

NATURAL CURRENTS

FALL 2025 NEWSLETTER

Updates from the Homer Soil & Water Conservation District



District Manager Notes: Teaming Up

BY KYRA WAGNER

We survived this year! And what a year. You may have seen newspaper articles earlier this year about how our funding was frozen and staff were furloughed. After that period of extreme uncertainty, there have been major changes in expectations with our federal funders at the higher levels, but thanks to our awesome relationships with our partners locally, our work has been able to remain intact, relevant and funded. So, as usual, I am brimming with smiles as I share with you all the projects that the stupendous staff at Homer Soil & Water have worked on this year.

Every page highlights projects that were done in collaboration. I can't emphasize enough our gratitude to our community, volunteers, partners, agencies and our Board. Our theme this year is "Teaming Up" simply because nothing we do can be done alone.

Each section in this newsletter highlights our different programs and all the staff who work on them. Get to know us and get to know what is happening behind the scenes in our community and on the Kenai Peninsula.

THANK YOU!

In uncertain financial times, donations are always appreciated. We would like to shout out our gratitude to two anonymous donors (you know who you are!), the Downey/Garity Family, and Matt Hornaday for throwing your financial support our way!

Thank You!

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LOCAL WORKING GROUP

Every year the Kenai and Homer Soil and Water Conservation Districts team up to host a Local Working Group meeting on the Peninsula. The goal of these meetings is to solidify a priority list of top issues for our region and share them to our partners up the chain at the USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS). So, on January 24th, 2025, a diverse group of 40 people representing agencies, organizations and local government came together in Ninilchik at the Ninilchik Traditional Council's Community Center to discuss perspectives and priorities for resource management on the Kenai Peninsula.

The morning was filled by passing the microphone for introductions and lists of everyone's top natural resource issues they prioritize in their work. Over lunch we heard

from Laurie Stuart, Executive Director of the Tyonek Tribal Conservation District on their successful programs like Tyonek Grown and their culvert replacement for opening up salmon rearing habitat.

In the afternoon, participants voted on top priorities discussed that morning. It was clear that the issues of highest concern are too big for any one organization to address, and that we will need to work together.

This day was a success because we work together so well. And we recognize we can do even better. A huge shout out to our partners who have kept this conversation going as the year has gone on.

Thank You!



JOIN US!
Become a
cooperator
(it's FREE!)

If you would like to get involved with our District's activities, please join us by being a member (we call them "cooperators"). This gives you a voice in our elections and gives you the opportunity to plug into one of the most boots-on-the-ground, practical, professional, positive and forward-thinking organizations in Homer working to utilize and conserve our local natural resources. Sign up on our webpage at www.homerswcd.org or just click here: <https://form.jotform.com/210335561361043>

AGRICULTURE PROGRAM

Meet the Staff



Monica Kopp
Ag Program Coordinator

monica@homerswcd.org

Monica was originally hired for our NRCS Soil Survey field work because of her excellent background in botany and soils. Her passion for agriculture and her dedication to the soil of her own new farm is why she is a perfect lead for technical support to producers with us and at the KPC Ag Program.



Victoria Monsaint-Queeney
Natural Resource Specialist

victoria@homerswcd.org

Victoria joined the team in 2024 to help our soil testing program provide nutrient recommendations to local farmers. During her time here, she has also used her PhD in soil microbiology to support involvement in data analysis for several research projects with our collaborators.



Nicole Arevalo
Outreach Specialist

nicole@homerswcd.org

Nicole was hired in 2018 to conduct a local Food Systems Study, 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.



Megan Stoll
Natural Resource Specialist

megan@homerswcd.org

Megan is impossible to list under only one program at Homer Soil & Water. She is part of our Native Plants Program and helps the Invasives Program cut down large cherry trees, but it's her background with grazing animals (most recently Firefly the Mule and Klaus the Fjord horse) and hay brokering that makes her the perfect person to run our Grazing Lands Conference.



Kyra Wagner
District Manager

kyra@homerswcd.org

Kyra has now been with the district for nine years. After years of experience as a general community volunteer and gardener, she is now in charge of oversight for a stellar crew of 15 people. She loves seeing what the latest issue may be and what we can do to address it.

Kelp Biostimulant Research

Victoria has been working with the Chugach Regional Resources Commission, Kachemak Kelp Hub, UAF Cooperative Extension, and Twitter Creek Gardens to test out a newly developed kelp product. Their research is measuring the effect of this kelp biostimulant on plant growth of beets and potatoes on farms in Homer and Fairbanks. Stay tuned for results!



