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A letter from our chairman

Happy Spring! I am looking forward to warmer weather and the opportunity to prepare for the busy summer season of farming, fishing, and enjoying Interior Alaska's natural resources and recreation. Fairbanks Soil and Water Conservation District (FSWCD) is preparing for a season of new and ongoing projects to promote private land development, provide natural resource education, land owner technical assistance, and getting some great conservation projects "on the ground" this year. This spring newsletter contains: 2013 project highlights, upcoming programs and opportunities for 2014, informational soils and property development articles, and much more. FSWCD looks forward to serving you this year. Please contact us with your land use needs. Thank you for supporting your local conservation district and

helping to promote the wise development and conservation of natural resources.



USFWS sponsored youth corps member planting a pollinator garden at JP Jones Center

2013 Project Summary

Thanks to our hardworking board, staff and great local, state and federal partners, FSWCD accomplished many great projects during 2013, including: expanding the FSWCD borders, adding 35 cooperators, hosting two high tunnel workshops, providing over forty soil/fertilizer recommendations, and offering technical assistance to numerous land owners. FSWCD combated the aquatic invasive Elodea and other noxious weeds. Projects were continued and new programs were started to improve the Chena River, its tributaries, and protect Chinook salmon. The district also worked with the US Fish & Wildlife Service schoolyard habitat and youth corps programs with seven schools in communities

including Nenana, Fairbanks, Healy, Cantwell, and Barrow. These programs resulted in actual restoration projects such as rain and pollinator gardens, tree plantings, trail work, and riparian area improvement. FSWCD assisted NRCS with the farm energy audit program and worked to promote rural energy assistance. A dialogue was started with Alaska Miners Association and local placer miners to help them continue their operations utilizing best management practices as they come under numerous and complicated types of government scrutiny and regulations. Our district was awarded management of the statewide Agriculture in the Classroom program to teach agricultural literacy. FSWCD was also excited to be part of the successful commitment to open the Nenana/Tochaket area to land use as well as the road between Manley and Tanana.



A Soil Testing Program customer's peony farm



The aquatic invasive Elodea growing in Chena Slough

Successful Projects from 2013...



Herbicide application in 2012



Cirsium arvense

Stevens Village Creeping Thistle Eradication

Cirsium arvense is an invasive plant that was found in 2011 growing on the airstrip pad in Stevens Village. This was the farthest north known population of creeping thistle in Alaska, and is considered a high priority invasive plant due to its ability to spread quickly and alter landscapes. It was likely introduced from equipment brought to the village for work on the airstrip, an issue that needs to be

addressed to prevent new infestations in rural areas. The same year that the thistle was found, the site was visited and all above-ground biomass was removed. The next year FSWCD returned and applied an herbicide to the infestation. In 2013 the site was re-visited and no new growth was observed. FSWCD has partnered with the Stevens Village Tribal Council, Yukon Flats National Wildlife Refuge,

and the State of Alaska Division of Agriculture to complete this project. FSWCD will visit the site one final time this year to ensure that the population of this nefarious weed will not return! It is a rare occasion when a small invasive plant population is found at a remote location and we are able to act quickly enough to eradicate it!!!

Soil Sampling & Community Habitat

The FSWCD Soil Sampling Program continues to expand, providing services to farmers, gardeners, and lawn properties. The price per soil sample has been raised to \$35 to cover FSWCD costs.

The USFWS funded a project called “Community Habitat” in which FSWCD staff provided free soil sampling and information on sustainable lawn practices and riparian restoration to landowners along the Chena River and its sloughs. The outreach

was very successful and resulted in new partnerships as well as the beginning of several new stream-bank restoration projects on private property. This project will be continued this year. If you would like to sign up, contact FSWCD at (907) 479-1213 x107.



Nicole testing soil in our mini-laboratory at the FSWCD office

Berry Event at the Tanana Valley State Fair



Handing out berry and jam samples

FSWCD received a grant from the Alaska Division of Agriculture to help pay for a promotional event for local berry products and the growing of berry plants in interior Alaska. Over 200 people visited the event and most were very excited about the delicious samples and useful

information presented. Special thanks to Vic Johansen for providing delicious berry samples from his farm!!!!

