

Fairbanks Soil and Water Conservation District

NEWSLETTER

Fall 2025



FROM THE DISTRICT COORDINATOR

Summer seemed to flash by this year. I hope you all were able to enjoy Alaska's beautiful natural resources throughout the summer. Fairbanks Soil and Water Conservation District's (FSWCD) mission is to promote wise development of natural resources. FSWCD had a very busy summer field season as usual including invasive plant work, community gardens, farmer training, soil sampling and agricultural technical assistance. Our natural resource education classes emphasized hydroponics.



District Coordinator, Joni Scharfenberg enjoying time with her grandchildren in Oregon.

The new program for the year and continuing into next year is establishing a native plant nursery. There is a significant demand for local native trees, sedges, grasses and berries. Riparian restoration continued this summer, particularly with great projects by our Youth Habitat Corps. Thanks to our annual tree sale, over 7,000 trees were purchased to be planted throughout the district. FSWCD is one of over 3,000 conservation districts nationwide, encompassing much more than the city. It's borders include the Fairbanks North Star Borough and portions of the Tanana, Nenana and Yukon River watershed, totaling over 30 million acres.

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Education and Outreach Program

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FROM THE DISTRICT COORDINATOR (CONTINUED)

FSWCD staff works diligently to meet the needs of all who need assistance throughout the district. This year's emphasis was reaching out and offering services to outlying communities such as Healy, Nenana, Anderson, Cantwell and Denali. Please call us with your concerns and questions wherever you may live in the district. This fall newsletter has great stories about all the summer's projects - enjoy and learn about all the services we provide.



FSWCD collaborating with USFWS officials in Nenana on a riparian project.

YOUTH FOR HABITAT

YOUNG STEWARDS OF THE CHENA: FAIRBANKS YOUTH FOR HABITAT FOSTERS NEXT GENERATION OF ENVIRONMENTAL LEADERS

This summer, over an eight-week period, the quiet banks of the Chena River and local waterways were abuzz with the activity of a dedicated youth workforce: the Fairbanks Youth for Habitat program. Now in its 12th year, the program concluded another successful season, immersing 24 student participants in hands-on conservation and ecological science, culminating in tangible projects and a deeper understanding of their local environment.

Under the leadership of Program Manager Scott Faulkner and Field Supervisor Ariana Kendall, with support from program assistants Allysa Sullenberger and Jessica Horwitz, the program was divided into Beginner and Advanced tracks, allowing participants to build skills progressively. The United States Fish and Wildlife Partnership funded the program.

Visit www.fairbankssoilwater.org for more information

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YOUTH FOR HABITAT (CONTINUED)

For many beginners, the journey began with the fundamentals—learning to set fish traps, identifying local macroinvertebrates, and conducting vital water quality tests. The curriculum extended far beyond the water's edge, including a Chena River float trip, visits to the fish hatchery and UAF's Large Animal Research Station, and practical lessons in composting, forestry, and maintaining the rain garden at North Pole City Hall.

The Advanced Corps undertook a significant capstone project: the construction of a handicap-accessible deck for streambank protection on the Beaver Slough at the Holiday Heights Senior Apartments in North Pole. After a project management workshop and meetings with the landowner, the team developed a full project plan, budget, and timeline before executing the build.



Youth for Habitat participants are standing on the Beaver Slough streambank protection project at Holiday Heights Apartments in North Pole.



Residents can use the handicap-accessible deck to enjoy the local plants and wildlife.

The program concluded with data entry, final reporting, and reflective exercises. By combining scientific fieldwork with civic engagement and practical skills, the Fairbanks Youth for Habitat has contributed valuable labor to local conservation while planting the seeds for a future generation of informed and passionate environmental stewards for Interior Alaska.

Visit our website for updates on Youth for Habitat 2026

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Noel Wien Children's Veggie Garden

With funding from the Rasmuson Foundation, this summer we were able to install and maintain a brand new veggie garden at the Noel Wien Library. The new garden was an idea that was thought up many years ago during the first Kid's Literary Farmer's Market event that had its 5th year this summer. Former Noel Wien Library Director Melissa Harter and Mel Sikes dreamed of a veggie garden that families using the library would be involved in that would provide not only veggies for the event, but a learning opportunity for summer long garden education programs. With the help of many community volunteers and library staff, the garden was installed in early July and harvesting took place on September 12th. Many families took home produce that they watched grow out the Children's and Teen Rooms windows all summer. A final event of a reading time "Stone Soup" activity took place on September 25th complete with soup made with veggies from the garden. Next summer, the library is planning more activities including more involvement from library patrons on the types of veggies in the garden and activities involving the garden all summer long.



