NATURAL CURRENTS

FALL 2026 NEWSLETTER

Updates from the Homer Soil & Water Conservation District



District Manager Notes

BY KYRA WAGNER

A rising tide raises all boats. Leaning on this statement, we create a philosophy that goes beyond collaboration. Everything we do involves collaborating with various partners, so our success or failure on projects reflects on those partners and funders who supported us. They support us so we do our best not to let anyone down. Since that is always our intension, we find that we get supported by our collaborators when we start to sink.

The reciprocal is true as well. When our partners hit hard times, it will only benefit us all if we help to keep them afloat as well. This goes beyond what is written in a contract or MOU. This rising tide is more like... friendship.

Thanks to all our partners and collaborators for the respect, understanding and appreciation that we have experienced over the years. Right back at ya!

For this reason you will see this stamp throughout this newsletter:



There are many projects that are too much for any one group to take on, but working together, almost anything is possible.

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Peninsula-Wide Conversations

Local Working Group

Every year conservation districts 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). This February a diverse group of people representing agencies, organizations and local government came together and identified what really matters in our region. These are some of the words that floated to the top.

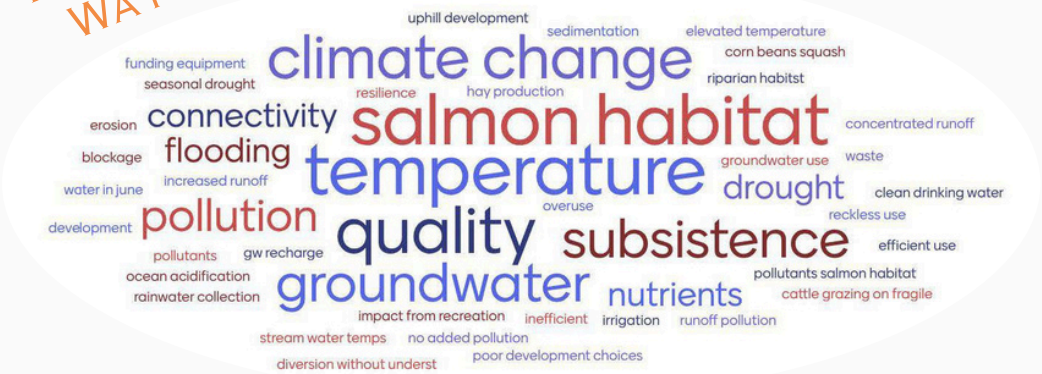
Healthy Plants



Healthy Soil



Healthy Water



Healthy Communities



What matters most to you?

Agriculture Program

Meet the Staff



Monica Kopp
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Ag Program Coordinator

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
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Natural Resource Specialist

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
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Outreach Specialist

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
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Natural Resource Specialist

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
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District Manager

Kyra has now been with the district for a decade. After years of experience as a general community volunteer and gardener, she is now in charge of oversight for a stellar crew of 10-15 people. She loves seeing what the latest issue may be and what we can do to address it.

NRCS Launches Regenerative Pilot Program

Homer Soil & Water Providing Technical Support

This year, the NRCS rolled out its Regenerative Pilot Program, an initiative focusing on holistic on-farm conservation strategies. This program includes new soil health testing requirements to track overall soil health over the course of its 5-year contracts.

Interpretation of the soil health testing data must be done by a Qualified Individual that the program participants hire. As a result of this requirement, Victoria Monsaint-Queeney of our Agriculture Team has been putting her soil microbiology degree to use in acting as Qualified Individual for 7 producers on the Kenai Peninsula and across the state

We hope that this opportunity to educate new and experienced farmers about soil health practices will result in better yields and long-term sustainability of agriculture across the state. An article was released in the state-wide NRCS newsletter about the program: News Release - USDA to Invest $1 Billion Nationwide in Regenerative Pilot Program for Fiscal Year 2027.



Southcentral Growers Conference April 2026

This spring we hosted the second annual Southcentral Growers Conference at Kenai Peninsula College's Kachemak Bay Campus in Homer. This two-day event was packed full of sessions and included over 80 participants from across the Peninsula.

Participants were able to attend presentations about a variety of topics, including soil health, livestock, mycorrhizae, and more. Sessions also included virtual presentations by farmers across the state and Q&A sessions with local businesses. Our keynote speaker was Tom Zimmer of Calypso Farms in Fairbanks who presented on Growing Food and Community in Alaska.

Funding to Test Soil Health



This year, several Soil and Water Conservation Districts across the state were recipients of an NRCS Soil Health award. The grant was housed by the Alaskan Association of Conservation Districts and subawarded to Homer Soil and Water, as well as other districts, to fund each district for any soil health-related research or services they might benefit from.

Homer Soil and Water's soil health grant has focused on testing soils and crops across different management or natural regimes on producers' lands, with the goal of helping farmers develop and maintain healthy agricultural soils. This has included soil health and fertility testing, as well as pathogen testing, in an effort to understand existing and potential limitations on crop productivity and health.

In addition, we are finishing up a season-long cover crop study at the garden on Kenai Peninsula College's Kachemak Bay Campus. This study is looking at the effects of a cover crop mix (oats, buckwheat, and field peas) on soil structure, microbial activity, and nutrients in two fields - one field that was tarped for the beginning of the season and one field that was left fallow.

We just received confirmation of a second year of funding for this grant, so we hope to expand our soil health testing to more landowners next year and we hope to complete a second year of our cover crop trial as well. Photo Credit: Victoria



Before



After

The Alaska Agriculture Conference & Grazing Lands Workshop

In 2026, Homer Soil and Water Conservation District has continued to partner with the Alaska Farm Bureau, NRCS, Western SARE, University of Alaska Anchorage, Intertribal Agriculture Council, and the National Grazing Lands Coalition to help plan the statewide Alaska Agriculture Conference.

This year's schedule features a full day single track Collaborative Grazing Lands Workshop on November 12th (see the schedule to the right), followed by the 2-day multi-track annual conference. These two days will include a dedicated track for livestock producers and other managers of grazing and hay land, but also include all kinds of information on soil health, garden and farm production, floriculture, marketing, business planning, beekeeping, new studies, and more.

Register now to join us at the downtown Anchorage Sheraton November 12-14 2026. For more information and registration, please visit the Farm Bureau's event page online.



Village-Driven Ag Workshop

In July, we hosted our first Village-Driven Ag Small Farm Workshop for off-road and tribal producers looking to expand their knowledge and resources on growing food in remote areas in our greater "region" of southern Alaska. Eligible participants had to be located on the Kenai Peninsula, Kodiak Archipelago, Alaska Peninsula, Aleutian Chain, or Bristol Bay to apply. We had 12 successful applicants.

