**Meeting Agenda**

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August 9th, 2017

5:30 PM

USDA Service Center, 4014 Lake St Homer, AK

1. Call to order 5:53pm
2. Roll call: Chris Rainwater, Tim Alzheimer, Devony Lehner, Catherine Knott. Kyra Wagner, Karin Sonnen
3. Approval of the Agenda:
4. Approval of the Minutes: Tim motioned to approve, Catherine seconded, passed.
5. Visitors
   1. NRCS Report - Karin Sonnen

**EQIP Update**-

NRCS Alaska received an additional $2,270,000. This funded 48 additional contracts, 7 were in Homer totaling $165,350 in additional funds, as of last meeting. As of today, we have had a third round of EQIP funding.  Eleven additional projects in Homer-Seldovia.

For FY 17, Homer has received 48 contracts totaling over $930,000.

Homer Field Office currently has 50 applicants for 2018.

We are processing payments, scheduling site visits and working through the planning process for new applicants, and getting the remaining contracts that are now funded, through the obligation process.

Re-Cap From Last Meeting: Changes for FY 18 contracts

* For High tunnel eligibility, the land has to be planted to a garden edible crop.
* Applicants must file for water rights if they are being funded for any water consumptive practice.
* Fall certifications where the lid of the high tunnel is left off, because they are going to leave it off for the winter, are no longer allowed.

**WILDLIFE TRAINING:** NRCS had a wildlife practices training the last week of July, in Kenai, covering many topics, including stream assessments, ponds, and Little Brown Bats. The little Brown Bat expert from UAA was interesting! We learned the bats hibernate in Alaska, in scree fields. The females are not moving their young around on a daily basis from house to house, but may have day time and nighttime roosts, and the males roost solitarily. They feed at dusk and dawn even in AK – so have a longer torpor period during the day, and at high latitudes just have one feeding a night. The availability of insects being so high in Alaska is likely why they do well here, even though it is cooler and they may have less time to feed. Discussed White Nose Syndrome and its likelihood of making it to AK. It is now in WA. It may take 3 to 5+ years for bats to find a bat house, but she was delighted that we were helping to get more out there. We discussed the best locations. The bats may expand their range based on people’s range, as they commonly use buildings for their habitat.

**Other News:** The fall range assessment at the head of the bay (last week of September) has been approved by Bob Jones.

25% State Biologist Ryan Maroney has taken a job with AK NRCS in the Palmer State Office as a Native Liaison Technician. Unsure what this means for the 25% State Biologist duties.

Karin is out of the office the week of August 14, and Karin and Jared will be attending a soil health training in Palmer the week of August 28.

* *Chris saw Karin on TV explaining NRCS (from a year ago at the Aleutian Life forum of 2016)*
* *Devony heard that climate change is being dropped from governmental websites. Karin says that’s not true, they just got a memo on that subject recently and it is a false rumor. All NRCS climate change information is still readily available.*

1. Financial Report: Tim motioned to approve, Catherine seconded, passed.
2. Manager’s Report

**Trails**

* **Caribou Lakes Trail**: Recent trip photo-documented the trail. Recent bid from a drone operator will be attempted mid September to produce precise photo documentation.
* **Watermelon Trail**: New SCA crew will be out on the trail for one week in September. Mike Eastham, new trail coordinator for the Snomads, has a goal of widening the trail to 20ft for winter grooming.
* **School Yard Habitat Trails**: conversations with schools underway for this year’s work.

**Invasive Pest Coordination**

* **Chugach National Forest/RAC grant work**: Matt, Betty (from the Forest Service), Janice (from Coop. Ext) and Jen (from Kenai Watershed Forum) are taking care of sites. All DEC permits completed.
* **Cooperative Weed Management:** Many sites sadly untreated because of lack of funding.