Natural Resource and Education Coordinator Mel Sikes harvesting kohlrabi.



Volunteers harvest vegetables at the Noel Wien Children's Veggie Garden.



New garden beds at Noel Wien Children's Veggie Garden.

Visit www.fairbankssoilwater.org for more information

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AFFECT UPDATES

During the summer of 2025, with funding from Alaska Food Policy Council and Golden Valley Electric Association, FSWCD was able to offer a fourth year of the AFFECT (Alternative Fairbanks Farm Education & Cooperative Training) Farmer Training Program. Starting on May 26th and ending on August 25th, every Monday night, local farmers provided farm exploration experiences for 15 students. Students were able not only to visit local farms but learn from seasoned farmers who shared their knowledge and innovative solutions to farming techniques that work in our climate. Students also assisted with tasks to help these farmers during their time there including planting, weeding, and harvesting. Farms we worked with this summer included Goosefoot Farm, Offbeet Farm, Alaska Fruits Orchard, Growing Roots Farm, Frontieress Farm, Risse Greenhouse, Vic Johanson's Orchard, Heartspace Community Farm, and Spinach Creek Farm. Students also learned about lasagna gardening and other sustainable gardening practices including companion planting at the Corinthian Baptist Church garden. During the summer of 2025, over 350lbs of produce came out of the Corinthians Garden and was donated to Breadline Inc., Fairbanks Community Food Bank, and deserving families throughout Fairbanks. Some of the AFFECT students assisted with watering and harvesting at the Corinthian Garden.



AFFECT students planting trees at Alaska Fruits Orchard



Brad St. Pierre of Goosefoot Farm giving a demonstration on how to harvest saskatoon berries

Visit www.fairbankssoilwater.org for more information

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AFFECT UPDATES (CONTINUED)

The Farmer Training Program was coordinated by Abby Lutmer, a farmer herself who has an emerging farm, Heartspace Community Farm, up on Haystack Mountain just north of Fairbanks. Her leadership and enthusiasm provided the students with insight from a new farmer who has written farm development grants and is in the process of expanding their production and developing and enhancing the soil in a new area that has never been farmed before.

We started the program with 15 students. On September 1st, we graduated 13 of those students, with an additional 2 people joining in on classes occasionally. We are working on funding to continue the AFFECT program including the farmer training component and continue pursuing grants to realize the dream of an incubator farm to provide opportunities for AFFECT students who need a space to farm but aren't in a position to purchase or lease farmland yet. If you have any questions about the AFFECT program please contact Mel Sikes at mel.fswcd@gmail.com.



AFFECT Coordinator Abby Lutmer offers a demonstration to students.

CORINTHIAN'S BAPTIST CHURCH COMMUNITY GARDEN



The community garden at Corinthian Baptist Church.

In 2015, we helped start the community garden at the Corinthian Baptist Church at the end of 23rd Avenue in South Fairbanks with the assistance of a National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD) Urban Agriculture Grant. The original garden made with left over garage doors was planted for many years and maintained with a new NACD grant in 2022. In the Summer of 2023 with funding from a Alaska Division of Agriculture Food Security Microgrant, we replaced the old beds with brand new 32 foot long beds. This summer, with the assistance of funding provided by Access Alaska, we grew a wonderful garden that produced over 350lbs of produce that was donated to Breadline Inc. and the Fairbanks Community Food Bank. We have been told by many that seeing the garden grow and thrive was a joy on their daily commute.

Soils and Agriculture Program

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HIGH TUNNEL BEST MANAGEMENT PRACTICES PROJECT CONTINUES INTO 2026

FSWCD is continuing a project studying best management practices for high tunnels in interior Alaska. The inspiration for this project came through high tunnel users dropping their soil samples off with us and asking how other high tunnels fared over the growing season. High tunnel owners would remark upon their challenges and successes while we came to realize there was a community need to share and compile information.

