



## District Manager Notes

BY KYRA WAGNER

It's never dull down at Homer Soil & Water!

We continue to grow and strengthen our programs and are constantly looking for new ways to keep our organization sustainable and functioning to the highest potential. As you read through this robust newsletter, pay attention to the staff highlighted throughout. They are the key to our success.

Our Native Plants Program is hiring, so if you know of someone interested in the coolest summer job around, send them to our website for more information.

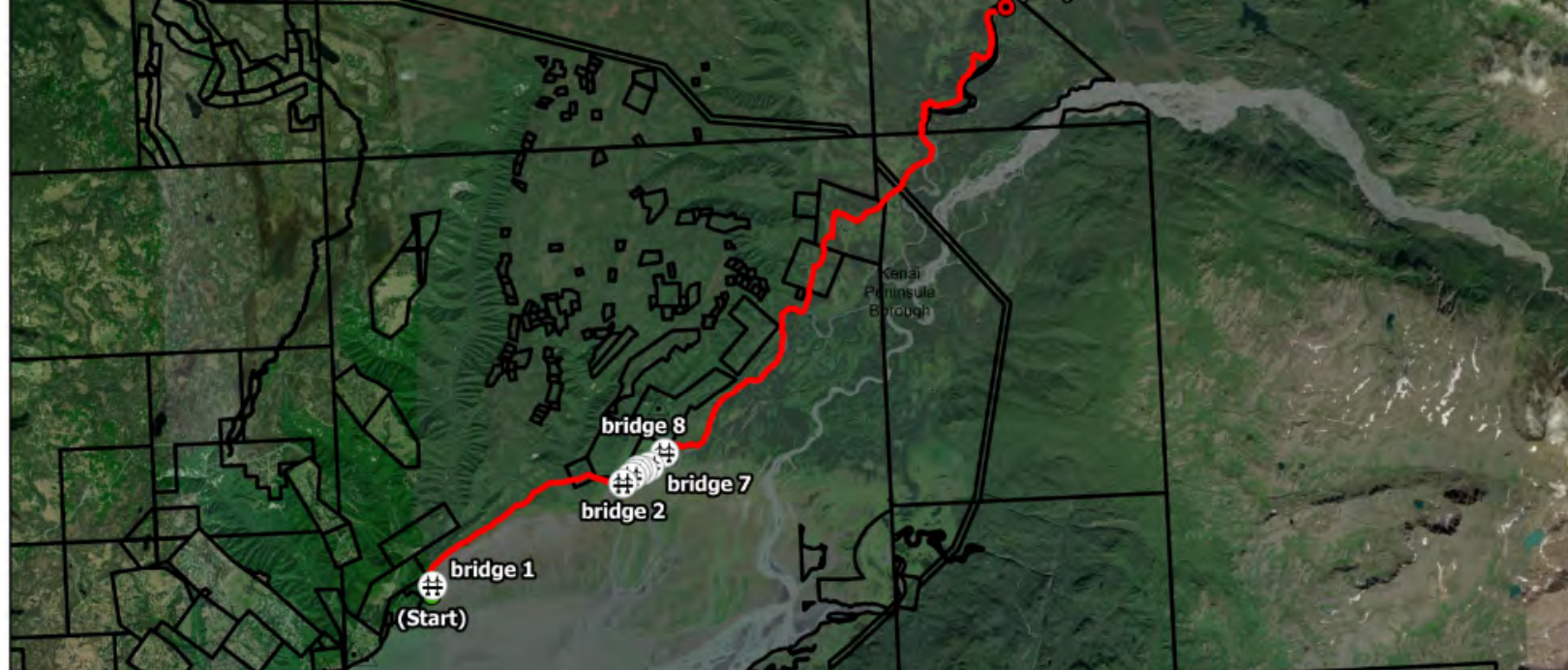
We also are in the process of revamping our offices in the Wildberry Building so that they can be used more as a communal space for other folks who work like so many of us. We tend to work non-traditionally; sometimes at home, sometimes on the road, sometimes in the field, and then sometimes in the office. If you know of a professional who is looking for a co-working environment in Homer, please send them my way.

It's hard to believe, but there is so much more going on here than we can fit into this semi-annual letter. If you would like to get more involved or stay more informed, feel free to join our monthly board meetings in person or on Zoom on the second Wednesday of each month. Feel free to contact me for more ways to plug in.

Thank you for your support!

## This issue:

Snow Survey & RS2477	PAGE 02
GPS Tracking Cattle	PAGE 03
Watermelon Trail Updates	PAGE 05
Habitat and Trails Team	PAGE 06
Trail Surveys	PAGE 07
Native Plants Program Team Update	PAGE 09
KP-CISMA Anniversary	PAGE 10
Elodea on the Peninsula	PAGE 11
Presenting Statewide on Chokecherry	PAGE 12
Invasive Species Team	PAGE 13
Know Your Land Talks	PAGE 14
Soil and Water Testing	PAGE 15
Ag Classes and Events	PAGE 16
Ag Program Team	PAGE 19
Our Board of Supervisors	PAGE 20
Our Partners	PAGE 21



## Comments on a Historic Trail Designation on the Fox River Flats

The Alaska Department of Natural Resources is open for public comment on or before April 26, 2024 regarding the proposed route of the RS-2477 right-of-way through the Fox River Flats. This designation needs to prove that the trail was historically used in this location, so extensive evidence was considered by the department including USGS Topographical Maps, Topographic Reconnaissance Maps, land title documents, interviews with relevant persons, primary historical sources, secondary historical sources, U.S. Surveys, Patent documents, USGS Reports, historic interview transcripts, and both modern and historic aerial photographs. Historic accounts of people using the Fox River Flats trail date to at least 1898. Specific trail location is known as early as 1915.

Homer Soil & Water hosted a comments session at the college April 16th and it became obvious that there are plenty of ideas about how this trail should go.

If you would like to comment, and to ensure consideration, written comments must be received by the Division of Mining, Land and Water at the Public Access Assertion and Defense Section, 550 West 7th Avenue, Suite 1030, Anchorage, AK 99501, on or before April 26, 2024. Questions concerning this activity or requests to view the full materials should be directed to Kara Moore, Telephone: (907) 269-6008; or e-mail: [kara.moore@alaska.gov](mailto:kara.moore@alaska.gov).

## Alaska Snow Survey

Every year Homer Soil & Water staff go out into the field with USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) staff to work on and monitor numerous snow survey sites around our area from the Anchor River divide to the valleys above Bradley Lake and over to Port Graham.