Our project was funded by a Conservation Outreach Agreement with the Natural Resources Conservation Service and was all about connecting new and emerging farmers in farther-flung areas with our thriving and seasoned farmers on the southern Kenai Peninsula. The agreement covered all travel expenses for these participants to attend a three-day workshop in Homer from July 24-26, 2026.

On July 23, all 12 participants arrived from the communities of Atka, Chignik Lagoon, Sand Point, Nondalton, Ouzinkie, Kodiak, Seward, Nanwalek, Port Graham, and Seldovia. Each day started with classroom sessions on the basics of gardening in southcoastal Alaska, an introduction to growing and propagating perennial fruits and vegetables, and discussions on funding and financial incentives available for rural ag projects.

Each afternoon we visited different local farms. It was great to see the diversity of styles and management practices of each of the farmers.

Importantly, the participants greatly benefited from networking with one another, as they were all either tribally-affiliated or located in a remote off-road community and their challenges are very similar. Their relationships are sure to be long-lasting, but to ensure that communication stays ongoing, we facilitated a post-workshop Zoom meeting to debrief the event, discuss highlights, lessons learned, and ongoing barriers, and to discuss next steps. We plan to continue hosting quarterly Zoom meetings to keep conversations going.







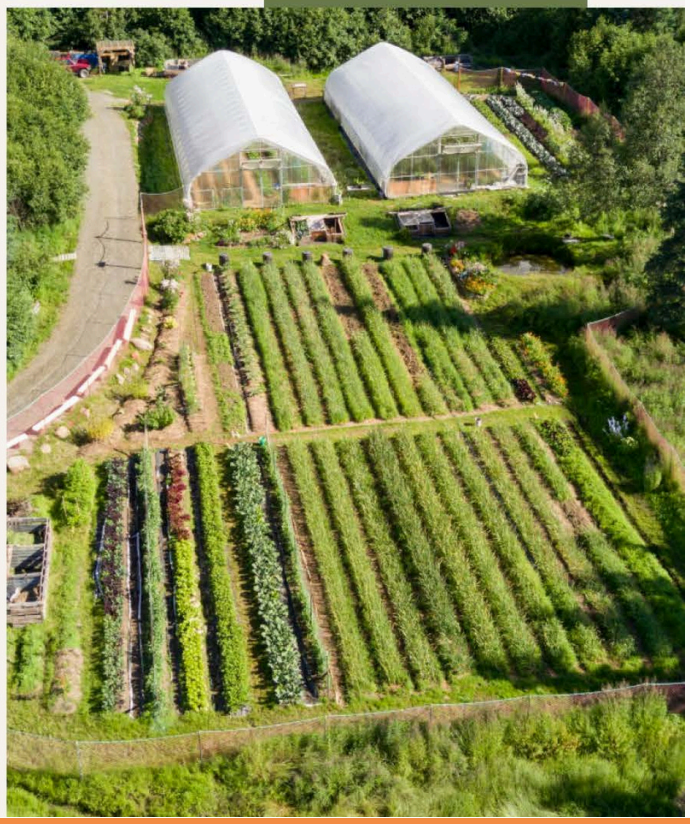
PRESERVING FARMLAND

In Homer, Alaska

THURSDAY
OCTOBER 29
6PM-7PM

K-BAY CAMPUS
HOMER, AK

This event lead us through the history of farming in the Homer area as a tribute to the value that our land and soils have here. People have prioritized farming here for decades and now we are seeing more need to preserve the most favorable farmland from future development. The Alaska Farmland Trust is expanding its services to our area and explained the different ways that landowners can wor to keep their land in production.



HOSTED BY:

Homer Soil & Water Conservation District

ALASKA FARM BUREAU

ALASKA FARMLAND TRUST

PRATT MUSEUM

KACHEMAK HERITAGE LAND TRUST

Support from the Sons of the American Legion

A big THANK YOU to the Post 16 Sons of the American Legion for awarding Homer SWCD $1,000 to help us build planter boxes and beds to grow out various species of Alaskan native plants. We will use the beds to trial growth from locally collected seed, and plants that were salvaged from sites on the lower Kenai Peninsula. The beds will be made to accommodate different light/shade and water preferences, so that we can experiment with growing a variety of different kinds of plants for land restoration and revegetation efforts.

Nikolaevsk Charter School

In August 2026 a new, innovative model for K-12 education opened its doors right in the heart of Nikolaevsk, AK - the Nikolaevsk Charter School is in session!

After four years of dreaming, planning, and navigating all the steps for gaining approval by the Kenai Peninsula Borough School District, this inaugural school year has over 60 students with open enrollment to serve more. There is great enthusiasm in the community for this new vision of what a school can be - one that pairs academic courses alongside hands-on learning in practical trades and skills rooted in homesteading (including a school farm), sustainable living and Alaskan food security.

The mission:
"To deliver high-quality education that goes beyond textbooks. We prioritize hands-on learning, Career and Technical Education (CTE), and STEAM — Science, Technology, Engineering, Art, and Math — so students can gain real-world skills, solve real-world problems, and find purpose in their own communities. Whether it's welding a greenhouse frame, designing a better chicken waterer, caring for livestock, building a root cellar, or crafting pottery from Alaskan clay, our students are builders, problem-solvers, and innovators."

The academic curriculum for grades K–8 is Montessori-based, while grades 9-12 receive a career technical education (CTE) focused approach. Hands-on learning includes gardening, cooking, farm projects, wood working, architecture/building projects (starting with wooden chicken coops), and food preservation techniques.

The school farm has broken ground, with a large garden area now planted by students with vegetable starts donated by the Anchor Point Greenhouse. Plans for an on-site orchard are underway (one apple tree per student), and in year two they plan to introduce livestock for the students to engage with animal husbandry.

Homer SWCD Board of Supervisors member Jim Engebretsen is one of the team of dedicated community volunteers who worked diligently to take the vision for the school through all the steps and hurdles to full fruition. Jim now teaches woodworking and other hands-on skills three days a week at the school. Students have been building their own school chairs, handmade cutting boards, and that's just the start.

Donations to the school are welcomed, from funds, to supplies for projects, to volunteer hours helping with various events. Visit https://akhomestead.org/nikolaevsk-charter-school-1 for more.

Homer Soil and Water staff look forward to working more with these students and teachers as their farm and gardens continue to grow and take shape.



Monica goes over soil sampling with the students. Photo credit: Nicole

Farm Family of the Year

CONGRATULATIONS AL!

Al Poindexter and family from the Anchor Point Greenhouse have been awarded the 2026 Alaska Farm Family of the Year by the Alaska Division of Agriculture.