For many high tunnel owners, it was their first time growing in a high tunnel and they were surprised at the lack of resources for the whole process. New users needed advice on site selection, site preparation, installing the structure, growing plants including varieties, controlled environment management, soil health, pest management, winter care, and economics. Repeatedly, we heard some of the same questions including most prominently, "Well, what are other high tunnel people doing?" FSWCD thought they could help.



This project is funded through USDA-NRCS and its products will not only be a public resource but will also help to refine the conservation practice, High Tunnel Systems.

In 2023, we started a project to understand what it means to have a high tunnel in interior Alaska through interviews and site evaluations. This project is continuing into 2026. We are interviewing high tunnel users to learn about their experiences and to find out the tips and techniques that worked for them. We are as interested in what did not work as what did! We'll be conducting site visits to collect photographs and all the data will be put into a high tunnel handbook. Our hope is that a handbook will provide useful information for beginners as well as be a resource to save time and money for seasoned users; ultimately increasing the production yields and lifespan of high tunnels for all.

If you have grown in a high tunnel, we would love to talk with you and potentially photograph your high tunnel. There is a \$50.00 stipend to participate and we will be conducting interviews over the winter with site visits in 2026. Please contact Aleya Brinkman at aleya.fswcd@gmail.com to learn more or schedule an interview.

Are you interested in getting a high tunnel? USDA-NRCS has cost-share programs that could help. Contact Emily Donaldson at Emily.Donaldson@usda.gov to find out more information.

Soils and Agriculture Program

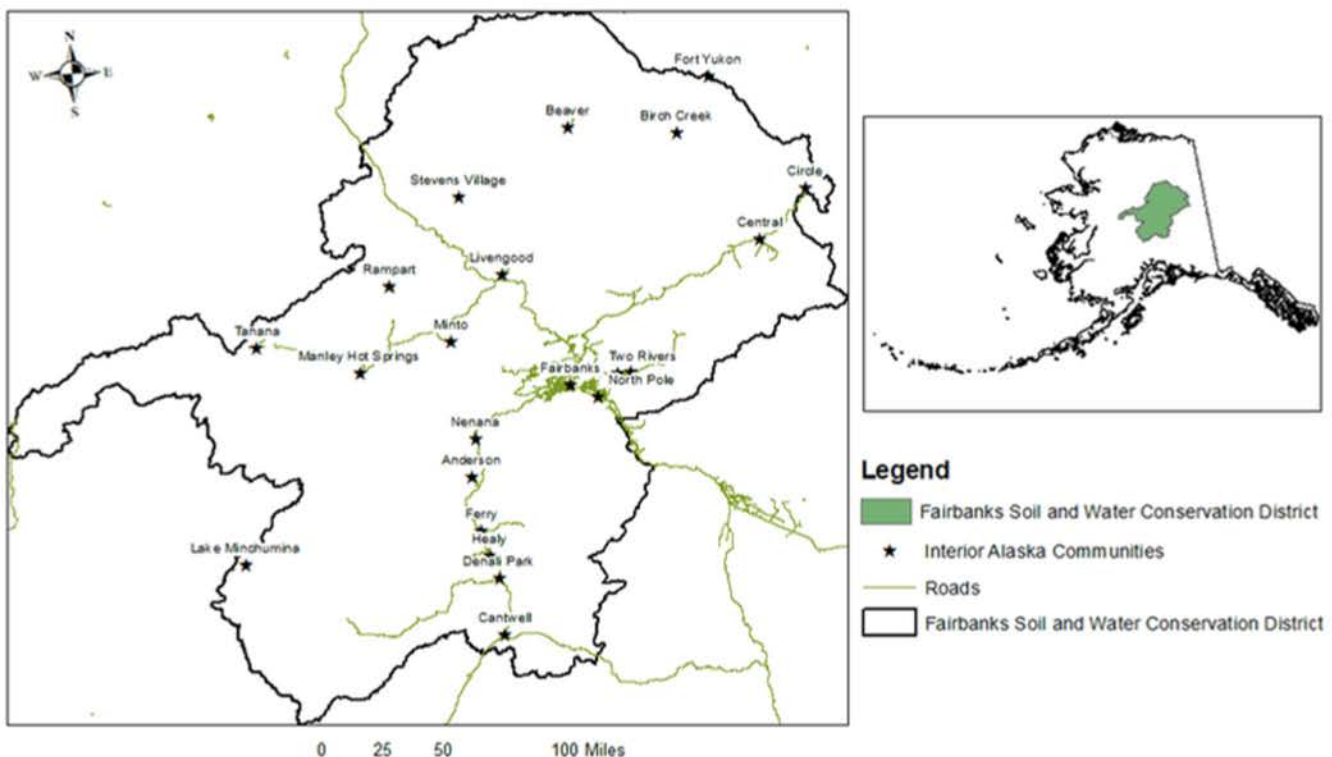
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Providing Conservation Assistance to Remote Communities in our Conservation District