**Soils**

* Jessica Guritz from Fairbanks Soil and Water will be joining us for a few weeks in October and will be able to do soil recommendations. So the plan is to run a campaign to get people to bring in soil samples in the fall so that they will be done before the spring planting time.
* We are asking for more funding from NRCS to increase our staff time on NRCS work. This would be a great way to bring Devony back into the fold ☺

**Grants**

* **Fish and Wildlife**: All paperwork has been signed (again) for our new agreement with F&W, but we have not yet received an agreement…Waiting to hear. As of yesterday Kyle Graham says:
  + We are waiting on our contracting person, who had a medical problem, to finalize the award.  The funding is there, everything is approved, just need a finalized award so the funds can be placed in your account.  I understand the uncertainty, but the pre-award cost memorandum authorizes all direct and indirect expenses incurred 120 days prior to the start date.  Hopefully this increases your comfort level with moving forward with the planned work without the funding actually in the ASAP account.
* **Division of Ag**: (grant for restaurant/consumer study) We got it! Funds in Oct.
* **Rural Business Development Grant**: (grant for a producer study) We got it! (Well, a bit more paperwork involved, but basically we got it.) Funds in Oct.
* **BLM**: All funds available now. We have $100,000 for AIM specific work in Nulatto Hills, $50,000 for soil survey work up there, and $30,000 for mining reclaim monitoring.
* **Ag in the Classroom**: (Education on classroom hydroponic and year-round growing techniques) $500 to pay for one Homer Soil and Water employee to go to a training.
* **NRCS**: Last Friday put in a proposal for $37,000 requesting funds to cover more employee time working on NRCS compliance work. Waiting to hear.
* **ACWA Grant**: (Anchor River streambank erosion project) Still waiting to hear.

**Tours**

* We were written into a grant by Center for Alaskan Coastal Studies where they had funds to pay for a lecture/tour regarding local agriculture. $200!
* Johnny’s Seed Company sent their western states sales rep up here in time for the garden tours. I arranged for her to visit many farms in the area. Arthur Keyes was also in town visiting peony farms and farms. Always good to see such folks connecting with Homer Soil and Water when they want connections to the agricultural community.
* *Chris would like to see local hire used for drone work.*
* *Tim knows of someone who has been doing such work for the City of Homer*

1. Old Business
   1. Annual Plan of Work: Tim motioned to approve, Catherine seconded, open for discussion.

Comments:

Goal 1: Landuse Planning

* Catherine: Try for big trail funding with big picture description of trail program rather than project specific funding
* Otto: Could we ask for Snomad’s funding? Need to educate partners and public about funding issues.
* Devony: can we reach for funding past normal sources, like for disabilities or youth?
* Otto: We need to contact the Homer Demo forest committee, arrange a meeting, let them know where things stand with our funding and capacity.
* Chris: Put minimum effort towards Homer Demo Forest Committee and Caribou Lake user group, but both should be given some attention.

Goal 2: Water Quality

* Karin: That is a low amount for Snow Survey…What are we cutting?!!?

Goal 3: Agriculture

* Chris: forage testing services should be put back in here.
* Otto: Petra Ilig of the Rhodiola Coop? Does she want the equipment?

Goal 4: Invasive weeds

* Devony: make signs that say “these weeds picked by ….” Weed warrior signs. Weed-be-gone in the fall works on orange hawkweed
* Otto: Bradley Lake should record where the clover piles are so that they don’t get used later as fill

Goal 5: Education

*No comments*

Goal 6: Administration

* Chris: The funding looks small for admin (Yes. Thank you for noticing.)

Otto called the question: Vote unanimous in favor

(Old Business cont….)

* 1. Cooperator List: How do we connect with cooperators? No contact info except some bad addresses. Suggestions included: Bushline, or neighborhood grapevine from cooperators that we do know, or check each individual through the borough parcel viewer. Kyra will email out the cooperators list for everyone to o through and check for individuals they may know personally.
  2. Trail Sponsorship: discussion of specific parameters of a policy for who to sponsor was tabled. Maybe we just need to get Conoco Philips to sponsor one and Exxon to sponsor the other, get them competing ☺
  3. Rhodiola Equipment: Still at Al Poindexter’s. The question is how long are we responsible for it.

1. New Business
   1. Kodiak update: Chris expressed concern of a story coming out of Kodiak where NRCS is trying to create a tribal conservation district in the region where an AS41-10 district already exists.
   2. Otto gave an update on the eventful lives of the bison transported this summer to Sitkalidak Island.

**Meeting adjourned at 9:20pm**

**Next Meeting September 13th, 2017, 5 or 6pm???**