From the Alaska DNR:
"The Farm Family of the Year award was established in 2000 by the Alaska Division of Agriculture and the Alaska State Fair to honor an Alaska farm family that best epitomizes the spirit of the industry, and to show appreciation for the hard-working Alaskans committed to agriculture."

The 10 acre Anchor Point Greenhouse, LLC was established in Anchor Point in 1976, making this year its 50th anniversary! They grow a wide variety of crops, including several heated greenhouses of tomatoes and cucumbers that are ripe early in the season, they produce Fishy Peat and Alaska Earth potting soils on-site using locally available materials. Al has also served as a local educator, starting the natural resources program at Homer High School the local chapter of FFA, teaching kids farm skills and land stewardship, and he has also served as the executive director for the Alaska Association of Conservation Districts and on the State of Alaska's Board of Conservation and Agriculture.

Read all about the many ways the Al Poindexter and his family have been pioneers in local agriculture:
Link to DNR announcement:
https://dnr.alaska.gov/ag/ag_FFY.htm



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

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
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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
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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
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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
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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.



Jack Hruby

Seasonal Natural Resource Technician

Jack came up after graduating the University of Pittsburg for his second summer in Alaska and has enjoyed learning the ropes with the Invasives Team, but his endless curiosity has led him to join in on other projects ranging from trail work to installing landslide monitoring equipment.



Ava Thompson

Seasonal Natural Resource Technician

Ava came up after graduating from Florida State University to be a priceless part of our Soldotna invasives crew

Invasive Prunus Tree Survey of the Kenai River

Whether you know them as European bird cherry or mayday (Prunus padus), or chokecherry (Prunus virginiana), you probably know invasive Prunus trees can be a pain. They can take over your yard, and escaped trees readily spread through forests and along rivers and streams. They crowd out native trees and shrubs, threaten salmon habitat, and can be toxic to moose.

For the past five years, we've helped landowners remove these tenacious trees from their properties to keep them from spreading into wild areas, especially salmon and moose habitat. Our replacement tree reimbursement program helps offset the cost of replanting after a landowner removes a Prunus tree.

Noticing an uptick in reports of rogue Prunus growing wild both on private property and public lands on the Central Peninsula, including along the Kenai River, we received funding from the Alaska Division of Forestry and Fire Protection and the U.S. Forest Service to expand surveys in the region, with a focus on areas impacted by spruce beetle outbreaks.

In June, Katrina, Ava, and a slew of partners surveyed approximately 38 miles of the Kenai River. Kenai SWCD District Manager Carly Pierson and staff from the Kenai Watershed Forum helped spot trees and collect data. The Alaska Department of Fish & Game and volunteers from the Kenai Chapter of Trout Unlimited provided on-the-water support, contributing time, boats, and invaluable expertise. This was one of the most logistically complex (but fun!) projects we've worked on, and we literally would have been up a creek without a paddle without the generous support of these folks – thank you!

The team identified Prunus trees at 157 locations, mostly concentrated around Soldotna. Mapping these Prunus "hotspots" is helping guide our outreach efforts and will provide a baseline as we work with partners to strategically plan for long-term Prunus management on the Peninsula.



Ava points out a Prunus padus tree growing along the Kenai River in central Soldotna.
Photo credit: Katrina



KP-CISMA partners spent three days on the water documenting Prunus trees along the Kenai River.
Photo credit: Katrina.

FREE
Chokecherry Tree Removal Assistance

Have an **invasive chokecherry** or **European bird cherry** tree on your property? Let us help you remove it at **no cost to you!** Targeted herbicide application will get to the root of the problem and ensure the tree doesn't come back.

- **Protect salmon & moose habitat**
- **Give native plants space to grow**
- **Stop the takeover in your yard**

TRADE YA!

Tree Replacement Cost-share Program

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



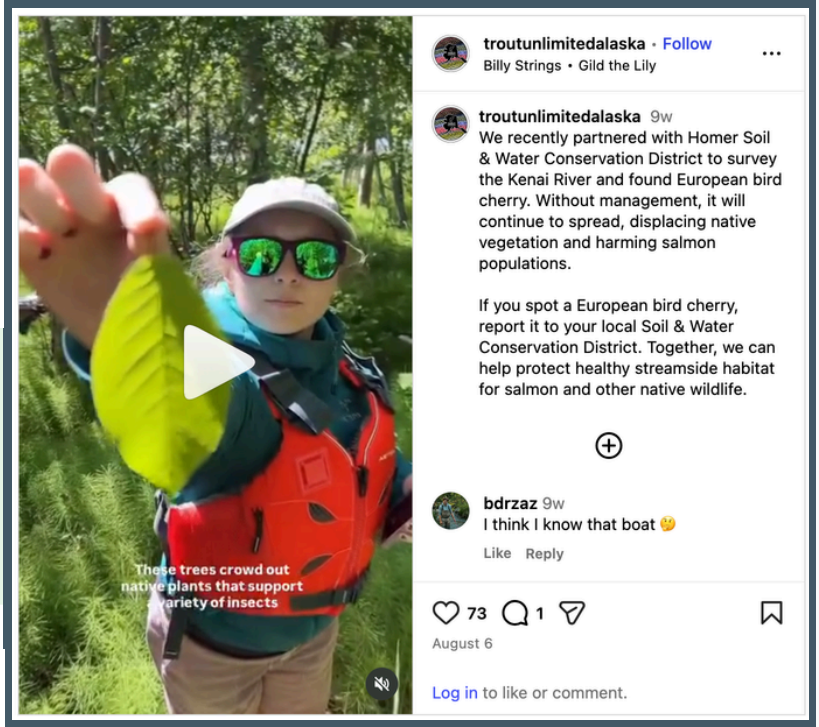
TELL US ABOUT YOUR TREE!

For DIY removal tips or to find out how we can assist you, click on the "CONTACT US ABOUT YOUR TREE" button at **kenaiinvasives.org** or scan the QR code:

Partnering to get the word out on Prunus Trees

Homer Soil & Water staff were featured in a reel put out by Trout Unlimited, one of our many wonderful partners in the quest to control these trees.

Check it out on Instagram:
https://www.instagram.com/reel/DbtaekwvqT7/



REPORT IT!

Invading a forest near you?