For 2014, we want to feature local rhubarb! Send us your ideas and recipes!

fairbanksswcd@gmail.com



Successful Projects from 2013

Elodea Control Project

In an effort to control the invasive aquatic plant Elodea in Chena Slough and prevent its spread into connecting waterways, FSWCD and many private, state and federal partners launched the Elodea control Trial Project during the summer of 2013. Educational signage was installed at Ft. Wainwright recreational sites and Chena Lakes was surveyed for Elodea. Borough employees were instrumental in assisting with the construction of a pontoon boat with a 4 inch suction dredge system and sluice way box mounted on it to mechanically remove Elodea in Chena

Slough. The boat was moved to a section of the slough just off of Repp Road to begin experimental work. A team of SCUBA divers operated the suction dredge, while a crew in chest waders manually removed Elodea with spaded pitchforks. The control efforts were successful, although elodea removal proved to be very labor intensive and progress was slower than hoped. FSWCD is moving forward with plans on using the suction dredge system in Chena Slough again this summer. Volunteers are needed! Please contact FSWCD for more information.

A special thanks goes to community participants and to Senator Coghill for his continued support for the project.

Elodea Quarantine

The Alaska Division of Agriculture has established a quarantine at the boundaries of Alaska preventing the entry and spread of five aquatic invasive plants, including *Elodea canadensis* and *Elodea nuttallii*. The bill prohibits the import, transport, sale and purchase of Elodea in the State of Alaska.



Photos: (Above) The Elodea pontoon boat w/ suction dredge. (Below) A diver using the suction dredge to remove Elodea



Tree Planting



Students potting trees at Woodriver Elementary

The State of Alaska Community Forestry Program donated 300 birch seedlings to the district last spring. Most were planted on local school grounds, with some being potted for use in future projects. Hundreds of Fairbanks-area students were able to plant a seedling and learn more about trees.



Before planting trees the site was barren ground susceptible to erosion. USFWS funds paid for this restoration project.

After planting trees at Two Rivers Learning Landscape. Future plans include seeding grass to stabilize the soil.



Persinger Crossing Culvert Replacement



First water in the Persinger Road culvert

Persinger Road crossing was upgraded to improve fish passage for the Chena Slough. This project was completed with funding from the US Fish & Wildlife Service and State of Alaska Legislative funding. Additional partners included the Chena Slough Technical and Neighborhood

Committees. FSWCD has helped replace 8 culverts along the Chena Slough, with the long-term goal to replace 3 more. Culvert replacement is just one of the many ways in which FSWCD is working to restore the waterways in our district.



A fisherman on Chena Slough (Peede crossing)

Time to start planning your garden for the summer!



Improving Soil Health

Soil health is “the capacity of a specific kind of soil to function, within natural or managed ecosystem boundaries, to sustain plant and animal productivity, maintain or enhance water and air quality, and support human health and habitation” (Karlen *et al.* 1997).

A healthy soil holds more water, needs fewer inputs (like fertilizer), and grows bigger, healthier plants. Having

healthy soil will make your garden or farm easier to manage and will be beneficial to the surrounding environment.

There are many things you can do to improve the health of your soil. Following are some examples:

- Mulch and do not leave exposed soil
- Apply organic or natural amendments
- Use crop rotation and a

diversity of plant types

- Minimize tillage
- Use cover crops and/or legumes to enhance your soil
- Mix compost and/or other organic matter into your soil
- Use mycorrhizal additives and enhance the microbial life of your soil
- Test your soil! You can't know what your soil needs if you haven't tested it!

FSWCD will be hosting a Soil & High Tunnel Workshop on Saturday, April 19

Please RSVP by calling Jessica at 479-1213 x107 or email jlguritz@gmail.com

FSWCD Summer Programs & Free Services

Weed Cost Share-

Financial and technical assistance is available to cooperators to help manage invasive plants and agricultural weeds.

Technical Assistance-

FSWCD staff will visit your property to look at resource

concerns such as erosion, invasive plants, water management, crop health, and forestry issues. We are also available to answer questions via phone call or email relating to natural resource concerns.

Soil Maps-

FSWCD will create a soil map for your property using the

Web Soil Survey.

