



FROM THE DISTRICT COORDINATOR

While I was lucky enough to escape some of the unusually long, cold and snowy winter, I, like all of you, join Fairbanks Soil and Water Conservation (FSWCD) staff looking forward to Spring! Spring brings our annual tree sale and DNR will have another Nenana Tochaket land sale as well. Be sure to preorder your trees and to check in with DNR soon! FSWCD has been busy this winter preparing for spring with outreach and education, getting ready for summer projects, searching for monetary resources and acquiring the background and knowledge needed to provide natural resource assistance to private landowners. This included many resource conferences, trainings and meetings.



District Coordinator Joni Scharfenberg enjoying ziplining with her granddaughter in Hawaii.

FSWCD representatives attended the annual State Farm Bureau conference, Alaska mining conference, State invasive species meeting, nonprofit and leadership training, The Alaska Association of Conservation District annual meeting and many others. We also sponsored the FSWCD biannual natural resource showcase for the interior and congressional delegations and other Fairbanks area officials. This event featured talks by residents and FSWCD staff to educate local decision makers about the variety of natural resource projects that are taking place in our district.

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FSWCD Staff

Education and Outreach Program

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FROM THE DISTRICT COORDINATOR (CONTINUED)

Presenters included: Max Plichta of Interior Alaska Land Trust, Sue Stapper of Aurora Energy, John Parcell of Tanana Chiefs Conference, Geologist and Mining Historian Tom Bundtzen, Brad St. Pierre from Tanana Valley Farmers Market, Falk Huetteman of Boreal Gold Honey, Liz Whitney representing FSWCD Native Plant Nursery, Melissa Sikes discussing agriculture education, City of Nenana Mayor Josh Verhagen showcasing Nenana's biochar plant, and Scott Faulkner highlighting FSWCD's Youth for Habitat and streambank restoration programs. Thanks again to all who participated. This issue of the FSWCD newsletter shows much of what the staff have been working on and what's to come this summer. Watch for new things happening with our compost partners Golden Heart Waste Management. Remember to call if you live on a water body and need restoration work or a free soil sample.

FSWCD is one of ten statewide soil and water conservation districts who serve private landowners and lease holders and citizens in their area to offer educational and technical assistance for their natural resource needs. Although we are recognized as part of DNR, districts receive no annual state funding and depend on donations, grants, and fundraisers to help meet your needs. Contact us if you have a resource need, question or want to volunteer!



Max Plichta of Interior Alaska Land Trust presenting on the Cripple Creek Restoration Project.

Youth For Habitat

Get Paid to Play in the Dirt: Fairbanks Youth for Habitat opens applications for 13th season

"A fun, hands-on summer job for 7th and 8th graders interested in science and the outdoors."

FSWCD is thrilled to announce that applications are now open for the 13th season of Fairbanks Youth for Habitat (YFH) program, a unique opportunity that connects local youth with the natural world right in their own backyard. If you are entering the 7th or 8th grade in the fall of 2026 and are interested in science and natural resources, we want to hear from you. This isn't your average summer camp; it's a paid, hands-on job for students who are curious about careers in fisheries, habitat restoration, and who care about making Fairbanks a better place for both wildlife and people.

Visit www.fairbankssoilwater.org for more information

Education and Outreach Program

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Youth For Habitat (continued)

The program is designed to introduce young people to these fields through real-world projects, including streambank restoration, fish collection and dissections, water quality testing, tracking migratory birds, removing invasive plants, planting native species, and exploring local agriculture. Participants should be prepared for the realities of working in Alaska and must be willing to get dirty, deal with bugs and variable weather, and work hard outdoors.



YFH participants collecting aquatic species to view in a photarium.



