

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.”



Sue Mauger, Cook Inlet Keeper’s Stream Ecologist, speaks at the Anchor Point Chamber of Commerce

Board of Supervisors

- Chris Rainwater, Chair
- Jim VanOss
- Steve Gibson
- Otto Kilcher
- Pete Roberts
- Debbie Alred, Alternate
- Carey Meyer, Alternate
- Devony Lehner, Alternate

District Consultants

- Shirley Schollenberg, Managing Consultant
- Lindsay Winkler, Watershed Consultant
- Caleb Slemmons, Natural Resources Consultant
- Hansel Klausner, Natural Resources Consultant
- Christine S’gro, Education Consultant

WATERSHED HEALTH PROJECT DRAWS ATTENTION

Since the December issue of Natural Currents, the Homer District and Cook Inlet Keeper have released their latest report from the Lower Kenai Peninsula Watershed Health Project. Radio, TV, and newspaper coverage of the report’s findings was strong as concerns about rising salmon stream temperatures and decreasing invertebrate communities caught people’s attention.

On March 8th, the Homer District and Keeper spoke to local fishermen and business owners at the Anchor Point Chamber of Commerce’s weekly luncheon to discuss recent monitoring results. More talks to the South Peninsula Sportsmen’s Association and

the Alaska Northern Forest Cooperative are scheduled for April.

Meanwhile, analysis of air and water temperature data collected in 2005 continues. This past year was the first time air temperature data loggers were placed at each water temperature monitoring site. Preliminary results show a very tight relationship between water and air temperatures collected in the upper reaches of the four lower Kenai Peninsula salmon streams. Lower down in the watersheds this relationship changes. This change could be due to natural and/or human influences. Possible human influences include loss of stream-side

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PARK SERVICE AND DISTRICT CO-HOST WEED TALK

Despite the dismal weather, hardy residents of the Southern Peninsula attended a talk on Thursday, February 23rd about invasive weeds at the Islands and Ocean Visitor Center. Through collaboration with Jeff Hays of the National Parks Service (NPS), the Homer District provided both an evening presentation for the general public and a round-table discussion touching on management issues. The event was well attended and fostered discussion and collaboration among others interested in the growing problem of invasive plants.

Hansel Klausner, discussed the results of the District’s 2-year inventory of invasives and some of the local infestations and control efforts that the District have worked on in the past. Jeff Hays and Penny Bauder (NPS) discussed the issues confronting Park Service lands and what people can do to prevent the introduction and spread of invasive plants. While not an obvious consideration, according to Hays “Homer, is a sort of bedroom community for folks flying into Katmai.” As such, there is concern that many of the problematic ornamental plants such as Orange Hawkweed, could be introduced

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Late Potato Blight in Alaska

IT'S HERE!
Help keep it off the Peninsula

WHAT TO DO

- Request certified seed potatoes from a reliable source
- Plant leftover stock from last year (if disease free)

PREVENT SPREAD...

- Do NOT plant seed potatoes from grocery store
- Do NOT plant other seed potatoes from the Matanuska Valley



Mildew-like halo around necrosis

IF YOU OBSERVE THESE SYMPTOMS IMMEDIATELY CONTACT:

TOM JAHNS, Cooperative Extension Agent
(907) 262-5824

Severely infected tubers will have a distinctive rotting odor



Weeds Talk Continued...

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accidentally even to more remote park lands. So far, the Park Service had not had to deal with many of the highly invasive plants and has been keeping other species like dandelion in check by hand removal.

Caleb Slemmons, Homer District's new Invasive Plants Program Coordinator, talked about the future of the District's invasive plant program. Caleb has much planned for this summer including community weed pulls, continuing Canada thistle eradication efforts and additional

District will also be updating the website (<http://www.homerswcd.org>) with information about local invasive plants and how to get rid of them. Watch for updates over the next couple of months!

In addition to these efforts, the District also has applied for funding to support a public education and outreach effort for invasive ornamental plants. This effort will include an education module for distribution through Peninsula schools, posters and brochures, greenhouse/landscaping outreach and improved display materials for public events (e.g. fair, Kenai River Fest).



NRT students gather at the Winn Nature Center for some animal tracking and a discussion on adaptive biology.

