**Meeting Agenda**

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May 10th, 2017

5:00 PM

USDA Service Center, 4014 Lake St Homer, AK

1. Call to order: 5:19
2. Roll call: Chris Rainwater, Gena Grobarek, Otto Kilcher, Tim Alzheimer, Marcus Mueller, Akaky Martushev, Robert Gibson, (someone) Devony, Jamie Lay, Jen Tarnacki and Shane , Filip Martushev,
3. Approval of the Agenda : Gena moved Otto seconded
4. Approval of the Minutes
5. Visitors
	1. KPB Land leases and programs: Marcus Mueller
		1. *How to make an effective ag land offering, has three requests right now. How do we offer up ag lands? Lease? Sale? What is the appropriate size? What are the going rates? What are the performance criteria? What should be allowed to go on an ag unit?*

*Presently, human habitation is not allowed, but now people are connected to their ag systems.*

*What’s a farm unit? 320 acres or lots of smaller units? Rangeland would be different…What production methods should we focus on?*

* *Chris: Smaller in more in demand now.*
* *Catherine: Should leave it open for crops we aren’t doing now*
* *Akaky: Big land leases tie up land especially if only using small part*
* *Robert: each piece of land needs to be looked at individually with individual users. Farmers and ranchers plan for years so they need to be able to plan.*
* *Otto: State’s leases make it difficult to make money. Farming is not a high profit system. How can it be something affordable yet not a give-away. Need to be able to invest and improve the land, but need to keep people from sitting on it. Maybe some tax incentives to make sure that they don’t want to subdivide.*
* *Robert: competitive bid? How do you decide who gets it?*
* *Otto: how about suitability?*
	+ 1. *Values? These sites will need site work. The first couple of years will not be profitable. Lease example: current assessment x 40% x 8%*
			- *The 3 parcels have been labeled ag parcels by the Borough*
		2. *Ag Zoning: land for sale, zoned ag. Leases would be separate. In 1989 LESA gave a suite of criteria for identifying ag lands, at the back of that study. Lease with an option to purchase a possibility*
			- *Otto: Ag zoning can change over time, ag covenants can’t change. Ag title is more about the dedication to farming, whereas ag zoning is more about money from land.*
		3. *Financing? Should the borough wok with farmers? They can loan to farmers at 2% over market.*
			- *Chris: not sure if FSA ag loans will pay for lease*
			- *Akaky: what is the master plan? Marcus: your lease proposal may not be part of the master plan.*
			- *Otto: at sale, lessor has priority?*
			- *Robert: on his ranch in Europe: the parcels that he subdivided; closer to habitations=smaller places, places closer to farms or forest=larger lots.*
			- *Gena: with zoning, how can you keep them from subdividing? Marcus: density would be part of the zoning, ie. One dwelling per 40 acres, or 120 acres, etc.*
			- *Otto: background checks? Chris pointed out that the state in the Point McKenzie project got them sued over judgement criteria.*
		4. *Farms improve the value and quality of life.*

*Future: Marcus. Wants to do both ag lease and ag sale. 60 days to get to Borough, 60-90 days to get through public, 60-90 to get to policy. Under lease, there would be an annual report required.*

*Borough landholdings are diverse, including oil and gas, gravel pits, etc. All kinds of relationships with land owners. The Borough has been an absentee landowner, but they are developing programs to interact with lease holders more and build relationships.*

* 1. NRCS Report : Karin Sonnen and Jared Worthington (7pm)

*Conservation Planning and Programs:*

*Approximately 32 applications moving to contracting Homer. Contract Reviews and Practice Reminder letters have gone out for existing contracts. Applications which were above our initial funding threshold for the Fiscal Year 2017 EQIP funding period are currently being offered contracts.  The deadline for applicants to decide if they want to proceed with a contract or cancel their application is May 31, 2017.  After May 31 we will know how much money is left in our budget (from applicants deciding to cancel their application) and if we are able to offer contracts to additional applicants.  Once all of our budget is allocated we will contact the applicants who were not offered contracts to inform them of their options.  Options include deferring the application as-is until the next funding period, modify the application, or cancel the application.  Their application is held in “eligible” status until they are either 1) offered funding or 2) our budget is fully allocated and they are offered deferring or cancelling options. State Conservationist Bob Jones said he would Request for more EQIP Funds from Head Quarters.*

*The State Technical Committee will meet Thursday, May 11. The meeting will begin at 9 a.m. and adjourn by noon. The NRCS State Technical Committee provides opinions on issues within a variety of NRCS conservation programs. The meetings are open to public participation. Draft agenda items for the May 2017 meeting include discussion on dune stabilization on Akun Island, soil health projects across Alaska, resource concerns with pond planning and design, Emergency Watershed Protection Projects, and the Environmental Quality Incentive Program.*

*Homer office –NRCS advertised for space. Anticipate a move – within 6 months? Unoccupied federal facility received highest priority, though the owner would have to do the build-out. Process for acquiring space is with admin team.*

*Staffing - Ryan officially selected for Delta Junction GS-11 Soil Conservationist, his start of date*