Victoria and Caleb taking care of data collection on the beet crop.

Cover Crop Selection Tool is Live!

We are delighted to announce that the Cover Crop Species Selector Tool for the Western U.S. is now live and available at <https://westerncovercrops.org/decision-tools/>

Why do we care?

Starting back in 2021, Homer Soil & Water conducted a series of studies with a statewide cohort of Districts with funding through the USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service and the Alaska Association of Conservation Districts. We recorded all kinds of data about individual cover crop species, such as growth habits, agronomic considerations, environmental tolerances, termination information, and more. This baseline information was then used in the design of the online Species Selector Tool to simplify the process of choosing cover crop species.

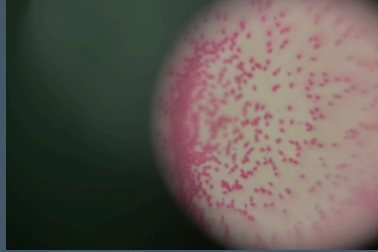


2021 Homer Cover crop trials out East End Road

Users can enter their field locations and select up to three cover cropping goals. The tool recommends a ranked list of cover crops based on goals, climate, and soil type. Even if you live in Alaska. Let us know if it works for you!

Outreach Across the Bay

In June, Monica and Victoria went across the bay to visit Port Graham and Nanwalek. They talked to high schoolers about soil health and worked with teens in the gardens at each village. Highlights included running the rainfall simulator to demonstrate how different soils erode and filter water differently, using foldable microscopes to see prepared slides of red blood cells, and making kale chips and a salad of fresh greens from the high tunnel in Nanwalek.



Sand Point 6th Graders Visit Homer



Also in June, we hosted a group of 6th graders from Sand Point who are studying food security, and we toured two farms together. They had a blast visiting the Dean Family Farm, meeting Jeff and Ranja's "yow" (a cross between a yak and a cow), horses, chickens and goats and seeing their amazing gardens. They also visited Shawn Jackinsky's Green Cannons Farm in Ninilchik to learn about all kinds of perennial food crops and meet his garden geese.



AGRICULTURE PROGRAM

Teaming up with Kachemak Bay Campus

Summer Workshops at the College

In July, we co-hosted a series of hands-on workshops with the Kachemak Bay Campus (KBC) and the UAF Cooperative Extension Service. Casey Matney (UAF-CES) taught two workshops on pests, Monica and Vic taught one on soil health, and Carey Restino (Hilltop Farm) taught weed management. It was fun to host these workshops at the vibrant high tunnel at KBC and get our hands in the dirt while learning great management tips for growing healthy gardens!



(1st Ever!) Southcentral Growers Conference



This successful event was organized collaboratively by Homer Soil & Water and the Kachemak Bay Campus on April 25-26, 2025. The keynote presenter was Fairbanks farmer Sam Knapp of Offbeet Farm, whose cutting-edge root cellar can make you swoon. Caley Gasch (left, UAF) talked about exciting work with her Alaska soil health study, and Julia Shanks, author of “The Farmer’s Office,” guided us through the tricky business of pricing strategies for farm products. Todd Heyman of Fat Sheep Farm in Vermont talked about setting up a successful agritourism / farmstay program. Local wisdom was also shared from Maggie Goedeke, a Homer-based physical therapist, on “Body Mechanics for the Physical Farmer” and Emily Garrity of Twitter Creek Gardens showed us tools she uses on her Ohlson Mountain farm to streamline the hard work of farming.

Learn More!

Check out our [NEW YouTube channel](#) and stay tuned for our spring “Know Your Land” lecture series starting in February on campus.

KNOW YOUR LAND

Producing Alaska-Grown Seeds Locally

Homer Soil & Water's Agriculture Program organized a visit with Leah Wagner, owner of Foundroot Seed Co. in Haines, AK, to tour Homer area farms. This was part of our project, "SEED SAVING IN HOMER: Building Resilience and Economy," made possible through a Specialty Crop Block Grant with the Alaska Division of Agriculture. Leah got to see farms and production possibilities while farmers asked her about requirements and markets for seeds. We look forward to seeing how these new relationships between growers and buyers might develop.



Leah Wagner discussed possibilities with a local grower on his farm north of Homer.