The NRCS Snow Survey Program provides mountain snowpack data and streamflow forecasts for the western United States and Alaska. Data is collected through automated weather stations (SNOTEL and SNOLITE), manual snow measurements (Snow Courses), and through partnering agencies and networks. You may have seen the most accessible sites at McNeil Canyon Elementary or in the Homer Demonstration Forest on the way to the Arboretum.

Common applications of Snow Survey products include water supply management, flood control, climate modeling, recreation, and conservation planning.

The latest reports are already out for April. Check them out at: <https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/alaska/snow-survey>

# GPS Systems Show Bird's-eye View of Cattle Movements at the Head of Kachemak Bay

BY DEVONY LEHNER

In 2020, Homer Soil and Water and the Fox River Cattlemen's Association began a multi-year project to test GPS systems to see if they could track cattle locations on the Fox River Flats state grazing lease. The project was funded by an NRCS Conservation Innovation Grant.

Three GPS systems were tested—two collar-mounted systems during the 2021 grazing season and one ear-tag system during the 2022 grazing season. One of the systems tested in 2021 couldn't be made operational, but both "direct-to-satellite" (DtS) systems—one on a collar, one an ear tag, were able to send cattle location data despite challenging conditions and remoteness of the Fox River Flats grazing area.

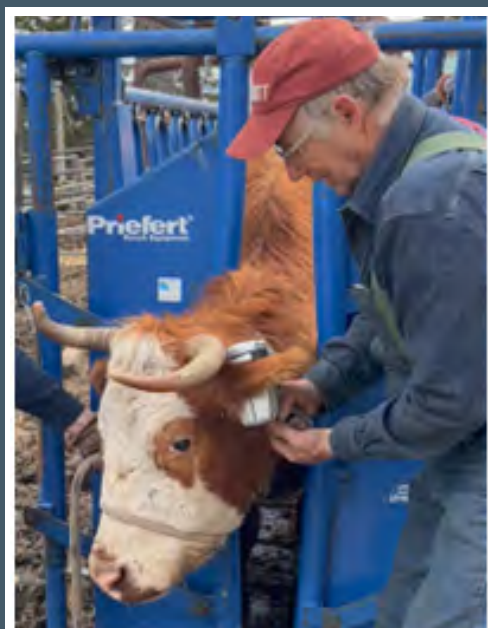
Photos on this page and the next help tell the story. If you'd like to learn more, check out the Facebook page "Fox River Flats and Beyond" or look at the



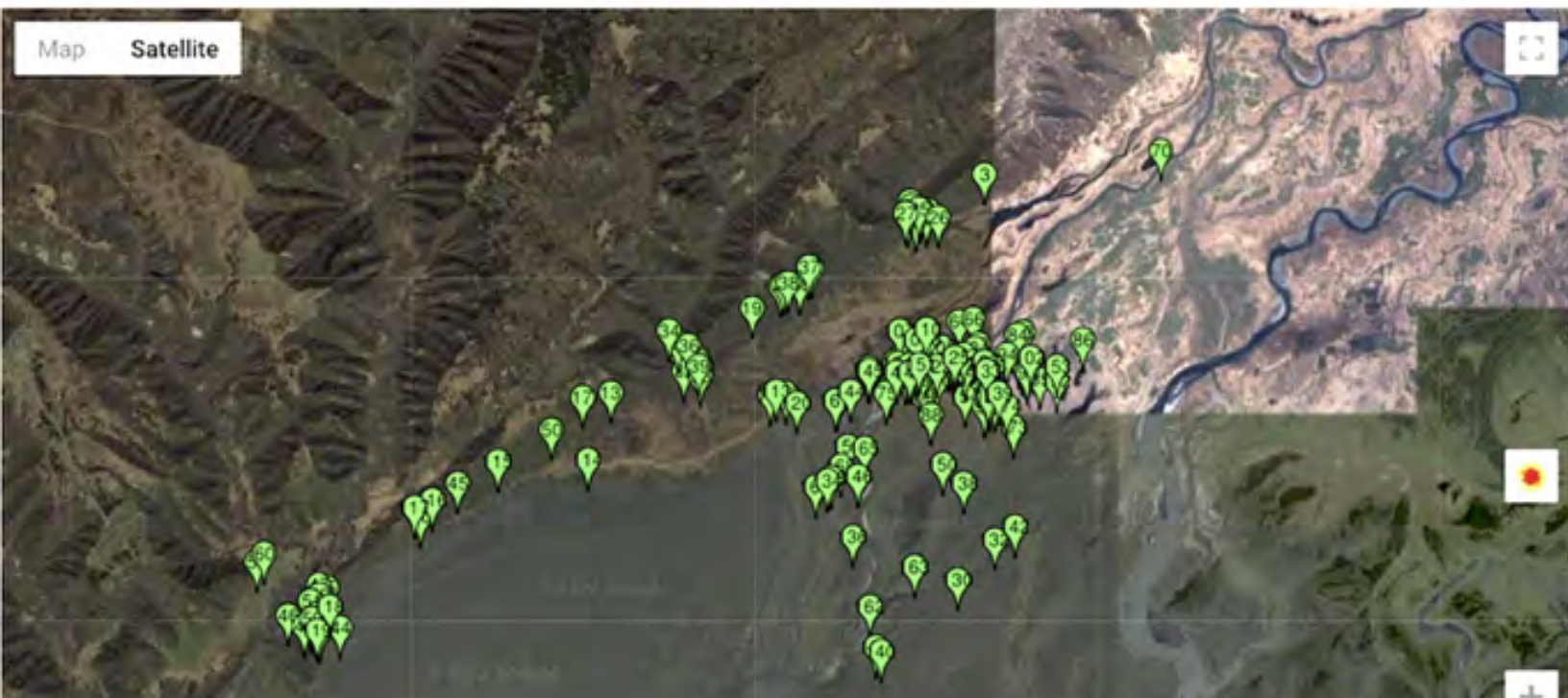
final project report—the link for the report is: [https://drive.google.com/file/d/11f1\\_ywCfLhYOoo2JDpAf7\\_q2IUdjhYFu/view?usp=sharing](https://drive.google.com/file/d/11f1_ywCfLhYOoo2JDpAf7_q2IUdjhYFu/view?usp=sharing).

It's hard to see cattle on the Fox River Flats, especially across Fox River. Can you spot a handful of cattle in the photo above?