FSWCD is the largest active conservation district in Alaska and the United States! At over 30 million acres, FSWCD stretches from east-west Circle to Ruby and north-south Fort Yukon to Cantwell (Figure 1). There are twenty-three communities in our district that are both on and off the road system. Manley Hot Springs, Minto, Livengood, Circle, Central, Fairbanks, Two Rivers, North Pole, Nenana, Anderson, Clear, Ferry, Healy, Denali Park, and Cantwell can be reached by road. You have to fly or boat into Fort Yukon, Beaver, Birch Creek, Stevens Village, Rampart, Tanana, Ruby, and Lake Minchumina. Conservation districts help private land owners in their district communities to meet the needs for conservation of soil and water and related resources.

Though we are the *Fairbanks* Soil and Water Conservation District, we comprise a large portion of interior Alaska. FSWCD strives to engage with our remote communities to address their natural resource concerns. Our habitat conservation crew has long been helping to identify and scout for harmful invasive species such as elodea, the water weed that chokes up salmon streams. This crew has also been working to monitor healthy fish passage in waterways across our district. Our agriculture education team has been providing education to develop hydroponics systems in the home and at schools to address food security. We are hoping to do more in our outlying communities in the future.

Location of Communities Respective to Roads and Food Centers (Fairbanks) in Fairbanks Soil and Water Conservation District



For more information on soils and agriculture visit www.fairbankssoilwater.org

Soils and Agriculture Program

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Providing Conservation Assistance to Remote Communities in our Conservation District (continued)

To accomplish this, we recently received several grants to assist with soil nutrient sampling and soil health outreach outside of the larger Fairbanks and North Pole city areas. Soil nutrient sampling can be used to increase gardening and farming yields, reduce the amount of money spent on amendments, and decrease harm to the environment by avoiding overapplication of fertilizer. It is something that everyone can do and use to grow more food.

We are also developing a local working group to help document conservation priorities and concerns in rural areas. This information is useful to us so we can pursue projects that matter to district communities. It can also help other agencies allocate funding where it is needed.



We will be hosting an in-person local working group this winter in Fairbanks where we get together and talk about community needs and we will also be launching an online survey so that outlying communities can document their resource concerns if they can't attend the meeting.

To bring soil nutrient sampling to remote communities, we are partnering with USDA-NRCS, AK Division of Agriculture, and the National Association of Conservation Districts. With these grants we hope to raise awareness about programs that can help rural communities and for folks to ultimately grow more food!

If you are from a community outside of Fairbanks and North Pole, you may be eligible for a free soil sample. Please contact us at soils.fswcd@gmail.com to find out more information.

Free Soil Sampling For Remote Communities in Our District!

Fall is a great time to get your soil sample in for nutrient testing! See if your soil health practices like composting, biochar, and cover crops are boosting organic matter.

- Did you add too much wood ash this spring?
- What was up with the hollow stems in your broccoli?
- Did you spend a lot of money on amendments but didn't really see increases in yields?

Learn about how your gardening style affects nutrient levels and might be contributing to common problems seen in your plants!



The cost is \$40.00 per sample and it takes around 6 weeks to receive the lab results and soil report. However, if you are from a community outside of Fairbanks and North Pole within our district, you may be eligible for a free soil sample.