To provide students with a comprehensive experience, the program is divided into three sessions. There will be two two-week Beginner sessions: Session 1, running from June 2 to June 12, and Session 2, running from June 15 to June 26. Those who successfully complete the Beginner program will then be eligible for placement in the competitive three-week Advanced Corps session, which runs June 29 through July 17. All sessions meet Monday through Friday from 9:00 AM to 4:00 PM. As a reward for their hard work and dedication, students who complete the program will receive a \$225 stipend. More importantly, they will walk away with new friends, a deeper appreciation for local natural resources, and valuable experience. The selection process includes an interview, and interested students are encouraged to visit the FSWCD website to learn more about what conservation is and what conservation districts do before applying. Applications and completed permission forms must be received by April 1, 2026 or until the program is full. This incredible opportunity is made possible, in large part, by our partnership with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. For more information and to apply, visit: <https://www.fairbankssoilwater.org/fairbanks-youth-for-habitat/>

Visit www.fairbankssoilwater.org for more information

Noel Wien Children's Veggie Garden Updates



Volunteers hard at work on the Children's Veggie Garden.



Garden beds at Noel Wien Children's Veggie Garden.

With funding from the Rasmuson Foundation, last summer we were able to install and maintain a brand new six bed veggie garden at the Noel Wien Library. This Summer, the library is planning many gardening activities. They have started asking for input from library patrons on the types of veggies they would like to see in the garden. Mel Sikes, our Education Specialist, has presented activities on seed planting during the recent March spring break. She is working with the library staff to plan many activities involving the garden all summer long in conjunction with their summer reading program which has a garden theme this year. We hope to have some library grown produce at the 2026 Kids Literary Farmers Market on July 21st this year. If anyone would like to volunteer to help with the garden, please contact Mel Sikes at mel.fswcd@gmail.com or call 907-479-1213 x5.



Volunteers harvesting veggies at the Noel Wien Children's Veggie Garden.

Visit www.fairbankssoilwater.org for more information

On the Horizon: FSWCD's Large Scale Composting Program

Locally made compost on a large scale is coming to Fairbanks! Thanks to grant funding from USDA-NIFA, we are pleased to announce that we will be continuing our composting program with a foray into community composting using a shipping container. FSWCD has been coordinating the installation of a 40ft Earth Flow Composter from Green Mountain Technology, Inc. The Earth Flow is an aerobic, thermophilic, fully enclosed vessel composting machine that will be housed and operated by our amazing partners at Golden Heart Waste Management. Projected arrival of our Fairbanks system is this summer; and we all hope to hit the ground running when it arrives!



Sean Anderson of Full Circle Farm explaining the Earth Flow operation.



An interior view of the Earth Flow composter.

Recently, FSWCD project staff had the privilege of visiting Sean Anderson of Full Circle Farm in Waimanalo, Hawaii to see an Earth Flow Composter in action. Sean co-founded their company, Leftover Love Co., where they create premium living compost from the vast quantity of food waste from the local community and mulch from island tree trimmers. Touring the grounds of Full Circle Farm and getting to see an Earth Flow in operation was both inspiring and gave way to the excitement of knowing that soon we would have similar composting efforts operating in our own Fairbanks community. Leftover Love Co. was the first operation on the Hawaiian Islands to get an Earth Flow; and since then, have been able to help populous and remote communities set up and operate their own composting units. Likewise, we are hoping to be a prototype and inspiration to our Alaskan villages and remote communities in our extreme northern climate! Look for our updates and pop ups by our partner Green Star of Interior Alaska this coming season, to get involved in turning our food waste into life-giving compost!

Visit www.fairbankssoilwater.org for more information

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On the Horizon: FSWCD's Large Scale Composting Program (Continued)



Sean Anderson explaining the compost process on Full Circle Farm.

We will soon be starting another food waste reduction effort as well. We are partnering with Waste Me Naught, a local organization that helps divert resources from ending up in the landfill, in establishing a permanent free drop-off location for anyone in the community to bring old, freezer-burnt, or scrap meat for mushers to use as feed.

Finally, we will be having workshops this summer on backyard composting. Anyone in attendance that shows an interest in composting at home will receive one of several composting units free of charge. Dates are TBD, and we will post updates on our website once we establish a schedule. We look forward to a busy summer and can't wait to see you all out there!



FSWCD's Compost Program Coordinator Felicia Gunn with Sean Anderson.



The finished product, life-giving compost.