Meet the Chef

The Meet the Chef Program is our favorite way to get farmers to meet with larger restaurant and institutional buyers. This summer we connected two remote bear viewing lodges on the west side of Cook Inlet with farms from Homer and Anchor Point. We also contracted local videographer Andrew Tomey of Arctic Stills Photography to create five videos with local chefs to showcase fun ways to make the most of Alaska Grown produce. The beautiful new videos will be released on our [YouTube channel](#) in mid-October. Thanks to the Division of Agriculture and another Specialty Crop Block Grant for making this possible.

Thank You!



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Homer Farmers Market Outreach

Staff had fun with our (first ever!) weekly informational booth at the Homer Farmers Market on Wednesdays this summer. We engaged with community members about assistance programs and resources for local food producers and backyard gardeners. We talked stewardship resources for homeowners in salmon, moose and wetland habitats. We also, shared information on invasive plants and our native plants program. We look forward to doing this again next year!



Agriculture Conference and Grazing Lands Symposium



Brandon Small
Northern Cheyenne Tribe ·
Lame Deer, Montana



Cole Bush
Shepherdess Land
& Livestock Co. ·
Ojai, California



Jerry Doan
Black Leg Ranch ·
Bismarck, North Dakota



Kendall Ballentine
Marketing for Farmers ·
Langley, British Columbia

We are super excited this year to be collaborating with the Alaska Farm Bureau, Western SARE, National Grazing Lands Coalition, and the Farm Journal to bring you Alaska's annual agriculture conference.

Thanks to a Grazing Lands Conservation Initiative grant from NRCS, we are able to bring in a great list of people to share information specifically about raising grazing animals. We are lucky enough to have Karin Sonnen, the NRCS rangeland specialist for Alaska, in our Homer office and she has been able to help us identify issues that affect ranchers all around the state, no matter what they raise.

So this won't be your average conference. Not only will there be speakers from around the country, but we will also be showcasing reindeer herders from Nome, bison ranchers from Kodiak, and everything in between. This will be truly Alaskan.

Visit our conference page to learn about topics being covered and register now!
<https://homerswcd.org/ak-grazing-lands/>

*Thank You to
our Partners!*



AGRICULTURE PROGRAM

Soil Testing

Don't wait until your plants are sad to test your soil! Just like with humans, preventative care is much easier than fixing a serious problem.

Even if your plants are doing okay, you may be over-applying fertilizers. Excess fertilizer may not visibly affect your plants, but it can:

- Reduce root/fruit/flower production
- Run off into waterways, contributing to declines in water quality and salmon habitat
- Contribute to salt and nutrient buildup in your soil, which can be toxic.



How to get your soil tested

1. Fill out an intake form (at our office or [on our website](#)).
2. Pay (check or cash in person, or by card online).
3. Drop off your soil sample at our office. If we're not there, leave it in the filing cabinet by the front door.

How to take a soil sample

1. Determine how many samples you need (if you treat areas differently, with different fertilizers or different climates like a high tunnel, they should be different samples)
2. Each sample should be comprised of at least 3 subsamples (for a larger area, 5-10 subsamples is ideal)
3. To take a subsample, dig a small 6" hole. Use a shovel to take a 6" deep slice out of the side of the hole.
4. Remove any plant material on the top of the slice, and remove the sides of the slice so that you end up with a 1" wide sliver. That's your subsample!
5. Repeat at least 3 times for each zone.
6. Mix together the subsamples to get your sample for each zone.

How much does it cost?

\$35/sample

We offer a \$5 discount on each sample after your 3rd sample!

This fee covers the cost of the laboratory analysis, shipping your soil to the lab, and a personalized soil amendments recommendation from our staff.

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 includes other useful information on water testing.

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.

INVASIVE SPECIES PROGRAM

Meet The Staff



Caleb Eckert

caleb@homerswcd.org

Invasive Species Program Manager

Since Caleb joined us last year he has adeptly taken on grant management, budgeting, reporting, web design and flying the drone. He spends much time outside of work learning from the local ecology and overall working to tend kinships with land and community.



Jen Chauvet

jen@homerswcd.org

Invasive Species Program Coordinator

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

abby@homerswcd.org

Invasive Species Program Specialist

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.



Katrina Danzinger

katrina@homerswcd.org

Natural Resource Specialist

Katrina has worked with HSWCD and the Kenai Watershed Forum on terrestrial plant projects, Elodea surveys, and certified weed-free gravel inspections and outreach. Katrina is our boots on the ground on the northern Peninsula.



Maria Hoffman

Seasonal Natural Resource Technician

Maria had been working in Alaska before we found her, but it was a perfect fit. She became a jack of all trades, helping the invasives team with surveys and the habitat team with water monitoring.