EMAIL US TO FIND OUT MORE ABOUT YOUR SOIL TYPE AND SOIL TESTING!
SOILS.FSWCD@GMAIL.COM

Habitat Restoration and Conservation Program

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NATIVE PLANT PROJECT

FSWCD's Native Plant Project began this spring and will remain a long-term part of our mission. The project includes wild seed collection, native plant propagation, collaboration with growers, and public outreach. The Bureau of Land Management's Seeds of Success (SOS) program collects and preserves wild seeds from native plants across the U.S. These seeds are stored for future restoration projects such as replanting after wildfires, supporting pollinators, reducing streambank erosion, and protecting wildlife habitat. This program ensures that local, climate-adapted plants are available when projects arise. This spring FSWCD became a certified collector for SOS. Staff spent much of the summer in the field surveying plant populations and collecting seeds. Collection sites ranged from Healy, to Paxson Lake, and as far north as the Arctic Circle, with most efforts focused in the Fairbanks area. In total, staff collected seeds from 18 species, gathering more than 3,000 seeds per species for storage in an SOS seed bank until they're needed. Collections included grasses, shrubs, sedges, rushes, trees, and more. In addition to supplying seeds to the SOS seed bank, FSWCD is establishing its own native plant nursery.



Rooted willow cuttings ready for planting at the Stroecker Farm site.



Liz Kempton and Ann Rippey building garden boxes for the Native Plant Project.



Liz Whitney repotting rooted willow cuttings.

For more information on our habitat programs visit www.fairbankssoilwater.org

Habitat Restoration and Conservation Program

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NATIVE PLANT PROJECT (CONTINUED)

This spring, project manager Hazel Berrios and her team began planning and preparing the site, located on Farmers Loop Road. The Bill Stroecker Foundation has kindly allowed us to use the land at no cost for this project. Staff coordinated tillage, installed a water tank, built garden beds, set up a high tunnel, and established a wild berry patch. Future plans include creating pools for plants that thrive in wet environments, planting additional species, and developing trails and interpretive signage to make the nursery accessible to the public. The nursery will exclusively grow Interior Alaska native plants, propagated from locally collected seeds and cuttings, for use in restoration projects. FSWCD will also use the nursery to develop best management practices for growing native plants in Interior Alaska. The goal is to encourage local producers to incorporate native species into their operations while making the process as efficient and accessible as possible. With many restoration projects underway across the state, demand for locally adapted native plants is high. As the project grows, FSWCD plans to expand collaboration with growers to increase native plant availability and support local agriculture.



Some of the 10,000 white spruce seedlings ready for planting at FSWCD's Seed Sowing Party.



FSWCD with our partners doing outreach at UAF's Music in the Garden.

OUTREACH

Community engagement is also central to the Native Plant Project. Education and outreach are core to FSWCD's mission, and this project amplifies those efforts. This summer, staff led a guided native plant walk at Creamer's Field, where more than 30 community members joined project manager Hazel Berrios and Liz Whitney to learn about local flora. Later in the season, they hosted another walk during Skiland's annual Blueberry Fest. FSWCD also welcomed the community at a "Seed Sowing Party," where youth and adult volunteers planted over 10,000 white spruce seeds for future restoration projects. The event included snacks, trivia games, and a native plant scavenger hunt. Looking ahead, FSWCD plans to open the nursery to the public and host workshops and events to share the value of native plants and their role in a healthy ecosystem. Keep an eye on our website to stay up to date on all things native plants.

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UPDATES FROM AQUATIC INVASIVES

The FSWCD habitat crew had a full summer looking for elodea across the interior. The 2025 season was jam packed with elodea surveys and herbicide treatments to eradicate elodea. Our technicians successfully completed over 60 aquatic vegetation surveys in water bodies around the interior. These included both road accessible and remote sites that were deemed to be high priority. No new elodea infestations were found this year. There are currently 12 known infested waterbodies in the interior. These include Harding Lake, Piledriver Slough, Chena (Badger) Slough, Manley Hot Springs Slough, and 8 lakes on Eielson Airforce Base. FSWCD conducted herbicide applications on Harding Lake, Piledriver Slough, and Chena Slough. Each of these sites saw favorable application conditions throughout the season. The Harding Lake herbicide application was particularly notable. It took two days and employees from FSWCD, ADF&G, USFWS, and DNR to complete. FSWCD could not have completed this task without the help of its partners.