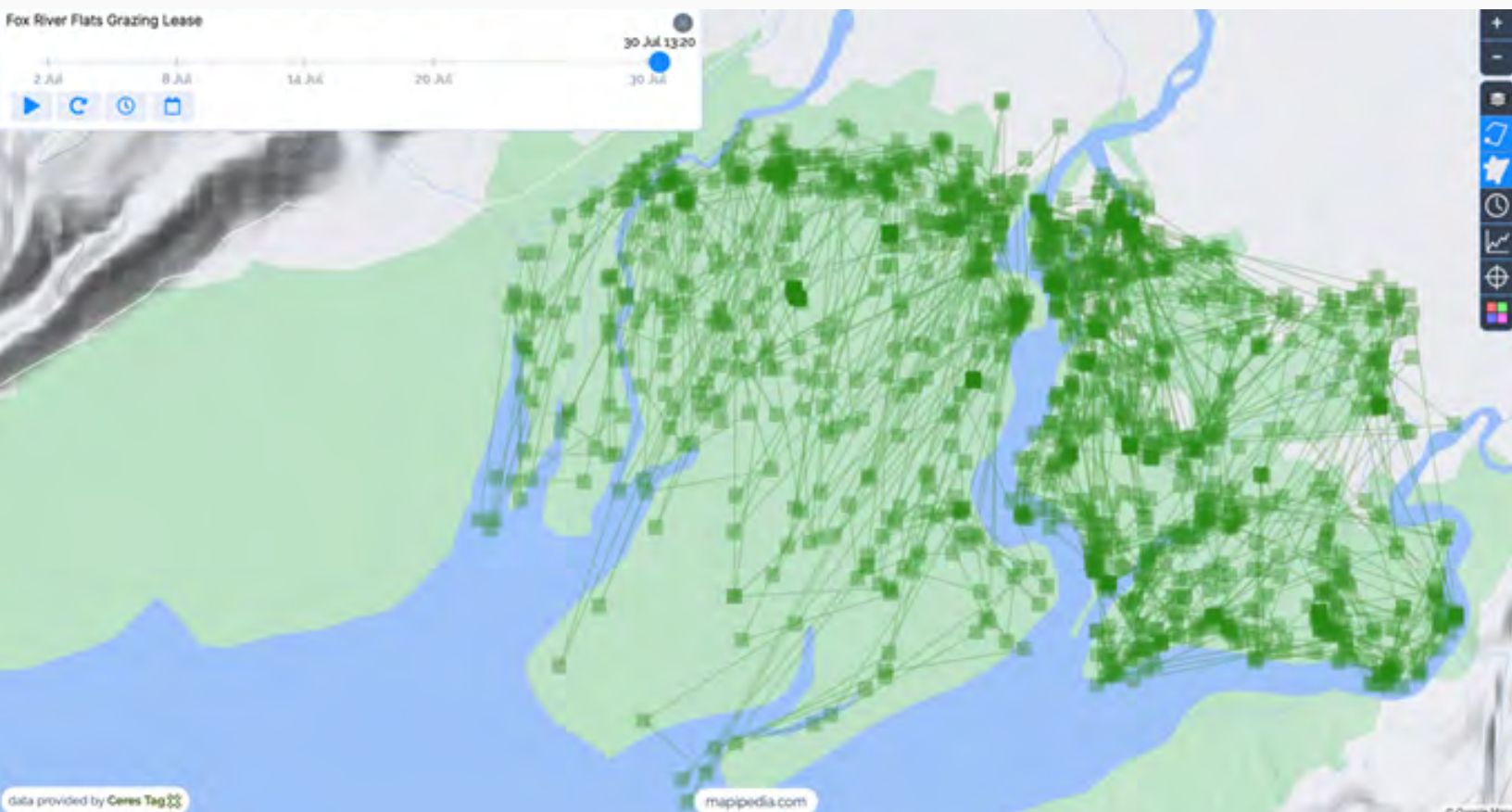
But what if you could put GPS trackers on your cows and see their locations on a computer or smart phone? This project tested three GPS systems—maps on the following page show some results.



The photo on the far left shows two Smarter Technologies GPS systems tested in 2021—both mounted on a collar. The photo on the right shows the Ceres ear tag GPS system tested in 2022. Both photos show cattleman Otto Kilcher attaching GPS units to his cows.



The map above shows cow location data from July 26 to October 25, 2021, for a single cow wearing Smarter Technologies direct-to-satellite GPS tag (number 0-4347998); this cow was part of the herd that generally remained close to and often west of Fox River. This tag was a collar-mounted, direct-to-satellite unit.



The map above is a heat map showing locations for about 12 cows from July 1-31, 2022; location data were transmitted every 4 hrs (~6 marked locations every 24 hours). An animation of a map showing a 48-hour period from July 1 to July 3 can be viewed in the video at: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1VkdtpjVvSxv2rx9OUymOrSsXKo1cyxU/view?usp=sharing>.

# The Watermelon Trail – A Sustainable Route

BY MATT JAMES

Homer Soil and Water Conservation District, in partnership with Alaska Department of Fish and Game and the Snomads, are making plans to conduct major repairs to the Watermelon Trail located in Homer, Alaska.

The Watermelon Trail was created in the 1920s by homesteaders accessing their property. Many years later it was connected to a cleared seismic line on the north end. It has been accessed by ATVs for over 40 years and sees heavy snowmachine use in the winter.

The current trail is a route that was possible for four-wheeled vehicles to transit without modifying the ground. It follows ridge tops and fall-line routes up and down slopes. Drainage is not controlled, so water gathers force as it flows down the trail line, eroding the trail and pooling in low spots.