Christopher Haberbush

Seasonal Natural Resource Technician

Christopher came to Alaska from Arizona just for the summer, but recently took a job at the Kenai Watershed Forum so he can stay! He was a valuable part of our Soldotna crew, helping out a great deal with elodea.

INVASIVE SPECIES PROGRAM

Teaming up Against Chokecherries

Spotlight: Invasive Prunus Trees

In September, the Director of the Division of Agriculture enacted a quarantine order to prohibit the importat, transport, and sale of invasive European bird cherry (*Prunus padus*) and Canada Red or chokecherry (*Prunus virginiana*) trees and their parts. If you follow our goings-on, you know this is a big win! Invasive Prunus trees continue to spread from ornamental plantings to forests, stream banks, and other natural areas across the state. This new quarantine aims to halt that spread. Over the past five years, through grants like those awarded to Homer Soil & Water, the state has allocated more than \$400,000 to invasive Prunus removal and public education efforts on their associated risks. Read the press release [here](#).

Thanks to continued funding from the Alaska Division of Forestry and the Copper River Watershed Project, our invasives crew has mapped and removed many hundreds of Prunus trees over the last five years. Check out some of our work from this season!

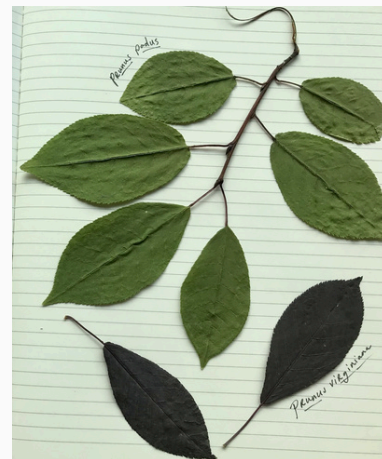
Thank You!



Staff tries out our new EZ-Ject Lance, a nifty tool that injects herbicide into tree stumps, as an alternative to our traditional sponge application.



This old mother tree is quite probably the source of a cherry tree infestation that stretches across many acres of private land in Kenai.



Both trees start with green leaves, but *Prunus virginiana* turns red later in the summer.



Partnering with USFWS Partners for Fish and Wildlife, we're helping a landowner remove dozens of Prunus trees from her Kenai River-adjacent property.

INVASIVE SPECIES PROGRAM

Teaming up Against Elodea

Elodea Eradication Underway at Crescent Lake

Despite the seemingly endless hurdles and setbacks of securing funding, working out complex logistics (and then working them out again when things don't go as planned), and an unexpected shortage of boots-on-the-ground personnel, the Elodea eradication efforts kicked off this summer at Crescent Lake! Sure, there have been a few hiccups along the way, but our remarkable KP-CISMA partners rallied to make it happen.

This tenacious little water weed was probably carried to the lake by float planes, but now threatens to infest and choke out fish habitat. It had already taken over 11 acres of the lake when it was first identified here. It is a top priority for all of our partners on the Kenai Peninsula and around the state.

Special thanks to our partners from the U.S. Forest Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Kenai National Wildlife Refuge, Anchorage Soil & Water Conservation District, Cook Inlet Aquaculture Association, and Alaska Division of Ag for their enduring flexibility and commitment (and for these great photos). The project is generously funded by the Alaska Sustainable Salmon Fund (AKSSF), a program administered by the Alaska Department of Fish & Game, which manages Alaska's allocations from NOAA Fisheries' Pacific Coastal Salmon Recovery Fund. You can read the project's full scope of work on AKSSF's website [here](#).

Thank You!



Pre- vs. post-treatment Elodea fragments.



The crew unloads supplies flown in from Soldotna. Thanks to the USFWS for the aviation support!



Cody Jacobson (Div Ag) and Dave Pearson (USFS) set up a boat for liquid herbicide application.



Maria stands by 136 40-pound bags of pelleted SonarOne (fluridone) and 80+ gallons of liquid Littora (diquat) that were flown up (and loaded/unloaded one-by-one) to the lake for the 2025 treatments.

INVASIVE SPECIES PROGRAM

Pulling Together to Stop the Spread of Weeds

Seward Weed Pull

Chris Haberbush, one of our Invasives Program seasonal techs, spent the better part of a week helping our partners at Kenai Fjords National Park with the Seward Community Weed Pull and invasive plant treatments at the Exit Glacier area of the park.