Visit www.fairbankssoilwater.org for more information

Corinthian Baptist Church Community Garden Updates



In 2015, FSWCD 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. With successive grants, the garden now has seven 32 ft x 4 ft long beds. It is quite a sight when it is full of happy, healthy plants all through the summer. This summer, we hope to continue the planting and management of this wonderful garden. We are looking for some help with this garden. It takes lots of people with lots of love and time to make a community garden successful. If you would like to help with this garden, please contact Mel Sikes at mel.fswcd@gmail.com or call her at 907-479-1213 x5.

The community garden at Corinthian Baptist Church.



A red sunflower beaming at the Corinthian Baptist Church garden.



Natural Resource and Education Specialist Mel Sikes harvesting kohlrabi.

Visit www.fairbankssoilwater.org for more information

2026 Annual Tree and Shrub Sale

We are looking forward to Memorial Day Weekend where we will have our 26th annual tree and shrub sale at the Delta Barn on the Tanana Valley State Fairgrounds. The sale will take place on Friday, May 22 to Saturday, May 23 from 10:00am-4:00pm on both days.

The mission of the tree sale is to increase food security, support local farmers, create wildlife habitat, and beautify our community. We source our plants from other conservation districts and nurseries in northern states as well as Alaskan producers. We are always looking for local growers with proven plants to sell at our tree sale or to invite as a vendor.

Preordering is available now for many of the trees and shrubs but we will also have plants that can only be purchased on the day of the sale such as black currant (Tiben and Ben Sarek), haskap (Boreal Beast and Boreal Beauty honeyberries sold together), and russet buffaloberry.

The proceeds of our sale support natural resource education. Cooperators receive a 10% discount.

This year we will be offering:

- | | |
|------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Aronia (Black Chokeberry) | Homestead Hawthorn |
| Russian Almond | Common & White Lilac |
| Russet Buffaloberry | Amur Maple |
| Nanking Cherry | Ussurian Pear |
| Dolgo Crabapple | Peony 'Sarah Bernhardt' |
| Siberian Crabapple | Peony 'Duchesse de Nemours' |
| Golden Currant | American Plum |
| Black Currant 'Savanna Zing' | Killarney Raspberry |
| Black Currant 'Tiben' | Wood's Rose |
| Black Currant 'Ben Sarek' | Seaberry |
| Red-Osier Dogwood | Serviceberry |
| American Elm | Silverberry |
| Sweet Gale | Snowberry |
| Haskap Boreal Beast | Norway Spruce |
| Haskap Boreal Beauty | Toklat Strawberry |



Killarney Raspberry



Sweet Gale



Soil Sampling & Consulting Services

WHAT WE CURRENTLY OFFER

General Soil Nutrient Testing - \$40.00

Our soil testing program has been running for almost twenty years! FSWCD processes and sends out around 200 soil samples per year!

Clients will receive test results on nitrogen, phosphorous, potassium, calcium, magnesium, sulphur, micronutrients such as boron and iron, % organic matter, pH, and cation exchange capacity. FSWCD staff will use this information to create detailed soil health and fertilizer recommendations for you.

If you are interested in this service, it generally takes 6 weeks to receive results and recommendations so plan ahead!

Free Soil Nutrient Testing for Outlying Areas In Our District - \$0.00

We applied and received a small grant during 2025-2027 to offer free soil testing for outlying communities in our district. If you are outside of Fairbanks, North Pole, and Two Rivers you may qualify for a free soil sample.

Contact us at soils.fswcd@gmail.com for more information.



CONSULTING SERVICES OFFERED FOR USDA-NRCS CEMA 216

We are preparing to offer soil health testing to the public* and as consulting services for the new USDA-NRCS Regenerative Pilot Program. This program will be focused on developing and incorporating regenerative agriculture processes for producers. The official practice number and name is CEMA 216 Soil Health (conservation and evaluation monitoring activity).

The purpose of regenerative agriculture is to view the operation as an ecosystem in order to regenerate and rehabilitate core processes. It involves integration of multiple conservation practices such as grazing management, nutrient management, livestock on the landscape, reduced tillage, and conservation cover.

