

**Meeting Minutes**

October 11th, 2017

5:00 PM

USDA Service Center, 4014 Lake St Homer, AK

**A. Call to order 5:25**

**B. Roll call:** Erin Sturdivant, Karin Sonnen, Gena Grobarek, Chris Rainwater, Tim Alzheimer, Otto Kilcher, Devony Lehner, Kyra Wagner, Kiki Abrahamson

**C. Approval of the Agenda:** unanimous

**D. Approval of the Minutes:** Gena motion to approve, Tim seconded, accepted

**E. Visitors**

a. NRCS Report: Karin Sonnen

**Conservation Planning and Programs:**

**EQIP - ASTC(P)**, also known as Amanda, is finalizing FY18 program documents. There should be an EQIP announcement at the end of October, with a batching date 30d from that (application deadline date). Expects that obligation would be done by the end of April.

**Local Working Group** Can delay until spring. Local ranking questions in FY18 will be local to the subaccount, rather than local in a geographic sense. The questions will be used to rank according to greatest conservation benefit. If many projects are similar and rank exactly the same, EQIP/ProTracts assigns a tracking code that is essentially a random number – it takes out any hint of favoritism.

**Working Lands for Wildlife**

NRCS Engineer and I (Meg) met with USFWS Kenai staff and NNAI staff to look at a site that has design work done and could be a WLFW site in 2018.

**Other:**

**NRCS Agreement Accounting for Space and Support** - Alaska NRCS must document concrete deliverables and equate them to the cost of space and IT support. For example, SWCD can write X wetland determinations for the space and Y conservation plans. Where have an agreement that pays an SWCD for determinations, those required for space/support will be in addition to the ones that need to be completed per an existing Cooperative Agreement. Work items funded with an agreement cannot be considered towards space. Anything that is the district's normal responsibilities can't be considered. The Wasilla NRCS office has contracted with the Palmer district do conservation plans to equate to what we pay for their computer/space, etc. That's where we need to head with all of the space agreements.

Consider getting at least one staff member through the planner training to write plans, do the wetland determinations, provide nutrient management assistance, or brainstorm with local staff to find unidentified tasks and work. You may have a training budget in an existing Cooperative Agreement that can accommodate this. Cassie said there is not additional funds now. SWCD funding (using non-NRCS funds) of the training can count as contribution for space. Please phrase deliverables in measurable quantities that would be accomplished in a year's time, or more, such as plans, hours, certifications, determinations.

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**Homer Staffing** – Homer SC opened and closed (!), panel is being formed. Discussing additional planners for field, again, including one more in Homer. That hire would likely happen before filling the Kenai Program Support position. A lot has changed in a month.

**Homer Space** – There was an acceptable bid, but NHQ hasn't released any funds and can't provide info until a lease is in place. Cassie anticipated a move in January. *Discussion later in agenda.*

**Meg Out of Office:** Around the Holidays... which are around the corner!

- b. NRCS Report: Karin Sonnen
  - i. People can sign up for EQIP till end of Nov.
  - ii. Otto: how do we know how much money goes into what pools for who? Karin: That is unknown but once contracts are signed it is part of public record.
  - iii. Report on trip to the head of the Bay for grazing lease study
    - 1. Scott Crocket, Arthur Keyes, Karin Sonnen and Chris Rainwater went out
    - 2. The cows are rotating between 3 areas on the Flats
    - 3. All guests were impressed with health of cows
- c. FSA Report: Erin Sturdivant
  - i. RTCP (Reimbursement Transportation Cost Payment) program period closed, but the office is calling and reminding folks who applied that receipts are due in by Nov 3.
  - ii. County committee seat will be open next year for the Homer area. Nominations in will be in August and elections in November
- d. Other guests: Kiki Abrahamson
  - i. Abrahamson presented a video of District Board Supervisor Catherine Knott addressing two people in her neighborhood who had been asked to give an estimate regarding the removal of a shed. Knott had a history of using the shed and, on the video, referred to being on the District Board and knowing details of the new landowner not being in compliance with their state farm plan and that she would file for adverse claim on the building. Abrahamson pointed out the unethical reference to her position on the board while in a situation where she was trying gain personal advantage. She presented a letter that she and her husband had signed outlining her grievances against Knott with a request that she have her status as a cooperator of the District removed.
  - ii. Abrahamson described other aspects of landownership and history in the neighborhood.
  - iii. Knott had submitted her resignation from the Board September 21<sup>st</sup>. Manager Wagner noted that her reference to the new landowner's lack of compliance was a misunderstanding between her and Knott, that the landowner was in good standing. Knott had since communicated to the landowner that she would not file for adverse claim.
  - iv. Abrahamson stated that she wanted to share this with the board so that they were aware of liability and responsibilities that they carry.  
  