Scan to tell us about chokecherry trees **growing in the wild:**

Elodea Treatments Continue at Crescent Lake

If handed a sprig of Elodea, you might recognize it from a high school biology lab of yesteryear or as "the goldfish bowl plant." Although native to parts of the Lower 48 and Canada, Elodea is highly invasive in Alaska and is the only invasive freshwater plant species known to be present in the state. It spreads between waterbodies when small fragments hitch a ride on boats or floatplanes. Once rooted, it can quickly multiply to form dense stands that crowd out native plants, block water flow, decrease dissolved oxygen, destroy salmon spawning beds, and disrupt aquatic food webs, including the availability of prey for juvenile salmon. Elodea is one of the greatest threats to fish habitat in Alaska, and state law prohibits buying, selling, importing, transporting, or intentionally releasing it within or into the state.

So, when Elodea was found in Crescent Lake – a large remote alpine lake on the Chugach National Forest – in 2024, it got our attention. It got everyone's attention. We thought Elodea had been eradicated from the Peninsula, so the discovery was disappointing, to say the least.KP-CISMA partners rallied to develop a rapid response plan, and in 2025, HSWCD secured funding to begin herbicide treatments in the lake.

The second year of treatments took place in 2026. Unfortunately, during post-treatment surveys, several new patches of Elodea were found outside the treatment zones. On the flip side, the herbicide seems to be having the desired effect: Elodea within the treatment areas is dying! The project team will regroup over the winter and adjust the treatment plan for 2027. Crescent Lake remains the only known Elodea infestation on the Kenai Peninsula.

A huge thank you to our partners at the U.S. Forest Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, National Park Service, and Alaska Division of Agriculture for their enduring flexibility and continued commitment to the project. The project is generously funded by the Alaska Sustainable Salmon Fund (AKSSF). Read the full project scope of work on the AKSSF website.

The 2026 Elodea season in photos:





The 2026 Crescent Lake season kicked off in June, when Ava joined a crew from the U.S. Forest Service, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, and National Park Service to transport more than 10,000 pounds of supplies and gear to Crescent Lake. Photo credit: Ava



Elodea Treatments (continued...)

Crews applied three rounds of targeted herbicide treatments to infested areas of the lake during July and August.
Photo credit: Ava

A HUGE PROJECT ONLY POSSIBLE WITH PARTNERS





The crew trialed new survey methods. Snorkeling proved impractical, as most Elodea was in deep water and difficult to identify without diving down. An aquatic ROV and a GoPro camera, however, were useful for spotting small patches of Elodea, even single stems. Photo credit: USFS





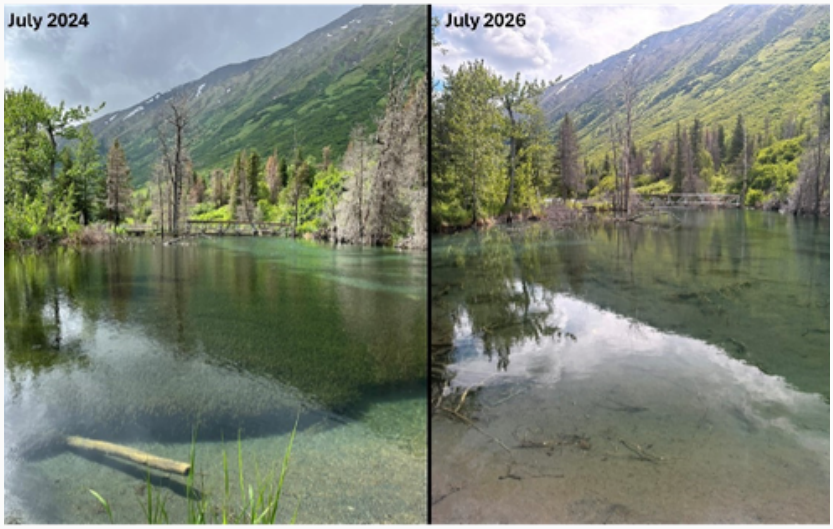


Remote fieldwork comes with challenges and requires creativity. After more than 7" of rain, Glacier Creek, which flows into Crescent Creek just below the lake's outlet, rose to flood stage. Water at the outlet rose about five inches and flooded the Knaak box that housed the herbicide drip station. The crew lifted the box onto log rounds and dried it out. Photo credit: Ava and USFS

Invasive Species Program

Elodea Treatments (conclusion...)

We're encouraged by the progress, with Elodea significantly reduced throughout the lake, including at the outlet. Notice the mat of elodea that is in underwater in the 2025 shot. There is still more to do, but it is good to see that treatments are effective.
Photo credit: USFS



KP-CISMA Annual Report

For more than two decades, HSWCD has coordinated the Kenai Peninsula Cooperative Invasive Species Management Area (KP-CISMA), a partnership of agencies, nonprofits, Tribes, community members, and others. From organizing community weed pulls and helping landowners manage invasive plants to developing local and regional management plans, our invasives team works alongside our fantastic KP-CISMA partners.

Learn more about invasive species and KP-CISMA's work at kenaiinvasives.org and in its annual report: https://bit.ly/47K8BPw



New Boot Brush Station!

Next time you take a stroll along the Beluga Slough Trail, stop by the Alaska Maritime National Wildlife Refuge visitor center to check out (and use) the new boot brush station! We teamed up with the refuge's visitor services staff to design it, with support from a Copper River Watershed Project mini-grant.
Photo Credit: Lora Haller/USFWS



Invasive Mussels: Southcentral Invasion Hotspots Project

Have you heard of zebra and quagga? We're not talking about the four-legged animals. These are small freshwater invasive mussels that pack a big punch. While zebra and quagga mussels haven't yet been found in Alaska, they cause major clam-ities in waters across the Lower 48 and are costly to remove once established. Their opportunism and prolific growth makes them well-suited to form monocultures that can threaten fish habitat, degrade water quality, clog water intakes, and transform freshwater ecosystems.

Following a springtime inter-agency early detection training led by the Kachemak Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve (KBNERR), crews from Homer SWCD, Anchorage SWCD, and Kenai SWCD surveyed 13 lakes in the central Kenai Peninsula, Anchorage, and Mat-Su for the invasive mussels as part of a coordinated pilot project for early detection. Field staff collected calcium content water samples to assist with risk models (the mussels need calcium to develop shells) and used a specialized plankton net to sample for the species' microscopic larvae, called veligers. Samples were sent to University of Alaska Fairbanks and KBNERR for analysis and informed risk assessment. The pilot project is wrapping up this December, but the invasive species crew is keeping eyes out for additional funding to support monitoring and rapid response work at the highest risk lakes on the Kenai Peninsula.

The mussels hitch rides on boats, trailers, floatplanes, aquatic plants, and recreational gear, so overland transport of mussels between freshwater bodies is one of the highest risks for spread. But, as





With just about any invasive species, prevention is the greatest cure. Members of the public are highly encouraged to clean, drain, and dry watercraft and gear between freshwater bodies to prevent accidental transport of aquatic invasive species. Simple hygiene of boats, floats, and gear can go a long way. Help us prevent these invasive freshwater mussels from getting fresh in our waters!