We can view the success of regenerative agriculture practices by evaluating soil health. Soil health indicators help us to keep track of the efficacy of these conservation measures.

Consulting services will be approximately \$1,400.00 for a site visit and sampling; soil testing including biology, chemistry, and physical parameters, interpretation, and reports.

What's Included Exactly:

1. Planning Meeting with Producer & NRCS
2. Site Visit and Soil Health Sampling for 3 locations
3. Testing for Soil Functions: organic matter cycling, soil structural stability, carbon food source, microbial activity, bioavailable nitrogen, soil texture, soil pH, and fertility.
4. Soil Health Report and Recommendations
5. Follow-up meeting discussing results and next steps.

Stay tuned for the roll-out of this program and contact USDA-NRCS if you are interested in learning more about their regenerative agriculture initiatives.

*These soil health services are available to the public, regardless of affiliation with USDA-NRCS.

**Contact the USDA-NRCS Fairbanks Field Office:
Emily Donaldson: 907-251-9227 Blaine Spellman: 907-388-4319**

Introducing Boreal Wilds

It has been a busy fall through winter for our native plant nursery team! We would like to formally introduce our new nursery name to the world: Boreal Wilds. We chose this name to celebrate the Boreal forests of Interior Alaska and the specific ecosystem that provides an abundance of native plant species for all of us to enjoy and appreciate. Just as the seasons transition throughout the year, our daily actions have shifted as well and we have spent much more time indoors through the winter finalizing protocols, ordering nursery supplies, processing seeds, and creating templates for seed sowing, watering, and fertilizing.

A large part of our work recently has been with BLM's 'Seeds of Success' program for ecological restoration. We collected over 18 species of native plant seeds from many different areas around the Interior this summer (most regularly visited being Wickersham Dome, Murphy Dome, Goldstream, and Chatanika) and then spent a couple months this fall organizing/processing the seeds, making sure the corresponding data sheets had all the necessary information, and our seed quantities were large enough to fulfill BLM's minimum requirements. We learned a lot through this process and are so excited to be positively contributing to a myriad of different restoration projects as well as improve the viability of growing native plants in and around Fairbanks. The phenology data we collected from the field sites this summer has made it possible to create our own specific timetable and reference information for native plant collection and propagation. We are hopeful that this information will contribute to more community members growing more Alaska-specific native plants!



Cottongrass seed being prepared for a Seeds of Success submission.



Natural Resource Specialist Hazel Berrios unpacks trays for native seed sowing.

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

Introducing Boreal Wilds (Continued)

As of late, we are in full nursery-planning mode for the spring. The first of the seeds needing cold stratification are tucked into peat moss in the refrigerator for better germination and at the beginning of April, we will start sowing the other species that don't require a stratification period. We are hiring for several different positions for the upcoming summer, one of which being with Tanana Chiefs Conference as our partner for Boreal Wilds. In the works through this partnership is a one-month summer internship for the next three years that aims to educate students on the foundational components of native plant nursery growing, with ethnobotany as a core tenant. We are hopeful to continue connecting with different tribal entities to understand the needs they have and how to best connect communities with the plant species that would be most beneficial. We are planning some upcoming outreach events and are looking forward to sharing the Stroecker nursery site with the broader community this upcoming spring and summer.



Jose Salas and his assistant working at the Native Plant Nursery.



Abby Lutmer and her assistant harvesting willow cuttings on Murphy Dome.

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

Updates from Aquatic Invasives

It may still feel like winter but the sun is coming back and the 2026 field season is just around the corner! The FSWCD habitat team is gearing up to continue their work of controlling and eradicating the invasive waterweed, elodea in Interior Alaska.

During the off season we like to remind anglers and other people recreating on the water that elodea can survive being frozen in ice and has been known to come up on ice augers. If you encounter any vegetation while on the ice or water, please remember to remove it and leave it at that waterbody. Never move plants, animals, or mud from water body to another. The best way to prevent the spread of aquatic invasive species is to Clean, Drain, and Dry all equipment after leaving and before entering the water.