Certified Weed-free Gravel Program Continues to Grow

Our gravel inspectors were busy this summer inspecting gravel pits all across the Peninsula.. We've been encouraged to see both the supply and demand of certified weed-free gravel grow on the Peninsula – and we get to be a part of it! Gravel producers can now request an inspection through a handy [form on our website](#).



KP-CISMA Report

Almost everything we do on the Peninsula is connected to, and thanks to, our collaboration with the Kenai Peninsula Cooperative Invasive Species Management Area (KP-CISMA). Whether it's working with landowners to eradicate invasive species on their property, or developing strategies to address specific species at a watershed or Peninsula-wide level, we are connecting with the agencies, tribes, non-profits, and individuals who make up the KP-CISMA.

If you want to learn more about invasives on the Peninsula, the KP-CISMA website at kenaiinvasives.org is full of information and the Annual Report.



INVASIVE SPECIES PROGRAM

Ways you can get involved



FREE

Invasive Chokecherry Removal Assistance

Have an invasive chokecherry tree (a.k.a. European bird cherry or mayday) on your property? Let us help you get rid of it at **no cost to you!**

- ✓ *Protect salmon & moose habitat*
- ✓ *Give native vegetation room to grow*
- ✓ *Stop the takeover in your yard*



TRADE YA!

Replace your chokecherry with a native or non-invasive tree and you might be eligible for a **\$150 reimbursement!**

- ✓ *Create habitat for birds & other wildlife*
- ✓ *Grow food*
- ✓ *Beautify your yard*

The 2025 Alaska Invasive Species Workshop

MARK YOUR CALENDAR!

Register for the 2025 Alaska Invasive Species Workshop! The workshop will be held October 28-30 in Anchorage, with the option to tune in virtually or attend in person. Visit www.alaskainvasives.org for details and to register.



NATIVE PLANTS PROGRAM

Meet The Staff



Casey Greenstein
PROGRAM COORDINATOR

casey@homerswcd.org

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 the Native Plants Program. On the side, she has a business doing work in contaminated site remediation and invasive plant management.



Bonnie Bernard
NATURAL RESOURCE SPECIALIST

bonnie@homerswcd.org

Bonnie first began experimenting with native plant propagation in a Louisiana greenhouse 14 years ago, and she's been hooked ever since. When not thinking about plants, Bonnie enjoys reading with her cat, making art, and skiing/hiking far off into the wilderness.



Megan Stoll
NATURAL RESOURCE SPECIALIST

megan@homerswcd.org

Megan has transitioned to the HSWCD Native Plants program from 20+ years of self-employment in arboriculture and tree service. With a background in nursery work, landscaping, and tree care, she is enthusiastic to apply her experience to promoting the use of native plants and coordinating the Alaska Community Forest Council.

Shout out to Native Plant Supporters

Collaboration is the key to success, and this year proved no different. Thanks to the generosity of Nancy Hillstrand at Coal Point, we were able to keep willow cuttings in cold storage to keep them dormant in preparation for restoration projects over the summer.

Later in the spring, we had the opportunity to join the Homer Garden Club and pop up a couple of tables at their annual plant sale in order to rehome some salvaged plants and sell some of the starts we had grown from seed.

Thank You!



NATIVE PLANTS PROGRAM

Teaming up for Restoration



Resurrection Creek

The irony was not lost on Native Plants Program staff as they planted willows on the east bank of Resurrection Creek, while on the opposite bank heavy machinery mined the abandoned creek bed for gold. While it seems counterintuitive to allow mining to continue, this project highlights the multiple-use principle of public land management, which addresses both ecological and economic interests by allowing for conservation alongside recreation and resource extraction.

At Resurrection Creek, a portion of the waterway in need of restoration is within the Hope Mining Company's active claims, so a collaboration between miners and the Forest Service – along with several other project partners – was integral to allowing restoration to take place adjacent to mining. For more information visit resurrectioncreek.org.

The Homer SWCD's Native Plants Program has been involved with the project since 2023. We have collected native seed from the project area annually, to have locally adapted seedstock on hand for ongoing revegetation efforts. In 2024 we established a willow nursery to ensure a supply of willow stakes, a staple of streambank restoration.



New Infrastructure to Meet Growing Demand for Native Plants

Homer Soil & Water has been fortunate enough to receive a great deal of community support to grow this program. Thanks to the generosity of the landowner at the Wildberry Building, we have built holding beds and a fenced area to store and grow out plants.

Thanks to an agreement with the Homer High School, our native plants team will be utilizing their greenhouse to grow wetland and streambank plants for projects like Resurrection Creek.