Elodea Hosedown outreach event at Tanana Lakes

FSWCD hosted the Elodea Hosedown outreach event at Tanana Lakes Recreation Area in June. A lot of people turned out to learn about elodea issues in Alaska, the watercraft decontamination station at the ALCAN border crossing, as well as the importance of "Clean, Drain, and Dry" practices for preventing the spread of aquatic invasive species. Elodea presence in the interior continues its steady decline due to the control and monitoring efforts of FSWCD and its partners. Even with that progress it can still spread to new waterbodies and pose a threat to habitat for fish and other wildlife. We encourage everyone who recreates on our interior waterways to practice the Clean, Drain, and Dry principles before entering and after leaving every waterbody you visit. Clean all boats and equipment, Drain any residual water from boats and holds, and Dry all equipment before storing. Elodea and other aquatic invasive species have the ability to survive for a long period of time in little to no water. Please visit our website for more information on elodea and other invasive species in interior Alaska at <https://fswcd-weeds.squarespace.com/>.

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UPDATES FROM THE NA-CISMA

The Northern Alaska Cooperative Invasive Species Management Area (NA-CISMA) had a successful summer with outreach events. We hosted two Chokecherry Chopdown outreach events and organized the Fairbanks Chokecherry Challenge. The Chokecherry Chopdown was aimed at informing the public about invasive chokecherry trees and what you could do to remove chokecherries on your property. We went over how to ID invasive chokecherries and discussed the different types of herbicides and methods you can use to safely treat and remove the trees. With the Fairbanks Chokecherry Challenge, which is currently ongoing, the objective is to document as many invasive chokecherry trees as possible in interior Alaska. In particular, we are interested in documenting the spread of chokecherry from areas where it has been planted as an ornamental to trails, riverbanks, and wooded areas. However, contributions from urban areas are also encouraged. If you would like to participate in the Fairbanks Chokecherry Challenge please scan the QR code below to visit the site page and get detailed instructions on how to join.

Interested in joining the NA-CISMA? Please e-mail Autumn Fish (northernakcisma@gmail.com). If you are interested in learning more about upcoming events, updates on invasive species in Northern Alaska, and job opportunities, be sure to check out our website or send us an e-mail.



Autumn Fish detailing how to ID chokecherry trees and how to partake in the Fairbanks Chokecherry Challenge.



People gathered to watch a demonstration on how to treat chokecherry trees.



We are on [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#)! Either click on the highlighted links above, or just search Northern Alaska Cooperative Invasive Species Management Area and you should be able to find us. We post all our upcoming events, fun facts about invasive species in Alaska, and other important information related to both invasive and Alaska native species. Be sure to check us out and give us a follow!

For more information on our habitat programs visit www.fairbankssoilwater.org

From Our Partners

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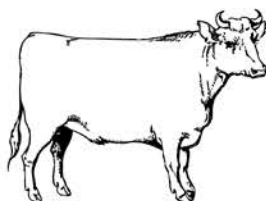


USDA OFFICE RELOCATION

Effective July 28, 2025, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) will no longer occupy office space at the USDA Fairbanks Service Center, located at 590 University Ave, Suite B. USDA agencies impacted by the office relocation are the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and Rural Development (RD).

FSWCD is still located in the basement of the building and will continue to occupy office space there and serve customers in person. USDA staff are still available to assist customers by phone, email, or in-person by appointment until USDA moves into new office space. Staff will be working remotely and will continue providing customer service until new office space can be acquired.

To schedule an appointment with the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), contact Emily Donaldson, natural resources specialist, at 907-251-9227 or email Emily.donaldson@usda.gov. The exact location of in-person appointments will be provided at time of scheduling and will occur in the Fairbanks area. To schedule an appointment with the USDA Rural Development, call 907-251-5835. The USDA Farm Service Agency continues to provide service to customers in the region through its office in Delta Junction, located at 1420.5 Alaska Hwy, Delta Junction, AK 99737. The mailing address for FSA remains PO Box 585, Delta Junction, AK 99737. FSA may be contacted by phone at 907-895-4242 ext.2 to reach Debbie White, FSA County Executive Director.



Registration is now open for the Alaska Ag Conference hosted by the Alaska Farm Bureau and Homer Soil and Water Conservation District. Topics include grasses and nutrition, grazing leases, stacking enterprises, meat processing, urban agriculture programs, weed control and invasive species. For more information or to register visit: <https://homerswcd.org/ak-grazing-lands/>.