NRT CLASS UPDATE

Women in Science

Three students from the Natural Resources Technology class were a big hit at the recent Women In Science event held at the Islands and Ocean Visitor Center. Together Hannah Bradley, Chelsey Nieman, and Mackenzie Callis, prepared and presented a hands-on lesson to Girl Scouts, ages 6 through 8. The lesson included plant part identification, dissecting flowers and fruit, labeling plant part functions and explaining the importance of each. The NRT girls were particular favorites of this younger crowd.

Winter Outing

On Sunday, January 15th the Natural Resources Technology class met up at the Wynn Nature Center, donned their snowshoes and participated in a winter recreation activity. While searching for and keying out animal tracks the students identified and discussed various plant and animal adaptations that allow for and support winter survival. Though there was little fresh snow for tracking the class was treated to blue sky and some breathtaking views.

School District Conference

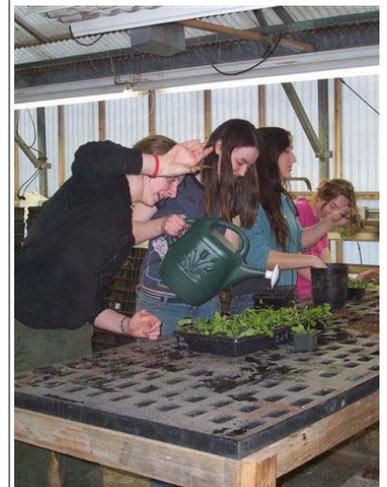
Also in January, the Homer FFA chapter planned and coordinated the Kenai

Peninsula School District, Career and Technical Student Organizations Conference. The conference was held on February 10th at the Homer High School and the Kachemak Bay College, it was a huge success thanks to all of the people in the community who donated their time and expertise. The conference involved competitions in job interviews, floriculture, prepared speech, drafting, and culinary arts, to name a few. The Natural Resource students walked away with awards in prepared speech, business math, culinary arts, and floriculture.

Speech Contest

The Rotary Club was gracious enough to host and judge our annual Speech Competition. The theme this year was, Water Wise. Kristen Tonga won first place and \$100 with her speech Fluoridation Oration, Hannah Bradley took second place with her speech on the effects of development on water quality, and Chelsey Nieman grabbed third with her speech on The Clean Water Act.

Kristen will now take her show on the road and travel to Anchorage in early
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Students in the NRT class propagate plants in the Homer High School greenhouse.

Plant Sale

May 2nd

*Homer High School
Greenhouse*

*Proceeds will send the
Natural Resources
Class
to the state-wide
Envirothon competition
and FFA Convention*

Plants Available:

Imperial Larkspur

Columbine

Aloe

Jade

Basil

Lavender

Chives

Cilantro

Tomato

Zucchini

Beets

Turnips

Cauliflower

Broccoli

Cabbage

Summer Squash

NRT Class continued...

(Continued from page 3)

April to represent the Homer District at the statewide speech competition. The competition will be held as part of the spring meeting of the Alaska Association of Conservation Districts and top speakers have a chance to bring home another \$200.

Envirothon and FFA Convention

The NRT class is currently preparing for the statewide Envirothon Competition, a multi disciplinary, hands-on natural resources education event that tests the practical knowledge of teams of students from across the state. AACD sponsors the event which will be hosted at Chena Hot Springs, in Fairbanks, on April 26th and 27th.

With hopes of maintaining their reigning champion status for a third year students are busy studying. The competition provides students an opportunity to learn about forestry, wildlife, aquatic ecology, and soil science issues and applications in the state. Students must provide mock solutions to Alaska resource issues.

The winning team gets to compete at the International Envirothon competition which will be held in Manitoba, Canada this summer.

The State FFA convention will be held in conjunction with the Envirothon. State FFA officers will be elected, Career Development Events will include; Floriculture, Poultry Judging, Dairy Product Judging. Leadership events include: Extemporaneous speech competitions, Prepared Speech, Job Interviews and reciting the FFA Creed. First place winners of these competitions will be eligible to travel to Indianapolis, Indiana to compete at the National FFA Convention next October. Leadership workshops will be provided at the state conference as well. Homer native Hannah Harrison is the State FFA President who is currently in the middle of planning and organizing the conference. She will also be conducting a leadership workshop.