Thank You!



NATIVE PLANTS PROGRAM

Teaming up to Grow

Opportunities to Work with the Native Plants Program: SUPPLY

There are various ways we can work directly with individuals or businesses interested in developing a native plants business. Our goal is to see the supply of native plant materials grow.

Is there a way to incorporate native plants into your existing farm, either as a perennial crop for native seed or for the harvest of actual plant materials? Would you be more interested in starting a new grow operation or instead salvaging plants to sell from areas scheduled for ground disturbance? Would it be possible to incorporate native plants into your retail or landscaping business?

Please feel free to reach out and discuss any business idea you can dream up that incorporates native plants. Some can be trickier to grow than typical crops, so we want to support producers with species-specific techniques for successful grow out.



Check out our publications on growing native plants on our website: homerswcd.org/native-plants

Opportunities to Work with the Native Plants Program: DEMAND



If you have projects scheduled for the spring that will break ground and remove native plants, hit us up and we may be able to salvage and rehome them.

Or, if you're a property owner with lots of acreage and wetlands, we're always looking for new places to do seed collection. Email casey@homerswcd.org.



HABITAT AND TRAILS PROGRAM

Meet the Staff



Matt James
FORESTER

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.



Marcia Macone
NATURAL RESOURCE TECHNICIAN

marcia@homerswcd.org

As our newest team member at Homer Soil & Water, Marcia has been enjoying the outdoor work of clearing, assessing and improving our local trails this summer. She comes to us with years of experience working both for Crowley and on the Tiglax, but also with a love of creating trails for access to the outdoors.



Devony Lehner
NATURAL RESOURCE SPECIALIST

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.



Trails Day in the Demo Forest

A trails work day at the Homer Demo Forest was attended by the Kachemak Bay Adventure Club (KBAC), Homer Trails Alliance and Homer Soil & Water. Twelve KBAC kids, age 6-12, have been hiking the area multiple times a week this summer. All three groups collaborated to organize the event and move wood chips stockpiled on site last winter. The wood chips were used to cover roots and wet areas. Over two days, the kids hauled and covered 500 feet of trail with wood chips!

HABITAT AND TRAILS PROGRAM

Teaming up to Test the Waters

Water testing on popular beaches in the Homer area

Project #ACWA-25-07 funded by DEC from an EPA pass-through grant.

WHY test “nearshore marine” waters?

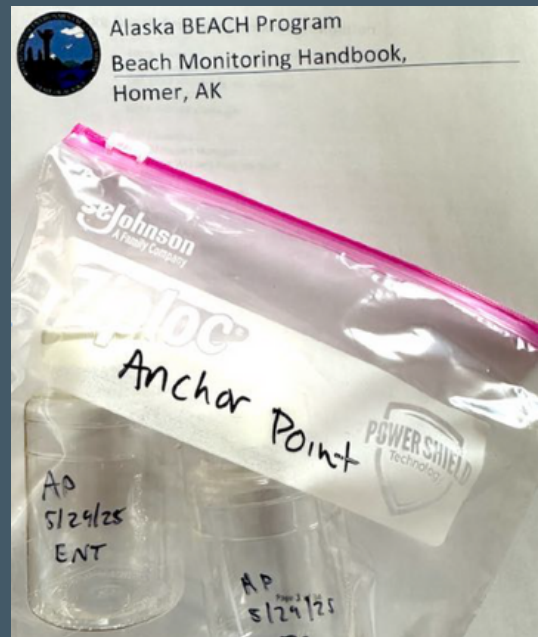
On the southern Kenai Peninsula, summer recreation often revolves around beaches—both for locals and visitors. Folks enjoy tidepooling, dog walking, kitesurfing, playing in the surf, and more. This is particularly true on three popular Homer and Anchor Point beaches: Mariner Park, Bishop’s Beach, and Anchor Point beach. Given the many ways people come into physical contact with these “nearshore marine waters”, monitoring for bacterial contaminants is critical.

WHO did the testing?

The Alaska Beach Program is part of the nationwide Beaches Environmental Assessment and Coastal Health (BEACH) effort. Through the statewide Alaska Beach Program, the Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) offers support to communities wanting to monitor water quality at recreational beaches. The program helps communities test bacteria levels in nearshore marine waters during summer. In the Homer—Anchor Point area, samples were collected by Homer Soil & Water and sent to an Anchorage lab to be evaluated for potential health risks as indicated by levels of fecal coliform and enterococci bacteria. The DEC then notifies the public when bacterial levels are higher than Alaska state water quality standards.