SAVE THE DATE NOVEMBER 13, 14, 15, 2025 DOWNTOWN ANCHORAGE SHERATON GRAZING LANDS SYMPOSIUM

BRANDON SMALL
NORTHERN
CHEYENNE BUFFALO
RANCH, MT

COLE BUSH
SHEPHERDESS
LAND AND
LIVESTOCK CO, CA



KENDALL BALLENTINE
CENTRAL PARK
FARMS, BC

JERRY DOAN
BLACK LEG RANCH
NORTH DAKOTA

**AT THE
2025 ALASKA
AGRICULTURE CONFERENCE**
STAY TUNED FOR OUR LINEUP OF ALASKAN PRESENTERS

For more information visit www.fairbankssoilwater.org

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Regarding NRCS West Regional Tribal Conservation Advisory Council

In 2013, three Regional Tribal Conservation Advisory Councils (RTCAC) were formed for the Eastern, Central, and Western regions to improve Indian country's access to federal conservation and land stewardship programs through the NRCS. Each 15-member RTCAC is made up of 10 tribal representatives, one NRCS regional conservationist, three state conservationists (STCs), and one NRCS American Indian Alaska Native Employee Association (AIANEA) representative.

These Councils can be instrumental in assisting the Chief, Regional Conservationists, and State Conservationists in strengthening government-to-government relations and clarifying the lines of communication and consultation with Indian Tribes. These Councils will provide an effective means to consult with Indian Tribes regarding national or regional-level program policy and regulations and provide a direct line of communication with Tribes at both the national and regional levels. These councils will also provide a venue for agency leaders to gather input on Tribal issues (continued on page 8).

The RTCACs have provided council on a broad spectrum of topics relating to NRCS assistance to tribes including:

- The NRCS Tribal Relations Strategy.
- Tools for NRCS staff to engage with tribes like technical notes and fact sheets on Tribal Ecological Knowledge In Conservation planning and Tribal Alternative Funding Arrangements.
- Standardized position descriptions for Tribal Liaisons and Tribal Planners.
- Training needs of NRCS staff working with Tribes.

HOW TO APPLY: Federal members will volunteer or be nominated and appointed by the NRCS Chief. The Tribal members will be an elected official of the tribe or be nominated by their Tribal council or other elected official. The Tribes will determine the method of volunteering, appointment and selection. For additional information, please reach out to Elizabeth Bezinque, District Conservationist for Fairbanks and Delta Junction Field offices at Elizabeth.Bezinque@usda.gov or 907-895-4241 ext 3.

NEW FAIRBANKS NRCS STAFF



Blaine Spellman

blaine.spellman@usda.gov

Blaine has been working as an ecologist for 20 years in Alaska. Over that time, he's had various stints with the Homer SWCD, AACD, and NRCS. He's happily married and has two children (and two dogs). Blaine's hobbies include outdoor recreation, traveling, gardening, and food. He also looks forward to working with and learning from staff and cooperators associated with the Fairbanks SWCD.

For more information on NRCS programs visit: <https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/>

Call For Board Member Nominations

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Call For Board Member Nominations and Notice of Elections

Are you passionate about promoting sustainable resource development and the wise use of natural resources?
Please consider serving on our Board of Supervisors!

CONSERVATION DISTRICT OFFICIALS JOB DESCRIPTION:

Conservation District officials serve on a multi-member board that establishes and implements programs to conserve soil, water and locally important farmland, rangeland, woodland, wildlife, energy and other resources on privately owned and leased land in our district's boundaries.

DUTIES:

Identify local natural resource needs and develop, implement, and evaluate programs to address them.
Educate and inform landowners and operators, general public, and local, state, and federal officials on conservation issues and programs.

Supervise district volunteers and paid staff; coordinate with cooperating agency personnel.

Budget district funds and report on activities to the public.

Direct the conservation district's operations.

Coordinate assistance and funding from district associations, private groups, federal, state, and local government.

QUALIFICATIONS:

Interest and background in developing natural resources responsibly.

Private Landowner or Lessee, signed up as a FSWCD cooperator.

Communication skills.

BENEFITS:

Satisfaction in seeing conservation practices applied

Interaction with others interested in natural resources

Input into local, state and federal conservation programs

Training through the state conservation agency

TIME REQUIRED:

Serve a three-year term beginning January 2026

Attend up to 10 regularly scheduled board meetings per year, occasional special committee meetings and events as needed.

If this sounds like a position you are interested in, or you have questions please contact Joni Scharfenberg at fairbanksswcd@gmail.com or (907) 479-1213 for a nomination form. Let us if you have any questions!