Invasives Program staff from around the state at Spring Training

Certified Weed-free Gravel

Our gravel inspectors had a busy summer, visiting gravel pits across the Peninsula from Seward to Homer. Although certified weed-free gravel sources across Alaska remain limited, we're encouraged by gravel producers' efforts to clean up their sites and by the growing interest from land managers in using weed-free gravel. Gravel producers can request an inspection using the form on our website:

https://form.jotform.com/251887327097066



Katrina looks for invasive plants while inspecting a gravel pit for potential certification through Alaska's Weed-free gravel certification program.

2026 Alaska Invasive Species Workshop



This annual workshop brings people together from around the state to get the latest on projects focused on new methods for monitoring or addressing invasive plants and animals, both terrestrial and aquatic. The 2026 Alaska Invasive Species Workshop was held in Juneau. Visit www.alaskainvasives.org for details and to see if you would like to plug in next year.

Native Plants Program

Meet The Staff



Bonnie Bernard
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NATURAL RESOURCE SPECIALIST

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
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NATURAL RESOURCE SPECIALIST

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.



Alexis Miller
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SEASONAL NATURAL RESOURCE SPECIALIST

Alexis grew up here in Homer and recently graduated from the University of Washington. She loves biology, knows her plants (invasive or not) and animals from her time growing up on a local farm and working at the Wagon Wheel. Her interest in everything has kept her busy this summer.

Fighting Erosion on Woodard Creek Canyon

The canyon above the hospital has extremely steep sides and a habit of having landslides. Homer Soil and Water is working with the City of homer to try some different techniques to maintain stable slopes. As the alder grows taller, it often topples and pulls up large chunks of the slope, so various versions of pruning and laying down have been tried. seveveral spruce saplings have also been planted in one area to see if their root structure could add benefits to the slope. We will know more as time goes on.



Spruce saplings in cages. Photo credit: Kyra

Collaboration with Bureau of Land Management

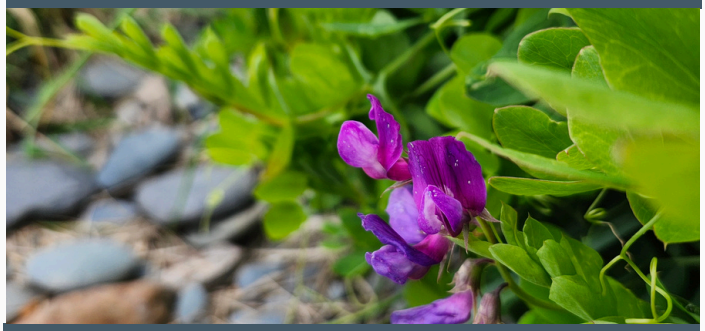
Homer Soil and Water Conservation District participates in the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Seeds of Success (SOS) program, a national seed-saving effort to secure genetic diversity from native plant species across the United States for restoration efforts. Read more about the BLM Seeds of Success Program Here.

BLM also supports Homer SWCD's efforts to build Alaska's native plant economy, including internal seed collection work that allows us to provide native seed to local landowners and partners. This funding also supported Homer SWCD in renting the Homer High School greenhouse facility for the purpose of growing out native plants for various businesses and revegetation projects.

In fall of 2026, we collected seed for both the national SOS program and for our Conservation District's seed supply to be able to provide seed for Kenai Peninsula revegetation projects and businesses interested in growing or otherwise using native plant species. If you are interested in growing native plants as a business, please reach out to us! Here is a snapshot of some species we collected this season:

BLM National Seeds of Success Program

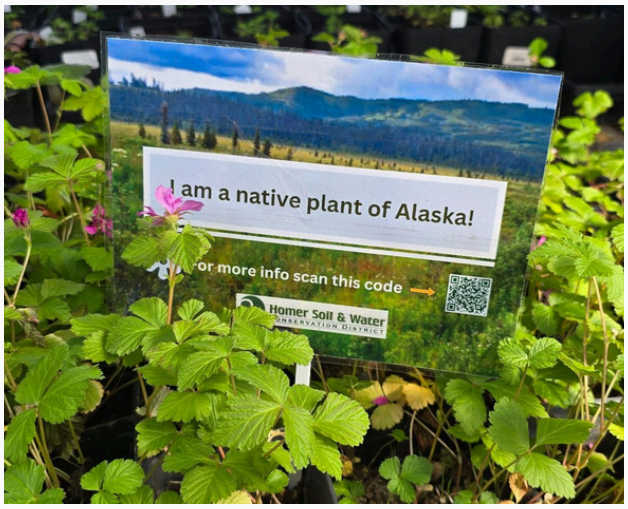
- Carex mertensii (Mertens' sedge)
- Geranium erianthum (woolly geranium)
- Geum macrophyllum (large-leaf avens)
- Lupinus nootkatensis (Nootka lupine)
- Polemonium acutiflorum (tall Jacob's ladder)
- Sanguisorba menziesii (Menzies' Burnet)



Homer Soil & Water Internal Seed Collections

- Achillea millefolium (yarrow)
- Artemisia tilesii (wormwood)
- Carex mertensii (Mertens' sedge)
- Corydalis sempervirens (rock harlequin)
- Dryas drummondii (yellow mountain-avens)
- Lathyrus japonicus (beach pea)
- Polemonium pulcherrimum (Jacob's ladder)
- Sanguisorba canadensis (Canadian Burnet)





Native Plants Around Town

In 2026, the USDA Rural Development Program funded HSWCD to support local businesses in their district to include or expand on Native Plant products in their business activities. Our Native Plants Team identified 5 local producers to provide with native plant sees or starts to grow out and sell, and/or business planning assistance. We tasked these businesses with tracking the outcomes of their sales and activities, and documenting the evolution of their business plans. This project is a smaller part of a larger goal of our Native Plant Program to develop and support a Native Plant economy in our state. HSWCD native plant materials could be spotted this season at the farmers market, at Alaska Hardy Nursery, and in various landscape installations around town. Participants tracked information such as which plants sold well, which did not, what seed was easy to start, and what kind of crops large scale-purchasers were interested in and how these crops would need to be grown.