Weed Free Forage-

Forage and grain fields can be inspected for weed free forage certification by FSWCD.

Equipment Lending-

Weed sprayers and an aerator are available to borrow for FSWCD cooperators.



FSWCD aerator pulled behind a tractor

Considerations for selecting a site to farm or garden

Are you considering starting a farm or garden?

Below are some things to think about when picking a site:

- Water access— is there a water source nearby? What irrigation system will you use and does it work with your water source?
- Soil type and quality— you will want a well-drained
- Sun exposure and landscape position— Does the site get plenty of sunlight? Are you on a hill or at the bottom of a shaded (and potentially wet) valley?
- Productive soil type. If you don't know the soil type, check out Web Soil Survey on the internet or contact FSWCD for help

- Permafrost— Is there permafrost present? Cold soils are very difficult to work with for farming
- Proximity to markets for your products
- Access to inputs such as fertilizer, animal feed, and farm supplies



<http://www.flickr.com/photos/henkimaa/128261750/>

This site would be terrible for farming, but provides great wildlife habitat!

FSWCD and partner updates

Legislative Updates and Farm Bill

FSWCD encourages you to contact your legislators about **HB 207**, which could make many changes to the Agricultural Loan Fund and McKinley Meat.

Funding for the Alaska Association of Conservation Districts, which assists all soil and water conservation districts across the state, will be in the finance committee soon. Please contact your interior delegation and the Legislative Finance Committee co-chairs

Kevin Meyer and Bill Stoltz to provide your support!

2014 Farm Bill:

The 2014 Farm Bill has passed! Good programs to assist agriculture should be on the horizon. According to the Alaska Farm Service Agency (FSA), "Local and regional food systems will also receive a boost, with additional support for food hubs, farmers markets and on-farm business with a local or regional focus." Contact www.fsa.usda.gov/ak for updates. The National

Association of Conservation Districts (NACD) worked very hard to assure critical land use conservation remained a part of the farm bill including funding for EQIP and CTA. "Successful conservation requires a strong public-private partnership," said NACD president Garber. "Efforts begin at the local level, with technical assistance and funding from federal, state and local governments and the private sector. Info at: www.nacdnet.org



A grain farm in interior Alaska

Goodbye to Darcy and Tami, Welcome Aditi

FSWCD was sad to say goodbye to two of our wonderful staff members within the past year. Darcy Etcheverry, invasive species specialist, has now moved on to become an IPM technician at Cooperative Extension. Aditi Shenoy has been hired as the new invasive species specialist.

Tami Seekins has also moved on to new adventures, and Melissa

Sikes is taking on her projects as natural resources education specialist.

We thank both Darcy and Tami for all their hard work at FSWCD!!! Good luck in your future endeavors ladies!

Following is a list of our current staff members:

Marji Plessinger, Bookkeeper, 479-1213 x102

Joni Scharfenberg, District Coordinator, 479-1213 x103

Aditi Shenoy, Invasive Species Specialist, 479-1213 x104

Melissa Sikes, Education Specialist, 479-1213 x105

Jessica Guritz, Natural Resources Specialist, 479-1213 x107

Ryan Lane, Education Assistant

Kaley Sikes, Education Assistant

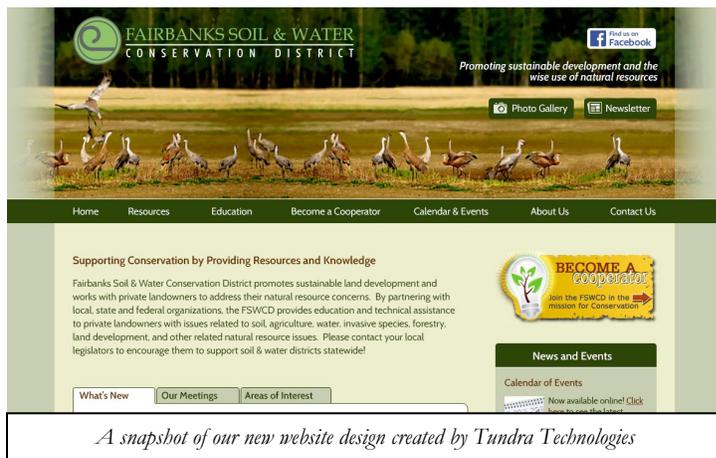
For information about seasonal jobs and volunteer opportunities, email fairbanksswcd@gmail.com

New Website Coming Soon!