Sustainable trail design routes trails along the contour of the ground, typically creating a “bench” in the slope. This approach allows the designer to

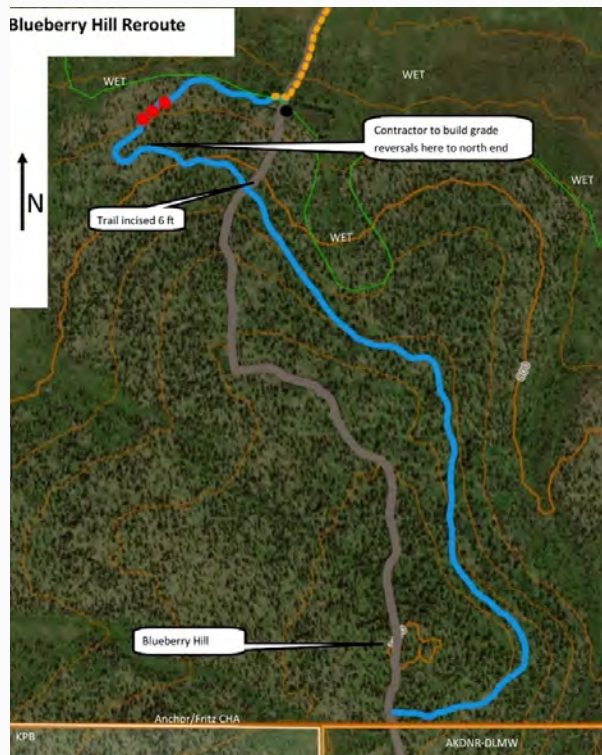


control the trail grade versus running up and down the fall line. With controlled grade, the volume and velocity of water can be minimized with regular drainage features along the trail.

There are approximately 6 miles of the Watermelon Trail that run through the Anchor River-Fritz Creek Critical Habitat Area. A trail assessment conducted by Happy Trails of Alaska recommends that 5.6 miles of the trail be rerouted to a sustainable route and move a part of the trail from private lands owned by Cook Inlet Regional Inc. onto lands managed by Alaska DNR and the Kenai Peninsula Borough.

Fall-line segments such as this have been incised as much as 6 feet deep, resulting in approximately 19,000 cubic yards of soil being displaced into the Beaver Creek valley. By rerouting the trail onto a sustainable footprint, this discharge of silt into a salmon stream can be corrected.





## The Watermelon Trail – A Sustainable Route continued...

A sustainably designed trail will not only allow runoff waters to be controlled to prevent erosion and trail degradation, but it will also place the trail on the hillside contours giving trail users a better view of the surrounding terrain.

Clearing work for this project may begin as soon as May of 2024 with actual trail construction following as funding allows.

For more information about the trail project please email Matthew James, [mattjames@homerswcd.org](mailto:mattjames@homerswcd.org)

## Meet the Staff: Habitat & Trails Program



### Matt James

Forester [mattjames@homerswcd.org](mailto:mattjames@homerswcd.org)

Matt was hired in June of 2020 as a Forester. He works closely with the ADF&G to complete moose habitat restoration projects on the Kenai Peninsula as well as working on trails issues. Matt is a long time Homer resident and came to us after a 25-year career of wildland firefighting with th a 25-year career of wil



### Marcia Macone

Trails Program Technician [marcia@homerswcd.org](mailto:marcia@homerswcd.org)

An avid trails enthusiast, Marcia has enjoyed the outdoor work of clearing, assessing and improving our local trails. She comes to us with years of experience working both for Crowley and on the Tiglax, but also a love of creating trails for access to the outdoors.



### Devony Lenher

Natural Resource Specialist [devony@homerswcd.org](mailto:devony@homerswcd.org)

Devony is the queen of Web Soil Survey, NRCS programs, and all the resources needed to make wise decisions on your land. With nothing more than the purest intent to inform each and every landowner on the Peninsula of these resources, Devony is our greatest resource and institutional memory bank.

# Asking the Public: How do you use the Watermelon Trail?

BY MARCIA MACONE

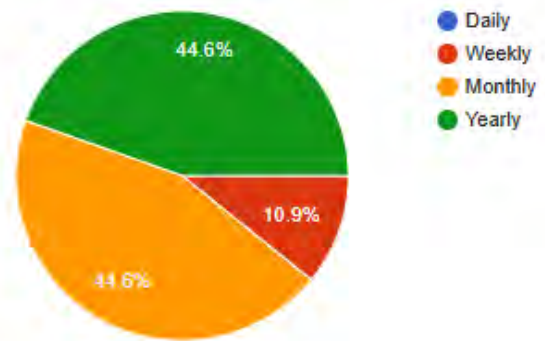
The HSWCD trail crew put together a survey/questionnaire for the Watermelon Trail as part of our public outreach, our goal has been to get a finger on the pulse of the trail users. Our objective is to protect, maintain and improve our stewardship of the Watermelon as well as other trails under our partnership with the Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADFG) and US Fish and Wildlife (USF&W).

The feedback from the Watermelon Trail survey was outstanding with 92 responses from various users. The survey was sent to the Snomads, Homer Cycling Club, Nordic Ski Club, and Homer Trails Alliance. Survey results were sent to our partners with ADF&G which in turn was shared with those making funding decisions. We strongly feel that results from public comment made a difference in getting substantial funding from ADF&G for the Watermelon trail.

To the right are samples of those responses and comments from the Watermelon Trail survey/questionnaire.

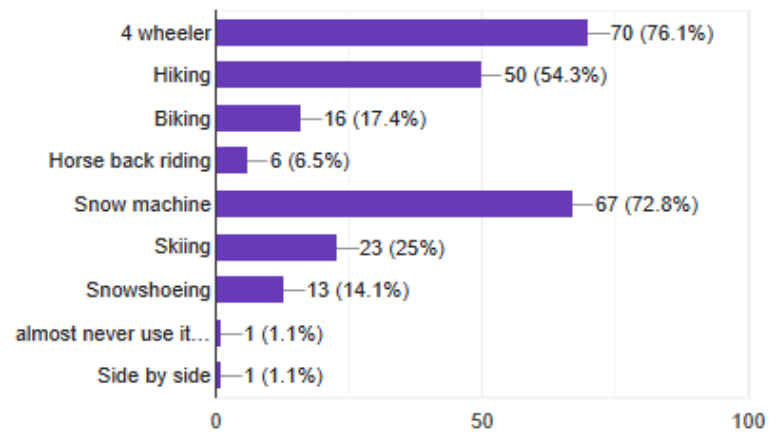
## How often do you access the Watermelon Trail?

92 responses



## How do you Travel on the Watermelon Trail?

92 responses



## If you could change anything about the Watermelon Trail, what would it be?

92 responses

re-rout the trail to accommodate better water drainage to assist in maintaining a sustainable trail.

Though would be very difficult would love that it wasn't so rutted.

Somewhat avoid ruts caused by 4-wheelers; don't object to 4-wheelers but do when soft trail damages it.

I would like the landscape to be reversed so I didn't have to return with a climb ;)

Trail Corridor clear wide enough to be groomed in Winter and fix the ruts, better drainage and hardened Summer trail surface.