A huge thanks to the businesses who participated in this study:

- Alaska Hardy Nursery - Featuring native plant stock at their nursery with signage, and in their landscaping installations. Exploring future and ongoing HSWCD supported activities to collect seed for the purposes of growing their own native plant stock.
- Snowshoe Hollow Farm - Growing out native plants from seed and starts for farmers market sales, in addition to creating grow-out beds of native plants for value-added products.
- Homer Hilltop Farm - Utilizing native plants in landscape installations and farmers market sales
- Anchor River Ranch - Working with the Alaska Plant Materials Center to develop a business plan for large scale growout of native grass seed
- Tilted Hills Farm - Exploring the market for native grasses and blueberry growout



Resurrecting Resurrection Creek

HSWCD has partnered with numerous agencies and organizations across multiple years in a broad effort to rehabilitate sections of Resurrection Creek in Hope, Alaska following mining activities. Chugach National Forest enlisted our Native Plants Team (in addition to Anchorage and Palmer Soil and Water Conservation Districts) to collect locally-sourced seed from Resurrection Creek and surrounding appropriate ecoregions and grow out revegetation materials to be installed by contracted work crews and at public volunteer planting events hosted by Trout unlimited. In 2026, HSWCD grew over 1400 native plants from locally sourced seed for this project. HSWCD also harvested and provided many hundreds of willow and cottonwood stakes for this revegetation project. Staff delivered plant materials to the restoration site and assisted partners at the public planting days.





Experimental Native Willow Nursery

Bonnie continues to steward the experimental native willow nursery, as funded by the Alaska Sustainable Salmon Fund. This year, she and local volunteers harvested approximately 1600 stakes under an AK DNR Non-Timber Forest Products permit, and planted 1200 of these within the nursery space that was cleared and fenced-in last summer. The remaining 400 stakes were withheld and planted in pots to provide known-source replacements for stakes that die within the first growing season. Once second-season survival has been assessed, any additional rooted stakes can be the nursery, and/or for establishment of a planted out at the Wildberry nursery to provide a local source of Salix alaxensis and/or Salix sitchensis.

Throughout the field season, Bonnie has conducted bi-weekly nursery maintenance. During the latter half of September, she and one field volunteer measured first-season growth metrics on a subsample of planted stakes, including data on mortality, basal diameter, number of shoots produced, and shoot length. She will analyze these data during the final months of 2026, and present first-year "lessons learned" at a small outreach event in Soldotna in November.



Homer SWCD Specialist Bonnie Bernard trims, counts, and bundles dormant willow cuttings near Resurrection River. Photo credit: Ranger Fox.



Bonnie works with a local volunteer to measure end-of-season shoot lengths in the AKSSF-funded experimental native willow nursery. Photo credit: Ranger Fox.

Enhancing the Relationship Between Utility Vegetation Management and Urban Forestry in Alaska

The Alaska Community Forest Council (ACFC) is bringing utility vegetation management (UVM) professionals together for a statewide industry forum, emphasizing the existing bond between UVM and Urban Forestry.

Supported by administrative and capacity-building funding through the Alaska DNR Division of Forestry and Fire Protection (DFFP), Homer Soil and Water Conservation District (HSWCD) assists ACFC to strengthen community forestry across Alaska by identifying needs, building partnerships, and creating opportunities for education and collaboration. Photo credit: Megan



Following the success of a Nursery and Landscape Industry Forum in October 2025, ACFC identified a need to support Alaska's UVM sector. The upcoming forum will bring utility professionals from across the state together to network, explore Integrated Vegetation Management practices, learn about updates to ANSI standards, and discuss legal and policy issues. Field staff will also have opportunities to earn their Electrical Hazard Awareness Program certification, which includes receiving first aid and aerial rescue training.

This two-day event is planned to be held in Anchorage in March of 2027 with two nationally renowned educators from the Utility Vegetation Management & Urban Forestry worlds of Arboriculture, Randy Miller and John Ball.

Randy is an ISA Board Certified Master Arborist, serves on the ISA Board of Directors, and is a past president of the Utility Arborist Association. He authored the ISA Integrated Vegetation Management Best Management Practices, and co-authored the ISA Utility Specialist Study Guide, among many other career achievements.

John Ball is a professor of Forestry at South Dakota State University. With nearly 50 years in the industry, an expansive list of credentials, and a reputation for being an industry-leading safety trainer, he is globally recognized for his work rewriting industry safety standards.

By connecting Alaska's utility professionals with leading experts and one another, the forum will help strengthen knowledge, safety, and collaboration across the state's UVM & Urban Forestry bridging sectors.





Meet the Staff



Marcia Macone

marcia@homerswcd.org

NATURAL RESOURCE TECHNICIAN

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

devony@homerswcd.org

NATURAL RESOURCE SPECIALIST

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.





Rolling Barge Bridge

North Fork Hills Trail: Stream Crossing Repair

We have partnered with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to restore and protect anadromous streams along the Caribou/North Fork Hills Trail on the southern Kenai Peninsula. The project aims to improve fish habitat while providing safe access for ATV users and hunters. At this particular crossing, traffic and ruts have diverted the stream from its original channel and created difficult, muddy passage for both fish and ATVs.

A local engineering firm designed the proposed crossing to protect the fish stream and ensure safe passage for ATVs and side-by-sides. The design uses a 66-foot “Rolling Barge Bridge” (image left) on helical piles to span the widest section, followed by a raised boardwalk that keeps traffic above undisturbed soil.

The Watermelon Trail: A Long Time Coming

A Little History

The Watermelon Trail trailhead is at the Snomads parking lot on Ohlson Mountain. From there it takes off down through Borough property, private property, state land and the Anchor River/Fritz Creek Critical Habitat Area (CHA). This complex mix of ownership and land management styles motivated the Snomads to pursue an easement for the entire trail so that they could ensure that management was consistent and the trail connected to the entire Caribou Hills trail system where they groom trails in the winter. The easement should be finalized by the spring, but this winter should be the first time the Snomads will be able to groom the Watermelon Trail, thereby creating a loop that connects into the Dry Hole Trail and therefore into the entire network.

Making it Happen

Homer Soil & Water has played a role in these trail improvements specifically in the CHA. With support from Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G) we have been doing basic maintenance and improvements for years. With the easement coming into place, however, it was a perfect time to take a bigger view towards the future for the trail. Deeply rutted and severely eroding, trail maintenance on the fall-line of the steep hillside was a never-ending battle. ADF&G commissioned a trail designer to lay out a more sustainable, easily drained and maintained, trail. In the designer's early estimates, judging from the size of the incised portions of the trail, over 18,000 cubic yards of soil has been displaced, all headed downhill toward the anadromous Beaver Creek.

Clearing the Trail

Last winter the work started in ernest. Since so much work needed to be done with heavy machinery, it needed to be done on frozen ground. The Snomads used this time to carry in bridges for crossings over branches of the Anchor River that are outside of the CHA. They also cleared the trail up to the CHA boundary. Homer Soil & Water then hired Wise Construction to clear the trail in the CHA to the width required for grooming (see photo below). The path that was cleared mostly followed the newly designed route and specifically went around private property where the trail has trespassed for years.