We appreciate your patience as we bring our website into the 21st century! The outdated website software we were previously using became unusable and our website has not been able to be updated since summer 2013. However, we will have a new and improved website coming

soon! Tundra Technologies is helping us set up a new website that will be more user friendly and easy to update!

Check back at: <http://www.fairbankssoilwater.org> in a few weeks to see our new website!



A snapshot of our new website design created by Tundra Technologies

FSWCD spring updates

2014 FSWCD Tree Sale Order Form

| Common Name | Price | Qty. | Subtotal |
|--------------------------|-------|------|----------|
| American Cranberry | 4.50 | | |
| Amur Chokecherry | 4.50 | | |
| Amur Maple | 4.50 | | |
| Birch (around 5' tall) | 18.00 | | |
| Dwarf Russian Almond | 4.50 | | |
| Iris | 4.50 | | |
| Late Lilac | 4.50 | | |
| Prickly Rose | 4.50 | | |
| Ranetka Apple | 4.50 | | |
| Russet Buffaloberry | 4.50 | | |
| Saskatoon Serviceberry | 4.50 | | |
| Siberian Larch | 6.00 | | |
| Silverberry | 4.50 | | |
| White Rugosa Rose | 4.50 | | |
| White Spruce (2-4' tall) | 15.00 | | |
| White Spruce (4-7' tall) | 20.00 | | |

Order Total: _____

-10% Cooperator Discount Total: _____

Name _____

Address _____

Email _____

Phone _____

All sales are final. Make checks out to: FSWCD. Cash payments can only be accepted at the FSWCD office. We are unable to take credit/debit card payments. Order form and checks can be mailed to the FSWCD Office. Pre-orders must be received by **Friday, May 16th**.

*2014 FSWCD Tree & Shrub Sale
Saturday, May 24th from 10-2pm*



Pre-orders are due by May 16th
Mail your order form with a check to:
590 University Avenue, Suite 2
Fairbanks, Alaska 99709

Or stop by our office with cash or check to place your order. Sorry we do not accept credit or debit cards.

Pre-orders will be available to pick up on May 23rd from 3-6pm.

Other vendors will be present the day of the tree sale, Saturday May 24th. They will be selling a variety of trees, shrubs, and garden plants. Please bring cash for these plants and support your local farmers!

For more information, contact Jessica at 479-1213 x107 or jlguritz@gmail.com.

Attention Interior Alaska Farmers!

Sign up for the 2014-15 Alaska Gown Sourcebook by April 15th!
Go to www.dnr.alaska.gov/ag
Or call 907-761-3858

This is a free service provided by the State of Alaska Division of Agriculture that can benefit your farm by providing free advertising. The sourcebooks are distributed at

events throughout the state, including fairs, trade shows, conferences, and more! They are also available at natural resource office, such as FSWCD. Potential customers will be able to find your farm or business easily using this guide.



FSWCD Wish List

As an organization that is mostly funded by grants, FSWCD sometimes finds our office lacking in essential equipment that could allow us to be more effective as an organization. Below are some items that we would happily take as donations:

1. A truck— many of our projects require hauling soil, mulch, plants, and other bulky items. A truck

would make it so much easier to get things done!

2. Equipment needed for small vegetable farming cover crop demonstration project— including broadcast seeder, cultipacker, disc, drill, and roller-crimper (all for pulling behind an ATV)

3. Volunteers!

4. A high capacity copy machine

FSWCD spring updates

Composting Worms Sale

FSWCD is selling composting worms for \$40 per pound (each pound contains half a lb of worms and half a lb of bedding material).

We are taking pre-orders until May 16th, either by mail or in person at our office. Checks can be mailed to:

590 University Avenue, Suite 2, Fairbanks Alaska.

Worms will be available for pick up on the day of the tree sale, Saturday, May 24th. We will contact you if this changes for any reason.