Visiting it more often :)

I would continue to make actual trail improvements that provide more ORV access with low environmental impact

No burning preference

# Asking the Public: How do you use the North Fork Hills Trail?

BY MARCIA MACONE

The HSWCD trail crew also put together a survey/questionnaire for the North Forks Hill Trail as part of our public outreach. This trail also has extensive damage in areas and multiple land ownership throughout. This trail begins next to Nikolaevsk and connects into the Caribou Hills trail complex. In the winter it can easily connect to the Dry Hole and other groomed trails that can take you all the way out East End Road.

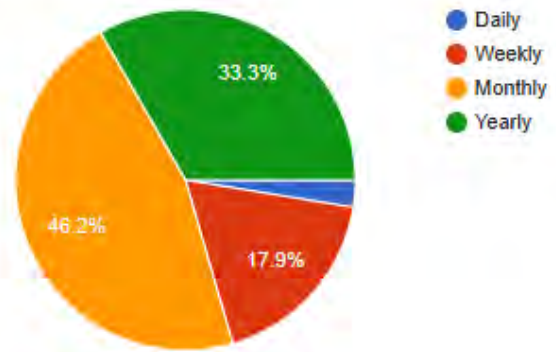
Our goal continues to be getting an understanding of the use patterns and finding out what the trail users want and expect. We then hope to be able to assess the top priority areas that need to be addressed to maintain good habitat for salmon and wildlife. This project is being supported by the US Fish & Wildlife Partners Program.

We currently have 34 responses to the North Fork Hills trail survey for the USF&W with the goal of getting the same public comments to leverage more trail funding.

To the right are samples of those responses and comments from the North Fork hills Trail survey/questionnaire.

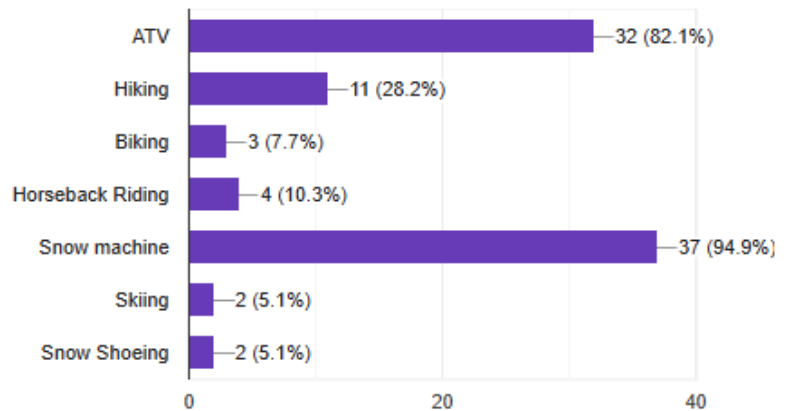
## How often do you access the North Fork Hills Trail?

39 responses



## How do you Travel on the North Fork Hills Trail?

39 responses



## What features of the trail system do you like or dislike?

27 responses

I like that it provides access into the backcountry.

I like the circle loop. The beauty

Deep mud holes. Narrow tree covered sections.

I did like the large steep hill on the west side.

I like That the trail exist

Close proximity to Anchor Point

All high ground and the views are some of the best on the peninsula...very little muskeg and stream crossings are fairly easy

the smooth ride



# Meet the Staff: Native Plants Program

BY CASEY GREENSTEIN

To kick off our new native plants program, we quickly realized that we simply need a ton of baseline information. How do you propagate different varieties? Who wants to grow these or collect seed for sale? Who would want to buy plant materials and how much would they be willing to pay? To answer these questions for our region, we built an amazing seasonal research team for the winter.

Two reports are done. They are shared out for peer review. The team gathered an impressive amount of information this winter.

- Total of 41 online surveys and 34 interviews
- Total of 40 Propagation Profiles written

Stay tuned for when the final drafts come out this fall for these two reports, "Starting a Native Plant Business in Southcentral AK" and "Growing Alaska's Native Plant Sector."



## Casey Greenstein PROGRAM COORDINATOR

Casey joined Homer Soil & Water in 2021 to bring her expertise to the invasives program and is now applying her background in botany and ecology to building a native plants program. On the side, she has a business doing contract work in contaminated site remediation and invasive plant management. [casey@homerswcd.org](mailto:casey@homerswcd.org)

# Meet the Incredible Seasonal Research Crew:



## Meet Bonnie Bernard

Bonnie first began experimenting with native plant propagation in a Louisiana greenhouse 13 years ago, and she's been hooked ever since. Her work with the HSWCD Native Plants program has largely focused on vegetation mats-- both those harvested from natural stands of vegetation, and horticulturally produced mats, grown with native plant species. When not thinking about plants, Bonnie enjoys reading with her cat, making art, and skiing/hiking far off into the wilderness.



## Meet Jake Egelhoff

Jake joined the Native Plants team in November to conduct interviews on native plant production with federal and state agencies, tribal entities, private nurseries, growers and contractors. He joined with field experience from across Alaska and Hawaii, annihilating invasive species, conducting wildlife surveys, and collecting qualitative research data on subsistence via interviews and surveys. He brings with him six years of wildlife and plant conservation knowledge and a love for plants and people combined.



## Meet Kelly Sivy

Kelly Sivy joined as a part-time/seasonal member of the HSWCD native plants team in November 2023. She earned her MSc in Wildlife Ecology from the University of Alaska Fairbanks in 2015, and has since worked as a consultant on a variety of ecology-related projects. Since joining the HSWCD team, she has conducted extensive literature reviews to compile information related to the propagation of Alaska native plants. In her non-science hours, she can be found at her workbench building violins and playing Old-time fiddle.

# Celebrating 20 Years of Partnership in Invasive Species Management on the Kenai Peninsula

BY JEN CHAUVET

The Kenai Peninsula Cooperative Invasive Species Management Area (KP-CISMA) celebrated its 20th anniversary in 2023! An idea planted in 2003 as a Cooperative Weed Management Area, the partnership has flourished over the last two decades into the KP-CISMA of today - a diverse group of dedicated partners from federal and state agencies, local municipalities, nonprofits, tribal entities, private



Scan to read the report!



landowners, business owners, and many passionate community members working together across the six-million-acre Kenai Peninsula to protect our most vital natural and cultural resources. Join us in celebrating the partnership's successes!

Visit [www.kenaiinvasives.org](http://www.kenaiinvasives.org) (or scan the QR code) to check out the KP-CISMA's 2023 Annual Report and learn more about some of the partnership's successful projects.