It became clear that some portions of the trail designed for ATV traffic were not ideal for snow machines. Modifications were made for the winter route that meant that the summer route needs to be mapped as a separate portion of the easement. In the photo below, Homer Soil & Water board members are contemplating a portion of the winter route that goes through a boggy area that is not ideal for ATVs.



The Watermelon Trail: The Project Continues

Fixing the Bridge

The easement has the requirement that all bridge installations need to be approved by an engineer. The old bridge over Beaver Creek was in need of modification, so Homer Soil & Water hired Arno Construction to do the repairs. Since it needed heavy machinery to move the base supports, once again the work was mostly done on frozen ground. Arno reconfigured, welded, reconstructed, and resurfaced the bridge and the ramps leading up to it so that it meets specs. A huge shout out for the stellar work done to make this last.



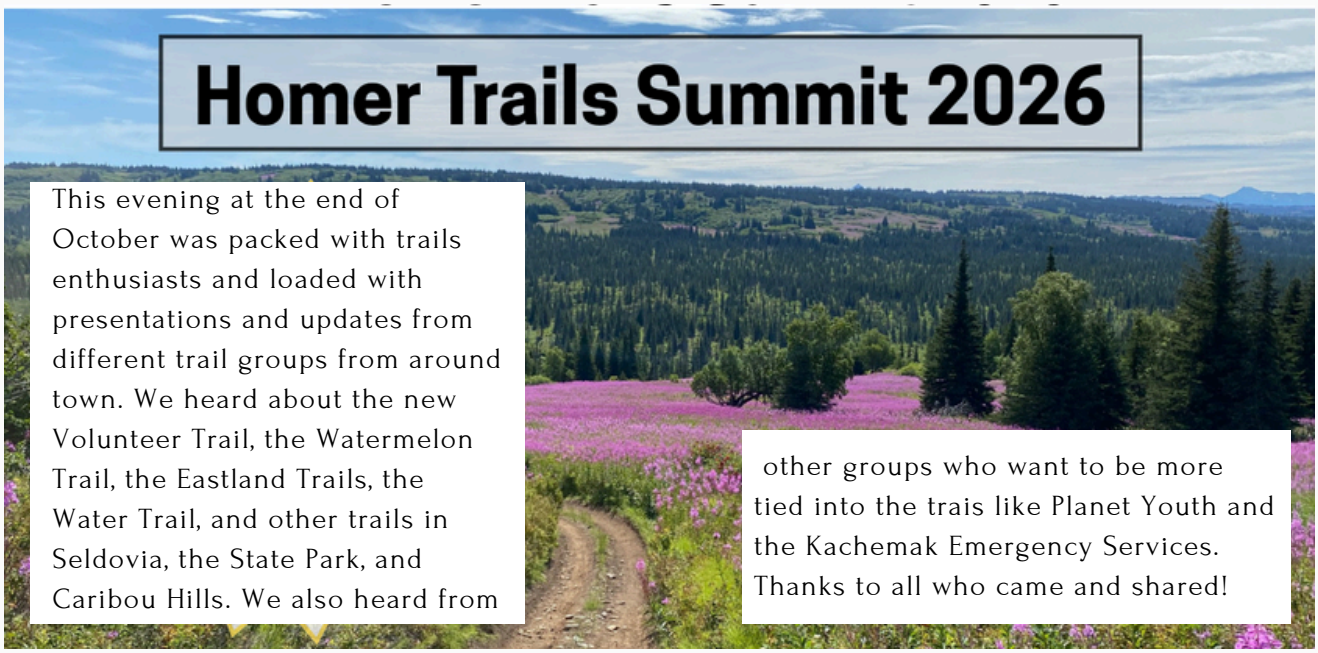
Trail Construction

Starting this fall and continuing into next summer, Kijik Technical Services, a Native-owned corporation with experience designing and building durable, accessible trails in critical habitat, will construct the new route through the CHA. Stay tuned as it develops!





A HUGE PROJECT
ONLY POSSIBLE
WITH PARTNERS



Still more to do: The Dry Hole Trail



We assess two anadromous streams along the Dry Hole Trail each year. Heavy ATV use, especially during hunting season, has severely braided the trail. During the 2026 season, we measured and evaluated changes at the first stream. The second stream has a badly damaged culvert where the stream has diverted. Our goal is to identify rerouting opportunities The photos show where the blocked culvert is causing the stream to run over the trail. Photo credit: Marcia



Landslide Suseptibility Workshop in Homer

Last fall Homer Soil & Water joined forces with local geologists, the City of Homer, the Kachemak Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve and the Woodwell Institute to host a workshop on landslide susceptibility in Homer. Decision makers, land managers, City and Borough staff all gathered for this two-day event focused on landslide hazards along with an evening presentation open to the public.

The workshop kicked off with Dr. Jennifer Francis, a Senior Scientist at the Woodwell Climate Research Center, describing the phenomenon of atmospheric rivers and how the warming climate intensifies rainfall patterns. Then we heard from local, state and national geologists describing how this new normal was increasing the likelihood of more serious landslides in our area.

Shallow landslides have been seen in the Homer area over the years in the form of debris flows and mud flows that coincide with intense rain. Deep-seated landslides are also historically visible here and tend to take out larger portions of area, though not as regularly. Each afternoon the group left the classroom for the tour bus and drove around the Homer area looking at historic flows and slides, noting the critical infrastructure connected to these areas.

The most uplifting part of this otherwise depressing topic was that Woodwell also brought in presenters from other communities who are also dealing with these issues. Roy Kaimo joined us from the Philipines to share the story of their successful early warning system that is managed within local communities. Lisa Busch from Sitka also described how the community responded after a landslide killed two community members and what Sitka has developed as their own early warning system.

After the workshop, Woodwell has continued to support geologists this year to focus on setting up soil weather monitoring stations and movement monitors on unstable slopes around town, namely the Woodard Creek Canyon above the hospital and the Overlook on Baycrest where the main road, gasline and internet lines all pass into town.

This brings up the question as to how Homer can best monitor lanslide probability in a reliable way. Local geologist Bretman “Hig” Higman is deploying monitors and developing a dashboard where community members will be able to monitor the data, but is there more we should be doing to keep our community alert and safe? The conversation will continue!



A landslide through a local landowner’s yard last year. Photo credit: Erin Hollowell

So Much happening in the Homer Demonstration Forest!