HOW water samples were collected, shipped, and tested?

Once a week, a 2-person team from Homer Soil & Water—Devony Lehner joined by either Marcia Macone or Maria Hoffman—prepared to wade out into the ocean to collect water samples at Mariner Park, Bishop’s Beach, and Anchor Point beach. Sampling was done within 3 hours of low tide. At each beach, the sample collector waded out till she was thigh-to-waist deep, depending on the size of incoming swells. She then filled two 100-milliliter sterile plastic bottles with water from about arm’s length deep. One sample was tested for fecal coliform bacteria, the other for enterococci bacteria. For quality control, two duplicate 100 mL samples were



HABITAT AND TRAILS PROGRAM

Teaming up to Test the Waters

Water testing on popular beaches in the Homer area (continued...)

HOW (continued...)

collected at one of the beaches each week to test for the same bacteria. This meant that the lab—which was run by Anchorage Water and Wastewater Utility, or AWWU—received 8 samples each week. Samples were collected from an additional screening site in August—the Homer Fishing Lagoon—so 10 bottles were sent to AWWU that week.



Sample bottles were placed into a hard-sided cooler, with icepacks, and delivered to AWWU within the 6-hr holding time requirement, allowing two hours for sample preparation in the lab. This meant that as soon as all samples were collected, they were driven to Kenai Airport, and the cooler was flown to Anchorage. There, a courier transported the cooler to its final destination at AWWU. At each monitoring site, the sample collector also recorded water temperature and pH and filled two small glass bottles to be used to assess water turbidity, which could vary dramatically depending on tides and the roughness of the seas. Photos illustrate the sampling process.

RESULTS

and how you can learn more

As soon as testing was complete, AWWU emailed each week's preliminary results to DEC and Homer Soil & Water, as shown below for samples from 9/3/25. Results were then posted to the [Alaska Beach Program](#) website, along with an interactive map, and weekly updates were emailed to the Alaska Beach Program listserv. Overall, all three monitored sites had low bacteria counts throughout the 2025 recreational season. Results for the entire season—May 29 to September 10—will be compiled into a final report available on the DEC website by February 2026. To view the final report, visit Alaska Beach Program or contact devony@homerswcd.org. A second season of sampling will begin May 2026.

9/3/25 Samples:	Fecal coliform (cfu/100mL)	Enterococci (mpn/100mL)
Mariner Park	<2	<10
Bishop's Beach	<2	<10
Anchor Point	4	<10
Duplicate – AP	4	<10

A huge thank you to the community for continued efforts in protecting our water! Remember, you can help keep our beaches clean by picking up after your pets, properly managing sewage on your boat, packing out all waste, and using provided outhouses and dumpsters. Thank you! And a huge thank you to DEC for funding this 2-yr project!

Thank You!



HABITAT AND TRAILS PROGRAM

Teaming up for Trees

Arbor Day in the Demonstration Forest



The historic Homer Demonstration Forest has a community Arboretum where a variety of trees have been given the chance to survive thanks to wood and wire moose fence. This enclosure, due to its location and land management, is an ideal site for future forestry trials. A steering committee for the Homer Demonstration Forest has been recently reactivated and identified fence repairs needed for the arboretum enclosure. Thanks to the Alaska Community Forestry Council and an Arbor Day Grant, we were able to buy the materials necessary.

Thank You!

If you would like to get involved in trails, trees, or other projects in the Demo Forest, just contact us and we will put you on the updated list for the steering committee.

(Left) Local community forestry leaders Ed Berg and Dave Brann study tree rings on a local slice of spruce from the Demo Forest aged out to be a seedling in the 1750s!

(Below) Homer Soil and Water staff and volunteers gathered for a work party to replace fence posts and repair the fence, remove undesirable vegetation and identify unknown trees.



HABITAT AND TRAILS PROGRAM

Teaming up for Moose

Moose Habitat Enhancement in the Critical Habitat Area

During the past winter, the Homer Soil and Water Conservation District, in ongoing collaboration with the Alaska Department of Fish & Game, completed a wildlife habitat improvement project encompassing 35 acres of spruce forest adjacent to the Watermelon Trail near Homer. The primary objective of this project was to enhance habitat quality for moose and other wildlife species while also facilitating improved hunter access.