## Meet Katrina

Katrina Danzinger will join the invasive species team this summer season as a natural resources technician. In a hybrid position, she'll work with HSWCD and the Kenai Watershed Forum (KWF) on terrestrial plant projects, Elodea surveys, and certified weed-free gravel inspections and outreach. Katrina interned with the KWF in 2023 and currently works as a GIS technician in Wisconsin, so she brings with her some great technical skills and lots of local, on-the-ground knowledge. We're sure glad Katrina decided to spend the summer with us!

# Elodea Found in Crescent Lake

BY JEN CHAUVET

Not the kind of heading you'd like to see in our newsletter, we know. And wait, didn't we tell you Elodea had been eradicated from the Kenai Peninsula? We did. And from our best knowledge at the time, we thought it had been. But now we're here to emphasize the importance of keeping all eyes open for Elodea. For all invasive species, in fact...even those thought not to occur on the peninsula. Perhaps, most importantly, for those thought not to occur on the peninsula.

In late September 2023, during a scheduled aquatic invasive plant survey, staff from the Chugach National Forest found Elodea in Crescent Lake. After surveying the entire 1,345-acre lake, they identified four discrete infestations that cover a surface area of approximately 11 acres in the western lobe of the lake. Most concerning of these infestations is one located in the shallow, slow moving water at the lake's outlet - from here, water flows to the peninsula's treasured Kenai Lake. Thankfully, in the CNF's surveys downstream from the outlet, along Quartz Creek and into Kenai Lake, they did not find any additional Elodea.

You might remember the success story about the eradication of Elodea in Sandpiper Lake a few years back. That Elodea was treated in 2020 and 2021, and years of follow-up surveys indicate the treatments worked. So, we've been here before, and we know eradication is possible. Each situation is different, and each location comes with its own set of challenges, but the Sandpiper Lake experience gave us some confidence and some tools to tuck into our tool belts.

Crescent Lake sits at about 1,500 feet, above and to the north of Kenai Lake, and about halfway between Moose Pass and Cooper Landing. Accessible by trail from the west (Cooper Landing) and the east (Moose Pass) and by floatplane, the lake is popular with hikers, anglers, and people enjoying overnight stays at the public use cabins. With so much human activity, responding to this infestation quickly is of utmost importance. HSWCD and other KP-CISMA partners will be collaborating with and supporting the Forest Service as they develop public outreach messaging and a management plan to address the Elodea in Crescent Lake.



If you think you've spotted Elodea anywhere on the peninsula, please report it to 1-877-INVASIV or by contacting HSWCD invasives team directly at 907-235-8177, ext 117.





## Invasive Chokecherry Tree Work Highlighted at Alaska Invasive Species Workshop

BY JEN CHAUVET

Held annually, the Alaska Invasive Species Partnership’s ([www.alaskainvasives.org](http://www.alaskainvasives.org)) Invasive Species Workshop brings together invasive species managers, scientists, students, community members, policymakers, and more from across Alaska. At the 2023 workshop in Sitka, HSWCD’s very own Patrick Houlihan presented on invasive chokecherry (a.k.a. European bird cherry or mayday) tree removal efforts on the Kenai Peninsula. Through the lens of his first-hand experience and loads of witty

stories, Patrick highlighted challenges, successes, and lessons learned from his three years of chokecherry tree work.

From Homer to Seward and every community in between, chokecherry trees continue to spread from manicured yards to the wilds, where they threaten our forests, moose, and salmon. Thanks to funding from the Alaska Division of Forestry, Chugach National Forest, and the City of Homer, HSWCD and the Kenai Watershed Forum have so far removed hundreds of invasive chokecherry trees, plus uncountable numbers of chokecherry tree seedlings and saplings from sites across the peninsula.

A big thank you to Patrick for advocating for and sharing this successful project!

## Have questions about what to do with invasive plants in your yard?

We’ve got you covered!

Visit [www.kenainvasives.org](http://www.kenainvasives.org) for tips on how to manage the most common and harmful invasive plants – orange hawkweed, chokecherry trees, hempnettle, reed canarygrass, bird vetch, and more.



# Meet the Staff: Invasive Species Program

## Meet Caleb Eckert

Invasive Species Program Manager

[Caleb@homerswcd.org](mailto:Caleb@homerswcd.org)

We are super excited that Caleb joined the Invasive Species team in February to assist with grant management, budgeting, reporting, and associated project support. Originally from the Matanuska-Susitna Valley, he has lived much of his life in Northern Arizona where he co-founded a small farm and worked in information technology. He spends much time outside of work learning from the local ecology, starting a new market garden in Homer, and making documentary multimedia—overall working to tend kinships with land and community.



## Jen Chauvet

Invasive Species Program Coordinator [jen@homerswcd.org](mailto:jen@homerswcd.org)

After two decades of work as a park ranger, naturalist, and environmental educator, Jen joined the HSWCD invasive species team in the fall of 2021 to focus her time on invasive species outreach & education, but now helps to coordinate with partners across the peninsula.



## Abby Dekoekkoek

Invasive Species Program Specialist [abby@homerswcd.org](mailto:abby@homerswcd.org)

Abby joined HSWCD last spring after doing salmon habitat restoration and invasive removal work in Washington state. She is enjoying her time exploring the peninsula while working on the front lines responding to invasive species infestations.



## Patrick Houlihan

Invasives Program Field Coordinator [patrick@homerswcd.org](mailto:patrick@homerswcd.org)

For the last few years Patrick has loved working with HSWCD as Invasives Program Field Coordinator. He also still works with Alaska Department of Fish and Game where he has enjoyed all kinds of salmon and habitat related fieldwork for over 20 seasons.

# EVERYTHING AG: WE HAVE YOU COVERED

## FREE Winter/Spring Workshops & Trainings

BY NICOLE AREVALO

This January, HSWCD's Ag Program team hit the ground running with our 2024 Know Your Land series of talks. This is our fifth year of providing these free workshops and our second year hosting them in partnership with the KPC Kachemak Bay Campus, which allows people to attend in-person or online via Zoom from anywhere in Alaska. There is one session left in the winter/spring 2024 series - Minimize Feed Costs by Optimizing Your Pasture, on Thur. April 25, 6 - 7 pm ([click this registration link to join via Zoom](#)). We're happy to announce that Karin Sonnen from our friends in the USDA-NRCS Homer, AK field office will be presenting from her wealth of knowledge on the subject.