*in Delta-Junction is June 25th. Michelle Jezeski was officially selected for the GS-12 District Conservationist in Wasilla, her starting date is June 11th. The State Conservationist announced that Scott Crockett would be the permanent State Resource Conservationist in Palmer. Soil Conservationist/Wildlife Biologist Ryan Maroney will be moving from Fairbanks office to a position in the Palmer State Office as Tribal Technical Liaison.  State Engineer Brett Nelson will provide leadership for the Emergency Watershed Program effective May 14. Two Soil Conservationists to be advertised for Homer. States anticipated to lose 10% of discretionary funding from 2016 levels.*

*Soil Health Training in 2017 – August 28th still on schedule*

*Meg out this week, attending a training in Greensboro NC.*

* *All agencies need to submit reduction plans to the White House.in June*
* *Water rights are still required for EQIP applications*
	+ *Gena said that when applying you should think of the most water you could use and apply for that amount because the process for applying is long.*
	+ *There are copies of the application in the NRCS office and downloadable online. Jared brought copies for all to see. Gena said they didn’t charge extra for using more than 500 gallons a day.*

*Karin: Landowner on the Sterling put a wetland pond in on an EQIP contract and it was controversial. This owner had all the appropriate permits, but many angered by the project, much because of the visibility. The new borough rule says if you dig and hit ground water, you need a borough permit.*

1. Financial Report Gena motioned Tim seconded
2. Manager’s Report
	1. **Trails**
		1. *Caribou Lakes Trail: Jeff Ericson went to the Kenai River Center with Matt. He was sent to the Army corps since it affects wetlands. Now he is trying to get the Snomads to sponsor them on an Army Corps Permit. They will need a permit if they use heavy machinery out there, but no one at the River Center seemed to think it was a problem to do most of the upgrades without a permit.*
		2. *Watermelon Trail: Bill Hague also went to the River Center with Matt and proposed that the Snomads open the trailway to 20 feet. It was decided that the borough would just modify the permit they already have to take care of the parking lot.*
		3. *School Yard Habitat Trails: Homer Middle School is going to have a massive day of trail work with all the PE classes next Wednesday. McNeil Canyon Elementary is in the process of assembling bird houses for the trails.*
	2. **Invasive Plant Program**
		1. *Elodea: TAfter intense permitting and a speedy process, they will be treating Sport Lake beginning on the 15th.*
		2. *RAC Right-of-Way work: We hired Jamie Lay as our summer field technician to help with IPC work, both she and Matt are taking the pesticide applicator training.*
		3. *FWS Environmental Assessment.: The EA that Matt worked on years ago is now finishing its final month open to public comment. He just found out this week that it will NOT function as a blanket permission to use those pesticides anywhere; we will still need site specific permits for spraying.*
* Elodea has been used at the college in experiments. Kyra will contact college.
	1. **Grant Update**
		1. *Fish and Wildlife: All paperwork has been signed for our new agreement with F&W, but we have not yet received an agreement.*
		2. *Division of Ag: Recently applied for a $15,000 grant to do a consumer market study.*
		3. *Rural Business Development Grant: Applied for a $15,000 grant for a producer study.*
		4. *BLM: Recently sent in paperwork for $30,000 for the work BLM wants Brad to do this summer regarding mining reclaim.*
	2. **Employee Update**
		1. *NRCS-Brad: Brad will be rather limited in his ability to do NRCS office work in the future. His BLM work will occupy about half of his summer and then in the fall he will be working two weeks off, two weeks on with a business he is starting. Good news, Matt’s security pass has come through and he will now be able to do HEL determinations for NRCS.*
		2. *BLM-Charlotte: BLM has found a new way to expand our relationship. Presently they have an employee that they pay for in the NRCS Soil Survey office here. They have funds to continue paying her, but they can no longer use the mechanism they have been using. In an effort to keep her on, they have asked if we could hire her and they would pay for her. This would mean that we have more funds in the office that we could charge indirect costs to and we could have use of the employee at times when we need more hands on deck.*
			+ Karin pointed out that there is a grazing lease south of Unalakleet and they want a soil survey so BLM will pay
		3. *IPC-Jamie: Jamie Lay came on as a field tech but has also shown interest in trail work. She has applied for the Snomads Trail coordinator position which would be a good way to collaborate and share with them*.
1. Old Business
	1. Employee Pay Rates: compare to GS salaries (Chris), different pay rate okay (Gena), need to keep employee from getting sad when they go back to normal pay (Otto). Identifying going rate is important.
		1. Otto: motion increase not to extend 25% of pay, Tim seconded
	2. Cooperator List-tabled
	3. Rhodiola Equipment -tabled
		1. Blades wearing out and being replaced
	4. Water Rights – discussed the new policy of NRCS requiring high tunnel applicants to apply for water rights first. The idea may be sound, but in reality it was noted that the state doesn’t have capacity to process or do much with the stack of applications it will be getting. And any time there is a question about water rights, there is no manner or authority for enforcing them so litigation will be the only recourse.
	5. AACD: Chris report: New AACD exec, director Jenny Daniels

**Next Meeting June 14th, 2017**