Students have also been busy in the greenhouse propagating plants and on May 2nd, Alaska Agriculture Day, the class will hold its annual plant sale fund raiser that makes the trip to Fairbanks possible. The sale will be held at the greenhouse at Homer High. If you don't have room for any more plants but are interested in contributing to this trip we always have Alaska Grown sweatshirts and T-shirts for sale.



LONG LINE EXPECTED FOR SOIL TESTING —SIGN UP EARLY—

With lessons learned, the Homer District is excited to offer the Soil and Forage Testing Program to our cooperators for the second year. Last year was a tremendous success with over 45 Cooperators participating in the emerging program.

The District is looking forward to providing soil tests and helping Cooperators to maintain healthy, productive soils on their lands. As last year, tests will include Nitrogen, Phosphorus and Potassium levels, pH and a number of micronutrients. This year, the cost will be a flat rate of \$16.00/sample, which includes shipping costs.

We are continuing to improve this program and are currently looking into the possibility of a field-based pH probe to get results back to you even faster! Fertilizer recommendations will be provided by the UAF Cooperative Extension Service based on testing results.

Spring is just around the corner and the District is currently taking early sign-ups for testing this year. Make sure to get your name on the list!

For all of NRCS Nutrient and Pest Management program participants, please note that the District's soil testing program will meet the NRCS soil testing requirements for this practice.

HSWCD AND HOMER TREE STEWARDS PROVIDE WORKSHOP, PLAN FOR SUMMER

On March 23rd, the Homer District in collaboration with the Homer Tree Stewards held a soils workshop for Tree Stewards volunteers and interested citizens. NRCS Soil Scientist, Mike Mungoven provided a presentation and discussion of basic soil components and how these components affect plant growth. Mike concentrated on local examples of how to optimize soil conditions for plant growth, and answered numerous questions from those in attendance.

Afterwards, discussion turned to upcoming events and service projects that are envisioned for the coming planting and growing season. Arbor Day, which in Alaska occurs on the third Monday in May, is rapidly approaching, and the Homer District and Tree Stewards are will again collaborate on several events. These include tree planting demonstrations, community schools classes, movie

presentations at the Homer Theater, interpretive hikes through the Homer Demonstration Forest, and groundbreaking at the future site of a tree nursery on the grounds of the Kachemak Heritage Land Trust office.

Other future projects discussed were the completion of the Kenai Peninsula College's landscape plan installation, collaborations with the City of Homer, and the development of an Adopt-a-Tree program. This latter project recently received grant funding from the Division of Forestry for the purchase of tools and safety equipment that will be checked out to qualified volunteers.

If you attended the Homer Tree Stewards certification course last fall or are interested in volunteering for any of the events or projects mentioned above, contact Hansel Klausner or Lindsay Winkler at the Homer District.

Though
some
Cooperators
may
disagree,
it's time for
soil
testing...



... not soil
tasting!



NRCS OFFERS ONE-TIME INCREASE IN EQIP PAYMENTS

Due to spikes in the cost of energy and materials such as concrete, steel, and plastic pipe, NRCS is offering an Energy Conservation Initiative that will allow a one-time opportunity to increase EQIP cost-share payments.

Only those contracts obligated in fiscal years 1997 through 2004 are eligible, and participants must complete the practice no later than June 30th. Payments for

eligible practices will increase the cost-share by 15 percent, but only fully completed and certified practices will be eligible.

Some applicable practices include fencing, pipeline construction and grade stabilization. Producers must contact NRCS prior to starting the potentially eligible practice; stop by the Homer Field Office to discuss your eligibility and pick up a complete list of practices.

Watershed Health Continued...

(Continued from page 1)

vegetation, water withdrawals, channel straightening, increasing sedimentation, and wetland loss.

The Homer District will continue to monitor temperatures on the lower Kenai Peninsula salmon streams and will work hard to keep our community informed of changes occurring within our watersheds. If you have suggestions for how we can better engage you in the project's results, please contact Shirley Schollenberg, District Manager, at our office or by email at shirley@homerswcd.org.

UPCOMING EVENTS & DEADLINES

May 2nd—Natural Resources Class & FFA Plant Sale

May 15th—Alaska's Arbor Day (details to be announced)



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www.homerswcd.org

*Meeting the needs of the local
Land User*