We record each session as well and you are welcome to watch any you may like (simply click the link)



Geneva Preston: Forest Stewardship

- High Tunnels 101
  - [Click link](#) and enter passcode W+v&.44W
- Low Tunnels 101
  - [Click link](#) and enter passcode @61OS2T=
- Forest Stewardship for Common Landowner Goals
  - [Click link](#), no passcode needed
- Local Grower Spotlight w/ Ryan Lee
  - [Click link](#) and enter passcode vl+5PdVL
- Crop Rotation for Successful Harvests
  - [Click link](#) and enter passcode 3#pptPA7
- Local Grower Spotlight w/Bill Bartee
  - [Click link](#) and enter passcode F7DyE\*Nw
- Efficient Irrigation Systems w/ Experts from Dripworks!
  - [Click link](#) and enter passcode 0fKNx.B\$
- Garden Soils 101
  - [Click link](#) and enter passcode N2+=du+v



Matt Iverson: Berry Propagation Workshop



# It's Time to Test Your Soil

BY MONICA KOPP

Our soils team will get you nutrient recommendations so you can build the healthiest possible nutrient balance for your soil in your garden or on your farm.. There's no need to worry about over-fertilizing or under-fertilizing.

#1. Collect your soil sample(s). To make a soil sample, simply scrape off the top inch or so of soil in the area you'd like tested and dig out roughly one to two cups worth. Please let the soil dry out, then place in a sealable plastic bag. If testing a large area, take multiple samples and mix the together. For more details on how to take a good sample, click [here](#).

#2. You can bring it to our office or get started online. Fill out an information form for your sample(s). If you have just one sample, just fill out the form on our website to get started. If you have more than one sample, and:

- You plan to treat each sample area separately: please fill out an additional form for each sample (example: one area has shrubs you plan to use manure on, and your other is a vegetable garden that you plan to use bagged fertilizer).
- You plan to treat each sample area the same: you can fill out one form and note any differences (example: HT1 is two years old and HT2 is three years, both are getting the same fertilizers and both are growing mixed vegetables).

#3. Pay online for your sample(s). If you have just one sample, follow the pay instructions normally. If you have more than one sample:

- After you fill out the form for the first sample, pay for all of them.
- Then return to this page, fill out the form for the next sample, and choose 'Already Paid'. Repeat this for each additional sample you would like to submit.

#4. Bring soil samples to our office at 432 E. Pioneer Ave. in downtown Homer, AK. We have set up a safe and convenient outdoor, on-the-go drop-off station with instructions for you.

We send off your sample to the testing lab. The results come back. Usually this looks like a foreign language to most people. So then Homer Soil and Water will



develop recommendations tailored to your specific growing needs and send them to you by email.

This usually takes 2-3 weeks on average, so plan ahead.

Price: \$35 for the first three samples and \$30 for each additional sample. Build healthier soil through Homer SWCD's soil testing program.

We encourage you to reach out with any soil testing related questions to Monica Kopp, HSWCD Ag Program Coordinator: [monica@homerswcd.org](mailto:monica@homerswcd.org) or call (907) 235-8177 ext. 111.

## Water Testing

Want info on where and how to get your well water tested? We made a [brochure that lines out the local options](#) and is accompanied by other useful information on water testing for you to know.

We don't test drinking water unless you know exactly what you want tested (arsenic, for example), but we can run water tests for irrigation water. Contact us to learn more.

# Seed Saving Workshop Series

BY NICOLE AREVALO

We're just over halfway through our spring 2024 series of free classes on saving seeds from your local crops in collaboration with the Homer Seed Library and taught by local permaculture instructor Saskia Esslinger. Our next two workshops in the series are more general gardening focused to help people grow capacity to become seed saving gardeners:

- May 4th - Food Gardening for Beginners ([click link for more](#))
- May 11th - Hands-on Workshop on Building No-Dig Garden Beds (AKA "lasagna beds"), which will be held at the KPC Kachemak Bay Campus' high tunnel and garden site on the south side of the campus (see our [website's events calendar](#) for more).

We will also be working again this summer with our six local growers who are growing crops specifically for seed production as part of our two-year seed saving project through an Alaska Division of Agriculture Specialty Crop Block Grant.



# Reimbursement Transportation Cost Program

Have you purchased any equipment, supplies or feed for your farm, flower, honey or aquaculture enterprise since last fall? Bought it at a local store or had it shipped in? If you answered yes, then read on.

The Reimbursement Transportation Cost Program from USDA-FSA is open for enrollment annually and can get you up to 25% payback from costs associated with shipping (either directly or via shipping costs reflected in prices at stores). The sign-up for the reimbursement happens mid-late summer and receipts need to be turned in during the fall.

Your operation doesn't have to be big - 🌱 if you raise and sell any amount of locally grown product

you can get in. This program was created for farmers in Alaska, Hawaii and the other U.S. territories outside of the contiguous 48 states to help offset the higher shipping costs we pay. We want to make sure that EVERY producer is aware of this opportunity.

And it's easy..

You simply register your farm (incl. honey, flowers, feed, livestock, horticulture/trees, aquaculture) with the Alaska FSA office, then provide copies of your receipts, fill out some paperwork, some calculations are made, and then USDA sends you a reimbursement check. There is a \$8,000 maximum available to each producer.

Here's a link to the [program page](#) and the [Fact Sheet](#) that explains the details.





## Selling to Local Restaurants Made Easy

BY NICOLE AREVALO

On March 11th, Homer Soil & Water hosted the first of a series of “Meet the Chef” events. In attendance were 13 local farmers and owners of 6 local restaurants who would like to buy more local foods:

- Wild Honey Bistro
- River Cafe
- City Bear Breads
- Boatyard Cafe
- AJ’s Oldtown Steakhouse & Tavern
- The Broken Oar

One of the biggest hurdles for local growers and harvesters who have interest in selling their foods to local restaurants is having the opportunity to talk with them about what they grow/raise/produce, and what the restaurants might be interested in buying

once the harvest is ready. These events, funded by a grant from the Alaska Division of Agriculture, create a space for talking together as a group - logistics, seasonal availability, learn from answers to questions from their peers, and make connections.

This inaugural Meet the Chef was held at Wild Honey Bistro, and we anticipate holding at least two more of these networking events this summer and fall. All local producers are welcome to join in - veggies, meat/poultry, goat cheese, chicken/duck eggs, seafood, fruit, honey, hot sauce, .... all of it!