Worms are easy to keep all year

round to compost kitchen scraps. All you need is a good tub or worm bin (kept at a temperature of 55-77 degrees), scraps to feed them with, and shredded paper to add to their bedding. 1 pound of worms will process approximately 3.5 lbs of waste per week.



freerorganics.com

Red Worms (*Eisenia fetida*) will turn your kitchen scraps into a valuable garden amendment!

Interior Alaska Hay Field Renovation Project

FSWCD will be starting a new demonstration project this year to address the problem of declining hay fields in our area. There are many older hay fields that have been decreasing in productivity and have compacted soils, but the producers do not want to completely renovate their fields because it is too expensive and results in 2-3 years of lost production (where no hay is harvested, meaning no income!)

The goals of this project are:

1. To renovate older, overly compacted hay fields without

losing a production season

2. To improve the soil health of hay fields in interior Alaska

We will be testing the effectiveness of three different treatments:

1. Using an overseeder to seed brome grass
2. Using the overseeder to seed radish seeds
3. Broadcasting radish seeds

Field radishes are commonly used to break up compacted soils. However, this practice is less common in Alaska.

We are partnering with six farmers to help us conduct this demonstration. We will have Field Days during summer 2014 and 2016 to demonstrate the equipment, field plots, and preliminary results.

This project is being funded through the Western SARE "Professional + Producer Award".

If you are interested in helping with this project, please contact Jessica at 479-1213 x107.



dailyharvestfarm.blogspot.com

Tillage (field) radishes



An older hay field in interior AK

Alaska Agriculture in the Classroom

Starting this year, FSWCD is managing the statewide Alaska Agriculture in the Classroom program.

There will be an **Educator Institute** taught by Melissa Sikes and Marilyn Krause from June 3-6 at UAF. The course is an introduction to the many resources available through the

Alaska Ag in the Classroom program, and interdisciplinary methods, including STEM, to teach principles of agriculture. A variety of curricula will be presented and field trips will provide hands-on opportunities.

The cost for the entire workshop is \$190 including

four 9 hour days of workshops and field trips. 1-2 UAF credits will be awarded for completion of the Educator Institute.

To sign up, register online with UAF summer sessions at:

<http://www.uaf.edu/summer/registration/>

or in person at 216 Eielson, at UAF.



For more information about our educational programs, contact Melissa at 479-1213 extension 105

Upcoming Events

April:

April 5 Fairbanks Farm Bureau Annual Meeting
April 15-17 Alaska Wood Energy Conference
April 19 Soils and High Tunnel Workshop (FSWCD)
April 21-22 Envirothon at Chena Hot Springs
April 22 Earth Day
April 25-27 Fairbanks Outdoor Show

May:

May 6 Alaska Agriculture Day
May 7 Chena River Watershed Summit
May 9 Visitor's Industry Walk for Charity

May 10 Opening Day of Tanana Valley Farmer's Market
May 13-15 Outdoor Days at UAF
May 23 Pre-order Pickup Day, FSWCD Tree Sale
May 24 FSWCD Tree Sale

June:

June 3-6 Ag in the Classroom Educator Institute
June 14 Chena River Walk, slough cleanups
June 21 Weed Smackdown

Sign up for the 2014 Visitor Industry Charity Walk! Enjoy delicious food while raising money for charities and having fun!

When you sign up, please consider selecting FSWCD to receive your charitable donation— funds will go toward natural resource education and local conservation efforts!



Register for the 2014 Weed Smackdown!

This year the Weed Smackdown will be held at the Dog Park off Davis Road. Prizes will be awarded to those who pull the most weeds, the biggest plant, the longest root, or have the best costumes!

<http://weedsmackdown.wordpress.com/>
Call 479-1213 x104 for more info



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The mission of FSWCD is to serve its cooperators, private landowners and all citizens of the district by promoting wise development and conservation of natural resources. FSWCD offers technical, educational and financial resources and works with a variety of partners to meet these goals:

- Prevention and eradication of noxious and invasive species
- Conservation of plant & soil resources
- A viable agricultural community

- Conservation/maintenance of water resources
- Conservation and development of forest resources
- Natural resources education
- Promotion of affordable energy