elkins, Fairbanks High School
 President: Rachel Kenley, Palmer High School FFA

Congratulations to the following individuals who have recently been appointed to the **State Board of Agriculture and Conservation**: Ruby Hollenbeck, Omar Stratman, John Schirack, and Al Poindexter. This is a 7 member board appointed by the Governor for 3 year terms.

DEVELOPERS CERTIFICATION PROGRAM

DRAFT STEWARDSHIP PRACTICES AVAILABLE

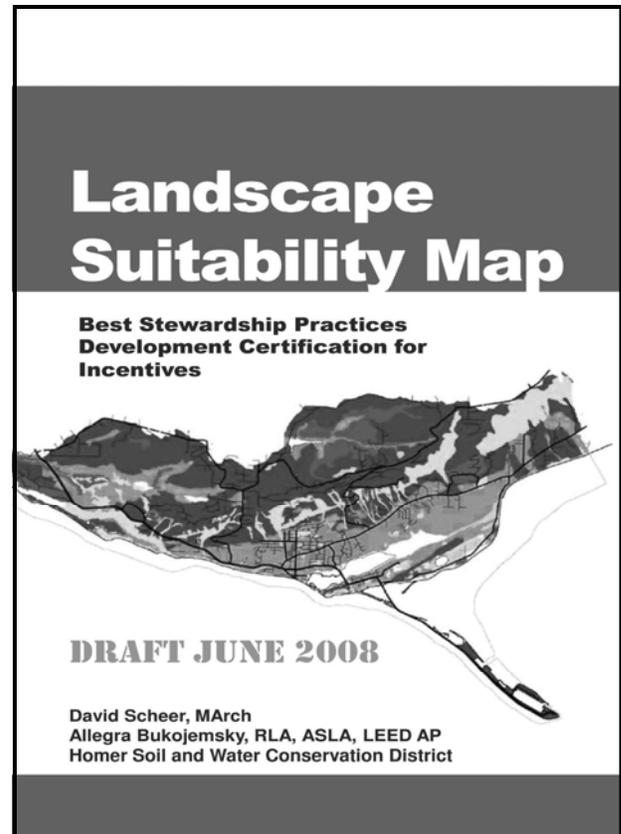
The Homer Soil and Water Conservation District has available for public review a draft version of a proposed *Developer's Certification Program*. Developer certification would be based on understanding and using appropriately the Homer Suitability Maps and related guidelines developed for the District by DnA Design. Certified developers would become eligible for various incentives.

The certification program is designed to encourage developers to use best stewardship practices that provide landowner and public benefits and save the community money by protecting "green infrastructure." Stewardship practices promoted by the program focus on landscape functions such as stormwater storage or slope stabilization, or on public amenities and landscape "connectivity" provided by trails or wildlife habitat. Developers who follow proposed guidelines and employ best stewardship practices as part of their projects could apply for Certification and would then qualify for procedural or financial incentives being identified by the District.

To use the Homer Suitability Maps, a developer first locates his or her proposed project on the maps and determines if it is located in an area mapped as highly suitable for development or as providing significant green infrastructure or connectivity. If the development falls into an area mapped as both, it will most likely be eligible for incentives.

The next step is to determine what landscape functions are provided by the development parcel. Four submaps help in this process. These show: (1) trail and viewshed zones, (2) wildlife habitat zones, (3) wetland and drainage zones and (4) soils/slope zones. Depending on which of the zones the development falls into, specific design strategies, or best stewardship practices, are required in order for the builder to earn credits towards potential incentives. If the proposed development falls into multiple zones, it would need to meet best stewardship practices for each, however, many of the required practices apply to more than one zone.

Modeled after existing certification programs elsewhere, this program provides a selection of practices that can be used to earn "credits". Credits can be earned in one of two ways, by integrating existing natural landscape functions into the development site plan or by setting aside portions of the parcel that provide important ecological



functions.

Best stewardship practices and techniques for integrating them into developments are outlined in a handbook, now available for review. This handbook is designed to help developers select the most appropriate stewardship practices, thus enabling them to maximize their credits towards incentives.