The southern Kenai Peninsula has experienced extensive forest mortality due to spruce bark beetle infestations, resulting in increased fire risk, diminished moose habitat, and challenging terrain for both wildlife and people. To address these issues, work was conducted during periods of frozen ground to minimize erosion, rutting, and soil compaction. Tracked machinery equipped with a masticating head was used to mulch fallen spruce trees into small chips and chunks. This mulched debris serves to suppress grass regrowth by functioning as a pre-emergent layer, thereby promoting regeneration of tree and shrub species over time. More than 200 soil patches were also scarified, removing bluejoint grass

Before the process began, parts of the old burn are still littered with down timber, making access difficult, and grass dominates.



(Calamagrostis) and exposing mineral soil to facilitate natural regeneration. This process utilized an excavator fitted with a bucket and thumb to lift and invert dense root mats, revealing underlying mineral soil. Such habitat enhancement accelerates forest succession in regions where natural disturbances are infrequent.

Following scarification, District personnel manually seeded the treated areas with Paper Birch seed, yielding encouraging early results that were seen this spring and summer.



Birch seedlings coming up this spring.

After the treatment, wood is mulched to suppress the grass and zones were scarified to allow trees to regenerate.





Board of Supervisors

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A Bit of History on the Call for Nominations

Every year around October, The Soil & Water Conservation Districts put out a call for nominations for the Board. This process is lined out in state statute, but actually has roots in the Dust Bowl of the 1930s. The federal government created the Soil Conservation Service (now the Natural Resource Conservation Service or NRCS) but realized that a top-down approach to working with landowners to improve their land wasn't the most effective approach.

As a solution, each state created their own Soil & Water Conservation Districts, who work with federal agencies like NRCS to give a voice to the needs of landowners, and can point individuals to federal programs that may benefit them.

The Board of Supervisors serves as oversight and leadership for the direction of the District. Board members must be a "cooperator" (our old-fashioned term for "member") and fill out a Nomination Form. The Nomination Form requires the applicant's signature but also the signature of three other cooperators. Applicants must own or manage land in the district.

Are you interested in being on our Board?

There is a process everyone is required to follow, but it is certainly possible for anyone. First, make sure you are on our list of cooperators. If you are not, sign up today so you can run for the Board in the future.

If you are already a cooperator, you can fill out the nomination form from our [website](https://homerswcd.org/HSWCD_Call_For_Nominations_2025.pdf), pick one up in our office at 432 E. Pioneer next door to NRCS, or click here: https://homerswcd.org/HSWCD_Call_For_Nominations_2025.pdf

Since you will need three signatures of support from other cooperators, just ask for a copy of our cooperators list. Now you can track down the folks you know who can help get you nominated.

Next you will need to send the nomination form by email to the Alaska Association of Conservation Districts. The address is on the form.

If, rather than jump on the board, you are interested in being an alternate board member or helping out on a committee, please contact Kyra Wagner at 907-299-4920.

Special Thanks

TO ALL OUR PARTNERS!



Special Event

LANDSLIDE HAZARD FORUM

Our office got a lot of calls this year from landowners concerned about landslide hazards. The lack of freezing temperatures and large amounts of rain oversaturated our local soils this last winter. Gravity took over in many locations, bringing down trees, sluffing hillsides, losing sections of bluff, breaking through old dams, and gutting stream channels with debris flows.

These dramatic events coincided with renewed attention by city and local officials to study these issues. To get an overview of the topic, check out the [presentation by local geologist Bretwood Higman](#) on Landslide Risk in a Changing Climate on YouTube. You can also check out two different studies about landslides in the Homer area:

- Salisbury, J.B., 2024, [Landslide hazard susceptibility mapping in Homer, Alaska](#)
- Buzard, R.M., and Overbeck, J.R., 2022, [Coastal bluff stability assessment for Homer, Alaska](#)



Tuesday October 21, 2025

Kachemak Bay Campus, 533 E Pioneer Ave.
Doors open at 5:30, event begins at 6:00pm

The evening will touch on these topics:

- Understanding the Hazard: Learn about landslide risks in Homer-and what questions remain unanswered.
- Lessons from Other Communities: Hear firsthand how communities in California and the Philippines have successfully addressed similar challenges through monitoring, early warning systems, and community response.
- Expert Presentations: Noah Finnegan, Jillian Nicolazzo, Michael Lucio & Roy Kaimo share their real-world experiences managing landslide hazards, drawing direct connections to Homer's unique situation.
- Local Perspectives: Hear from our panel on the current state of landslide science in Homer and potential management approaches for our community.
- Community Discussion: Ask questions, share concerns, and contribute your ideas during our open panel discussion.