Slowing the Flow, Beaver Style

Beavers used to live in the Demo Forest, damming up Diamond Creek in several places. In recent years, we have become aware that the present lack of beavers actually has a negative impact on our region. When they dam up an area, the resulting wetlands spur more browse for moose and help regulate salmon stream temperatures by saturating peatlands. This is why the Board of Game passed a moratorium on beaver trapping this spring in the Anchor River drainage.

The Homer Demonstration Forest is a great place to demonstrate what beavers used to do in our area. This coming summer you will see structures showing up in the headwaters (built by Homer Soil and Water, not beavers) that will block and slow the flow of water.

Take a close look at these beaver dam analogs (BDA) because they are a project that landowners can do on their own property if they wish to recreate native habitat and support salmon streams. And if you work with NRCS, ask them about their cost share program for this practice.



Cleaning Up the Cottonwoods

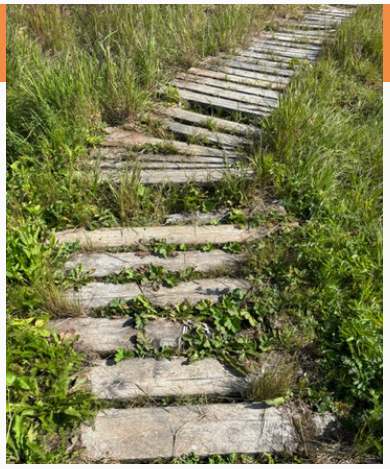
Within the Demonstration Forest Arboretum, cottonwoods were cut down as they had taken over the area, their stumps were ground down, and trees native to Southeast Alaska were planted. We are seeking arboretum accreditation, which requires 25 distinct woody species.

Children ages 5–10 with the Kachemak Bay Adventure Club planted cottonwood stakes along the creek creating habitat where the PALS had been placed. They also spread wood chips over wet, muddy sections of the trail.

Nature Trail Repairs

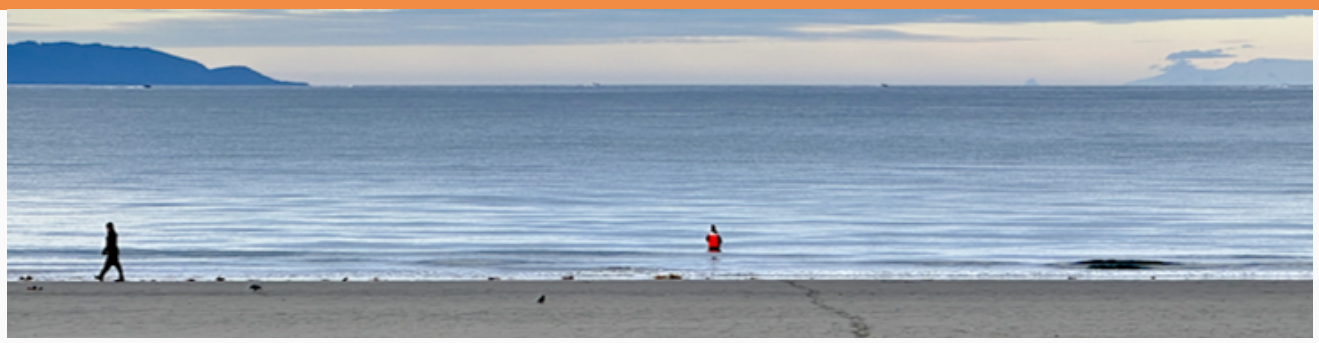
The Kachemak Nordic Ski Club has been working to replace broken boards on the Nature Trail boardwalk for safety.

A huge shout out to Mark Schraag and Dave Brann for all their hard work!
Photo credits: Dave Brann





Good News from the Beach Water Sampling Project



Waters sampled at Homer and Anchor Point beaches remained safe for human contact throughout 2026

This summer, some of you may have noticed folks in waders and bright orange life vests walking out to sea. What the heck was that about? Those intrepid folks were from Homer Soil and Water, and they headed out weekly from June to mid-September to sample nearshore marine waters for the state's Alaska Beach Program (https://dec.alaska.gov/water/water-quality/beach-program/). The summer of 2026 was the second and final season that nearshore waters were sampled at Mariner Park, Bishop's Beach, and Anchor Point beach. Sampling showed levels of two bacteria—fecal coliform and enterococci—and this information allowed the state to alert recreational users if waters were unsafe for human contact.

Last year's sampling—the first year of the 2-year project—is described in detail in a report called Waterbody Field Report Homer and Anchor Point Beaches: Mariner Park, Bishop's Beach, and Anchor Point Beach (February 2026), available online at https://dec.alaska.gov/media/i4sfnfql/2025-homer-beach-field-report.pdf. A final summary report will be available in February 2027. Briefly, once a week at each beach, Homer Soil and Water collected two 100 ml samples in sterile plastic bottles. Bottles were packed with ice into a plastic cooler, driven to Kenai airport, flown to Anchorage airport, and couriered to Alaska Water and Wastewater Utility (AWWU) for lab analysis—all within 6 hours of collecting the first sample. AWWU analyzed samples and sent results both to Homer Soil and Water and to the Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC), Division of Water, which then posted results on the Alaska Beach Program website. Homer area data and reports can be found on that website by clicking the Homer tab. Water temperature, pH, and turbidity were also collected at each sampling site.

We're happy to report that bacterial levels never exceeded Alaska state water quality standards, either in 2025 or 2026. Local communities are clearly helping protect the quality of their nearshore marine waters, which benefits all humans and fish and wildlife using these waters.

Sampling in the surf. Photo credit: Devony













Board of Supervisors

Chris Rainwater	Otto Kilcher	Jan Kieser	Charlie Trowbridge	Jim Engebretson
Board Chair	Vice Chair	Treasurer	Secretary	AACD Rep

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, which requires that districts have 5 board members who all own or manage land in the district. This requirement goes back to the Dust Bowl of the 1930s. The federal government created the Soil Conservation Service (now the Natural Resource Conservation Service or NRCS) to prevent soil erosion 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. Presently, we have a great deal of collective knowledge on our board with two life-long Alaskans and others with history working for the state. the City of Homer, corporations, non-profits and independently. We appreciate their time and dedication!

Are you interested in being on our Board?

1: You need to be a COOPERATOR (our fancy name for membership). To be a cooperator you need to own or manage land in the Homer District. You can fill out the form on our website: homerswcd.org/cooperator/

#2: Once you are a cooperator, you can download and print out the nomination form from our website: homerswcd.org/board/ or you can pick up a copy in our office at 432 E. Pioneer next door to Lazer Print.

#3: 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.

#4: Next you will need to scan and email the nomination form to the address on the form. Let us know if you need help with this.

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!