As mentioned above, this program is currently undergoing public review, and we welcome your comments. If you would like to read the handbook or view the maps, you can access them online through the project website, www.suitabilitymap.org, or feel free to stop by the Homer Soil and Water Conservation District office.

(*con't from pg. 1*) However, Alaska's early stage of invasion presents a unique opportunity to maintain the unspoiled character and abundant resources that make Alaska unique. By acting now to prevent introductions and finding and controlling invasive species before they are widespread, Alaska's natural resources will remain abundant and available for use.

Sometimes considered the "second line of defense" after prevention, early detection and rapid response (EDRR) is a critical component of any effective invasive species management program. When new invasive species infestations are detected, a prompt and coordinated containment and eradication response can reduce environmental and economic impacts. This action results in lower cost and less resource damage than implementing a long-term control program after the species is established.

Early detection of new infestations requires vigilance and regular monitoring of areas that may be potentially infested. The effectiveness of early detection rapid response techniques has been demonstrated in the Homer area by the control of Canada thistle in 2005 and potential for eradication in the near future. The Homer community responded to this threat reporting infestations to the Soil and Water Conservation District which helped to protect valuable natural resources in the Homer area from becoming impacted by Canada thistle.

More than 130 non-native plant species have been identified in Alaska (Alaska Exotic Plant Information Clearinghouse (AKEPIC) 2004). Spotted knapweed, Japanese knotweed, reed canarygrass, sweetclover, ornamental jewelweed, Canada thistle, bird vetch, orange hawkweed, and garlic mustard are among the highest-ranked species for their ability to invade and alter ecosystems in Alaska. Luckily, many of these species have not appeared on the Kenai Peninsula or in the Homer area. The major concerns we have locally include; non-native hawkweeds, common tansy, reed canary grass, sowthistle and a few other new invaders.

Most invasive plant populations in Alaska are currently small and manageable. If left unmanaged expansion of these populations is expected to affect the natural resources the community depends on such as salmon and moose habitat and agricultural lands. By acting now the threat from invasive plants may remain manageable.

The Soil and Water Conservation District encourages the community to take steps to prevent and control the spread of invasive weeds. This summer there will be several opportunities to participate in community weed pulls and invasive plant awareness events. To find out more about invasive weeds and how you can help please visit the Homer Soil and Water Conservation District website at:

HELP WANTED: WEED WARRIOR

HOMER SOIL & WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT IS LOOKING FOR WEED WARRIORS- QUALIFICATIONS INCLUDE A DISDAIN FOR NOXIOUS AND INVASIVE WEEDS, AN INTRE-SET IN THE PROTECTION OF ALASKA'S NATIVE ECOSYSTEMS, AND A WILLINGNESS TO REMAIN VILIGANT. DUTIES INCLUDE PARTICIPATION WITH COMMUNITY WEED PULLS. PLEASE CONTACT SARAH EASTIN FOR COMPLETE SCHEDULE OF THIS SUMMERS WEED PULLS.

AN ORANGE RETREAT

The Homer District will continue the study started last season on best management practices of orange hawkweed. Several types of herbicides and applications techniques are being tested. In addition USDA Research Agronomist had established a couple of test plots in the Homer area as well. Both studies should provide valuable information to local landowners struggling to eradicate OHW from their properties. Site visits will be organized for interested individuals so stay tuned for dates and times. Please do not hesitate to contact our office to be put on a contact list to be notified as soon as field trips are scheduled.

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

The HSWCD Board meets monthly, on the second Wednesday @ 5:00. We welcome all visitors!

UPCOMING EVENTS & DATES

July 9th HSWCD Board Meeting @ 5:00pm

July 12th Community Weed Pull

July 15th NRCD Board Meeting, 10:00 am

July 28-August 22 –National Envirothon, Flagstaff, AZ

August 13th HSWCD Board Meeting @ 5:00

Sarah Eastin is the new natural resource specialist and invasive plant coordinator for the Homer Soil and Water Conservation District. She comes to this position with a bachelors degree in Biological Sciences and GIS. In addition she has several years of natural resource management experience. She is looking forward to working with the community and helping local landowners manage their invasive weeds.

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*