Otto moved to take this into advisement and look into what exposure the Board has. Seconded by Gena. Discussion: What we can do? What liability does the Board have for board member actions? Motion carried unanimously.

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Abrahamson departed after a brief look at an invasive weed that she had found on her property, probably fall dandelion.

F. **Financial Report:** Tim motioned to accept, Gena seconded. Passed.

### G. Manager's Report

#### Land Use: Trails

- **Watermelon Trail:** At the end of September we held a teleconference with Brian Blossom (ADF&G Critical Habitat), Kyle Kidder (State DNR), Marcus Mueller (KPB Land Manager), Ben Mohr (CIRI Land Manger), Kyle Graham (FWS Field Office), and Mike Eastham (Snomads trail manager) and hammered out future steps for the Watermelon Trail. It looks like the Snomads permit for maintenance on the parking lot will get extended and widened to 24 feet throughout the Borough parcels on the trail. This will be the step needed for the State DNR to issue the easement through the rest of the state land. Fingers crossed, this will all be done by early in the coming year so Mike can apply for Pitzman Roberts funding to continue trail improvements around CIRI property
- **Fox River Flats Critical Habitat Area:**
  - Kyle Graham (USFWS) went out to Fox River at the end of September and noted that the bridges are successfully routing 4-wheeler traffic and reducing the number of stream crossings. He did find one prominent stream crossing and was wondering why that one didn't have a bridge and if there were plans to put one there.
  - Kyra is now on the planning team for the revision of the Fox River CHA and the Kachemak Bay CHA. The first meeting was last week. Eight members of the team are from ADF&G, then there is one representative each from DEC, DNR, NOAA, and the Borough. And HSWCD! It's awesome we are included!

#### Water Quality

- **Anchor River:** It sounds like, if there are ever funds coming from the ACWA grant we submitted about streambank restoration on the Anchor River, those funds will be announced in December. Maybe. So, with Devony's help, we went ahead and applied for funding through the Kenai Fish Habitat partnership to at least get started on a survey of conditions in the area. We will hear about that funding possibility in November (stage 1) and March (final).
- **Water Rights:** While trying to track down someone from the state to possibly come talk to our District about water rights, Kyra connected with Christine Ballard's supervisor, Mr. Henry Brooks. Mr. Brooks said they are quite understaffed and it would be good to know what kind questions we have for them. Thoughts?
  - *Otto: Is Mr. Henry talking to NRCS about water rights requirements? Or his supervisor? Chris: topics of interest include drilling for oil: water rights for landowners regarding fracking and Blue Crest*

#### Agriculture/Soil

- **NRCS & Employees:** Devony has started working on compliance issues for NRCS, Brad will be taking of the month of November, and we are bringing in Jessica Guritz from Fairbanks starting next week for three weeks so we can make sure Brad is all caught up before he leaves.
- **Div Ag Visit & ARLF:** At the end of September, the director of the Division of Ag, Arthur Keyes, came down to join NRCS grazing lease survey. While down here, we hosted office time and tours for him to interact with producers. His video of Hilltop Farm and Carey Restino's operation can be seen on the Alaska Grown Facebook Page. During office hours, Board member Gena Grobarek brought up questions about ARLF (the Agricultural Revolving Farm Loan Fund). Keyes let us know that the State is discussing the possibility of combining all the revolving loan funds in the state, thereby gutting the benefits to farmers since it now has a board of agriculturalists that selects loans. A combined board would not have such strong representation and may put the different interest areas in competition for fewer funds.
- **Farmers Market Promotion Grant:** Oh, yeah, and remember that grant we collaborated with Cook Inletkeeper on? The one that would jumpstart AK Farmers Market Association? We got it. \$20,000 a year for the next three years will be going to Kenai SWCD and to Homer SWCD to identify producer needs in the realm of direct-to-consumer sales. Yahoo!