For more information about our board visit www.fairbankssoilwater.org

Our Staff

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Joni Scharfenberg - District Coordinator
jonisc@gmail.com

Joni was born in Fairbanks, owned an 80 acre farm in Two Rivers, and sold vegetables at the Tanana Valley Farmers Market for over 25 years. She has worked for the FSWCD for 24 years and has been the District's coordinator for over 16 years.



Melissa Sikes - Natural Resource Education and Outreach
mel.fswcd@gmail.com

Mel Sikes is the Natural Resource Education Specialist. She has a Bachelor of Science degree from Unity College which she received in 1990. Her duties at FSWCD include being Project Director for the AFFECT USDA grant, state program leader for the Alaska Agriculture in the Classroom program, instructing educator workshops, managing grants, outreach community events, and sitting on the Georgeson Botanical Garden Friends board. She and her husband Derek have 3 grown daughters who live in Fairbanks. She quilts, sings, and enjoys walks with her dog Zoe in her free time.



Aditi Shenoy - Habitat Restoration and Conservation
aditi.shenoy@gmail.com

Aditi runs our Habitat Restoration and Conservation Program. She leads the Interior Alaska Elodea Taskforce, and has been working on eradicating the invasive aquatic plant elodea from interior Alaska. She also manages terrestrial invasive plant survey and control projects in Fairbanks, and surrounding communities in interior Alaska.



Colin McKenzie - Habitat Restoration and Conservation
wcmckenzie907@gmail.com

Colin has been working on our Habitat crew since 2019 and has settled into the role of coordinating and leading our surveys, herbicide applications, and invasive species related outreach. You'll most likely spot him on some sort of watercraft investigating the local aquatic vegetation.



Aleya Brinkman - Soils and Agriculture
aleya.fswcd@gmail.com

Aleya runs our soil sampling program and will tell you what you need to add to your garden or farm soil to grow great plants. She provides technical assistance to producers and conducts research on cover crops, pollinators, and high tunnel agriculture. Aleya has been in Fairbanks for 18 years and is a huge supporter and consumer of locally grown food.



Hazel Berrios - Habitat Restoration and Conservation
hazel.fswcd@gmail.com

Hazel has been actively managing projects that advance sustainable land management and ecological restoration across Interior Alaska. She has led and coordinated terrestrial invasive species surveys, targeting highly invasive species like chokecherry. Currently, she is focused on proactive conservation initiatives, including the development of the FSWCD native plant nursery, which will provide essential restoration and reforestation support throughout Interior Alaska. .

Our Staff



Liz Kempton - Development Coordinator

liz.fswcd@gmail.com

Liz was the Project Manager of a Composting and Food Waste Reduction USDA grant up until October of 2025 but has recently moved on. She also assisted the Native Plant Project and coordinated the backyard composting program, community compost bins, and local compost sales at the annual FSWCD tree sale. Liz will be greatly missed! In the meantime, you can send all compost inquiries to our general email: fairbanksswcd@gmail.com.



Scott Faulkner - Natural Resource Education and Outreach

scott.fswcd@gmail.com

Scott works with the Education and Outreach department specializing in natural resource and agricultural education. He leads the annual Youth For Habitat program and Riparian projects.



Autumn Fish - NA-CISMA Coordinator

aafish11@gmail.com

Autumn joined the Habitat team last summer in 2023, as a seasonal technician. However, she now maintains the position as the NA-CISMA (Northern AK Cooperative Invasive Species Management Area) Coordinator. She also assists the Habitat crew where needed in their surveys, herbicide applications, and outreach events. She has a passion for learning and adventuring the outdoors!



Felicia Gunn - Financial Manager

felicia.fswcd@gmail.com

Felicia has lived in Alaska for 18 years and has four awesome kids whom she loves to enjoy adventures with. She joined FSWCD in 2024 and is grateful to work with such an amazing team! At work, she handles anything to do with numbers and making sure the finances stay in order. When the digits are taking a break; you will most likely find her gardening, foraging, fishing, hiking, or anything that involves nature.



Lindsay Monty- Administrative Specialist

lindsaym.fswcd@gmail.com

Lindsay joined FSWCD in autumn of 2024 and supports the office by assisting with all things admin related. Universally at home in nature, she enjoys hiking, foraging, camping and dog-walking. She's excited to learn more about our programs and support the growth and mission of Fairbanks Soil and Water Conservation District.