Stay tuned to our Facebook page and website for the announcement of the next one.

## Alaska Farmland Trust Mixer

On April 18th, the Alaska Farmland Trust had a presentation & conversation about protecting farmland in Alaska at Danish Daughter Farm in Homer.

We keep seeing our local hayfields turn into subdivisions and houses, and that reduces our ability to grow enough food for our community. The AK Farmland Trust can help. They have traditionally focused on conserving farm lands in the Mat-Su Valley, but they've now turned their attention to helping us folks out on the Kenai Peninsula.

At this first-ever public get-to-know-you event here at Kirsten Dixon’s (owner of Tutka Bay Lodge) peony farm, folks had the opportunity to see the lovely

event space complete with Dixon’s finest hors d’oeuvres while they mingled with the who’s-who of the Homer farming scene and learned about this important organization focused on saving our ag soils for the future.





## Equity in Outreach

BY NICOLE AREVALO

Our Ag Program staff are happy to announce that this year we have a new funding source to bring our local food production training/workshops outreach to wider audiences, specifically villages and off-road communities on the southern Kenai Peninsula and west to the Bristol Bay and Alaska Peninsula regions.

We kicked it off in collaboration with our neighbors across the hall in the USDA-NRCS Homer office with visits to the Ninilchik Community Library and Anchor Point Library in January, February, March and to Seldovia coming up on April 23rd. We will be reaching out to the villages of Nanwalek and Port Graham next to offer our assistance, knowledge of local growing best practices, and share resources with any folks who are interested in growing gardens or raising animals to feed their families and communities.

We are in the planning phase of developing hands-on three day workshops for summers 2025 and 2026 that will bring people from off-road villages who are interested in learning about growing to Homer for hands-on classes and visits to local small farms.

We're really excited about this because being able to visit the farms, smell and see what it's all about, and ask questions right then and there to the farmers who are dialing-in how to successfully grow crops here at latitude 59 will provide insights that online workshops alone cannot.

Thanks to the USDA-NRCS for making this extension of our capacity to assist more people in our region possible.



## Alaska Food & Farm Festival

BY NICOLE AREVALO

Ag Program staff and HSWCD Board members attended the Alaska Food & Farm Festival in Anchorage November 10-12, 2023. Board members and our district manager were able to network with other soil & water conservation districts at the annual meeting of the Alaska Association of Conservation Districts, held jointly with the main event.

Our Ag Program team also offered presentations during the festival. District manager, Kyra Wagner, presented a big picture look at the projects HSWCD undertakes on the main stage, Ag Program Coordinator Monica Kopp shared a video about the district's invasive orange hawkweed control experiment using chicken tractors (at the Hickerson Memorial Cemetery), and Outreach Coordinator Nicole Arevalo presented the district's recent study on models for aggregating foods from small farms for wholesale distribution.

# Meet the Staff: Agriculture Program

## Meet Victoria Monsaint-Queeney

Natural Resource Technician

[victoria@homerswcd.org](mailto:victoria@homerswcd.org)

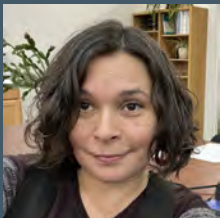
We are super excited that Victoria Monsaint-Queeney joined the team in December to help our soil testing program provide nutrient recommendations to local farmers. During her time here, she has also gotten involved in data analysis for several research projects with our collaborators. She will be defending her PhD dissertation on microbes and the soil nitrogen cycle this spring.



## Monica Kopp

Ag Program Coordinator [monica@homerswcd.org](mailto:monica@homerswcd.org)

Monica was originally hired for our NRCS Soil Survey field work because of her excellent background in botany and soils. Now we know her passion for agriculture and her dedication to the soil of her own new farm, so she is in charge of soil nutrient recommendations and technical support to producers



## Nicole Arevalo

Ag Program Outreach Specialist [nicole@homerswcd.org](mailto:nicole@homerswcd.org)

Nicole was hired in 2018 to conduct the Food Systems Study for the southern peninsula, bringing 18 years of work experience in food service and a BA in Anthropology. Since then, she's been our Ag outreach person and the executive assistant to the President of the Alaska Association of Conservation Districts



## Kyra Wagner

District Manager [Kyra@homerswcd.org](mailto:Kyra@homerswcd.org)

Kyra has now been with the district for eight years. After years of experience as a general community volunteer she is now in charge of accounting, grant writing and other general management. She loves seeing who the next person will be who walks in and what the latest issue may be.



Welcome our newest board member!

## Board of Supervisors

Chris Rainwater  
Board Chair

Otto Kilcher  
Vice Chair

Jan Kieser  
Treasurer

Charlie Trowbridge  
Secretary

Jim Engebretson  
AACD Rep

## Identifying Resource Needs

BY KYRA WAGNER

This January, dozens of partners from across the Kenai Peninsula gathered to identify the top resource concerns for our area. Co-hosted with Kenai Soil and Water and NRCS, we held this Local Working Group meeting in Ninilchik at the lovely Ninilchik Traditional Council building.

Meg Mueller, District Conservationist for our local NRCS field offices, presented on NRCS programs and answered questions. Michael Opheim and Carol Conant from the Chugach Regional Resources Commission presented with tips and suggestions for the best way to interact and be respectful of our tribal partners.

Then the markers came out and lists started getting developed of issues people see as top priorities for their lands or their stakeholders. Folks then voted for their top priorities from the long lists. Categories ranged from agriculture to recreation.

Top issues discussed were:

- Increased salmon habitat protection (including riparian buffers for salmon streams and state laws)
- Growing more local food for food security
- Funding for new farmers
- More ag conservation easements
- More education and outreach about responsible land use (including land use restrictions, trespass, etc.)
- Cooperative planning for trail systems, such as in the Fox River Valley, that access hunting and fishing areas.

## Become a Cooperator

IT'S LIKE MEMBERSHIP

Have you signed a cooperator agreement with the District? The simple, 1-page agreement documents that the individual or organization wants to “cooperate” with District efforts by developing and managing their lands in ways that reflect land and water suitabilities, as well as good management practices. You must own or manage land on the southern Kenai Peninsula.

Cooperators can participate in elections and run for positions on the Board of supervisors. It's free and easy, sign up today!

You can fill out a form online at: <https://form.jotform.com/210335561361043>



Special Thanks  
TO ALL OUR PARTNERS!