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## Invasive Weed Program

- **Weeds program:** Herbicide for Elodea was successfully applied to the two new lakes in Nikiski. The project was another great example of teamwork and diplomacy. Sediment and water samples will be collected before ice-in. Work has finished up with the RAC grant for this season. There will be reapplications at several spots next year and some new sites have been added. All partners are happy. Development is underway for the USFWS cost-share program that will be administered by HSWCD. Matt will be traveling up to Anchorage later this month for the annual Committee for Noxious and Invasive Pest Management Conference. After that he will be attending the initial meeting for the Statewide Council on Invasive Communication, also in Anchorage the same week.

## Education

- **West Homer Elementary:** Earlier this month, Matt was able to get 12 classes out identifying invasives and conducting weed pulls at West Homer Elementary, and has returned several times for various spin-off topics regarding invasives and/or School Yard Habitat.
- **McNeil Canyon Elementary:** Conrad Field continues to identify and draw more plants that school kids out at McNeil can see near their school. He is looking at 60-70 plants drawing to be compiled in a collection of laminated ID cards for school use.

## Administration

- **Board Member Resignation:** Catherine Knott's resignation was effective on September 21<sup>st</sup>. Anyone know of someone else we can get on the Board?
- **The Fall Newsletter:** Planned to go out in the next week. Some will be sent out by email and some by mail. Nomination letters for Board positions will go out with this. Gena's position is up for re-election and now Catherine's seat as well.
- **BLM Audit:** The office has received notification for a "Public Civil Rights Compliance Review." This will translate into lots of time and paperwork for the District Manager.
- **GIS class:** Matt and Brad are participating in a GIS workshop this weekend put on by the college for nonprofit employees. This will mean we will better understand how to get the most out of the GPSs we have and help with tracking things like weed infestations and land ownership boundaries and trail when we are working with maps. Hopefully we will be able to stop bugging Jared every time we have a GIS-style question!
- **New office space:** Still unknown, the word on the street is that we will be moving in December or January. Meg is in the process of revising and updating space agreements with the idea that we will now be writing in deliverables with our space use agreements. *Discussion later in agenda.*

## H. Old Business

- a. Cooperator List and Newsletter/Elections
  - i. Discussion of cooperator list to be sent out for board nominations. Many on the present cooperator list are not responsive to communication and we only have mailing addresses, what should be done about these? Suggested that District Manager look into the possibility of having categories of non-active cooperators. Active cooperators could benefit from email communication more frequently, non-active would be included in mailings for elections.
  - ii. Open Board Seat: Catherine Knott's resignation
    1. Otto: motioned to bring the resignation to the floor
      - a. Point of order: Otto: should this be in executive session or open session?

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- i. Discussion: Executive session is for financial or employee privacy or to purge a board member, but since she already resigned, there is no action that would require going into executive session.
    - b. Otto moved to accept Catherin Knott's resignation with a resolution. Gena accepted. Resolved:
      - i. Whereas Knott's inappropriate reference to her position on the HSWCD board to influence a situation could cause potential harm to the District
      - ii. Whereas Knott has acknowledged the impact of her statements and the effect they had on the District
      - iii. Whereas she has already submitted her resignation
      - iv. We resolve to accept her resignation effective today, Oct 11, 2017
  2. Motion passed with unanimous consent
- b. In response to ethics issues affecting the Board:
  - i. Motioned by Otto: Look into the responsibilities of districts in regards to ethics from the State of AK. and read over and update our supervisors' handbook. Make sure that all new board members read and sign that they have read it. Tim seconded. Passed.
- c. Discussion about revoking Knott's cooperator agreement. Otto: We would need to investigate our liabilities and responsibilities or authority to remove cooperators from the cooperators list, the mechanism by which they can be removed, and if we can remove them at all.
- d. DNR land offering: Rolling Hills Subdivision
  - i. Due to the similar geographical and physical characteristics that this land offering has to the Forest Hills Subdivision, the District Manager is to submit the same recommendations.

## **I. New Business**

- a. State Farm Plan Comments
  - i. Mark Richey submitted 5 updated State Farm Conservation Plans (SFCP) for land on the North Fork. New roads and buildings proposed did not seem to inhibit potential for agricultural use on the land.
    1. Motion to approve upgraded SFCP: Gena moved, Tim seconded, approved.
- b. Earning NRCS Office Space
  - i. Discussion: Can we look at other locations? Can we find out what Palmer is trading for space? District Manager will look into these questions.

**Adjourned at 9:57**

**Next Meeting November 1<sup>st</sup>, 2017, at 5pm**