If a suspicious plant is spotted either in the water or on your gear, please take a clear picture of the plant and report it to:

- The ADF&G invasive species hotline at 1-877-INVASIV (1-877-468-2748)
- FSWCD's Habitat and Invasive Plant Program Coordinator at (907)-479-1213 Ext. 4, or aditi.shenoy@gmail.com.

For more information about elodea please visit our website at: <https://fswcd-weeds.squarespace.com/>

Habitat Restoration and Conservation Program

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Updates from the NA-CISMA

The Northern Alaska Cooperative Invasive Species Management Area (NA-CISMA) has been busy over the winter planning for the 2026 summer field season. Both the NA-CISMA Strategic Planning and Prunus working groups have met over the past few months and some exciting projects are in motion. One such development is that we have been working on a program for assisting landowners with chokecherry control in the Fairbanks area for the 2026 summer season. This past month, we met with Hannah Thompson from Anchorage Soil and Water Conservation District to gain insight in developing our program. Be sure to stay tuned for more details!

In the next few weeks, the NA-CISMA will be releasing its 2026 Winter Newsletter. Upcoming events, meetings, updates from the 2025 summer field season, and plans for the upcoming 2026 field season will be included. It will be posted on our website soon! Don't forget the NA-CISMA is on Facebook and Instagram. See the codes and links (below right). If you are tired of doom-scrolling, but not ready to kick your internet habit just yet, you can check us out and learn about invasive species in Alaska's northern region. You can join in on the fun too for Trivia Tuesdays and What's That Wednesdays. Be sure to give us a follow on Facebook and Instagram! Below is a sample from the NA-CISMA socials.

Mindful MONDAY

Invasive Species & Winter

Winter camping and snowshoeing are great ways to experience the joys of outside adventuring in the snowy landscapes. Although spread of invasives species is lower in winter, its important to be mindful of potential spread:

1. Check your packs, tents, and equipment for plant material
2. Buy/gather firewood where you burn it or use certified heat-treated firewood
3. Brush boots and equipment of snow, mud, dirt, or debris before heading home

The graphic features a winter scene with snow-covered evergreen trees, a green tent, a campfire, and a stack of firewood. A logo for the Northern Alaska Cooperative Invasive Species Management Area is in the top right corner.



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

Partnerships Build Healthy Soil and Food Security in Fairbanks, Alaska

Tracy Robillard, NRCS

FAIRBANKS, ALASKA – Food security is a concern for all Alaskans. About 95 percent of the food purchased in Alaska is imported and the food supply chain is vulnerable to disruptions. Contributing factors are Alaska's remote location, high transportation and fuel costs, and a limited growing season.

Fortunately, there is growing interest in supporting local food systems and increasing local food production in and around Fairbanks and Interior Alaska. The midnight sun and long summer growing days supercharge crop production. If managed appropriately, farmers can produce an abundance of food.



Managing Soil Nutrients for Food Production



Aleya Brinkman (right) agriculture and natural resources specialist with the FSWCD and producer April Smurda (left) look at beans grown in a seasonal high tunnel.

A critical part of managing crop quality is managing for healthy soils. Together, the Fairbanks Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) and the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) are helping farmers improve soil health which has a direct connection to improved food production.

Aleya Brinkman is an agriculture and natural resources specialist with Fairbanks SWCD who helps growers test their soil and manage their nutrients through a partnership with NRCS. She works with growers throughout Fairbanks and surrounding communities and serves as a valued technical resource and a liaison between producers and NRCS.

"It's rewarding to see long term relationships develop and to help connect farmers to resources," Aleya said. "My goal at the SWCD is to help people grow more food, whether that's through nutrient management or better soil health practices."

Nutrient Management is a conservation practice recommended by NRCS that involves the four R's—applying the Right Source; Right Rate; Right Time; and Right Place of nutrient application. Benefits of managing nutrients using the four R's include higher crop quality, optimized crop yield, increased profitability, cost savings from not over-applying inputs, improving water quality by preventing leaching of excess nutrients into groundwater, and building more sustainable, healthy soil.

For more information visit www.fairbankssoilwater.org

Partnerships Build Healthy Soil and Food Security in Fairbanks, Alaska (continued)

Improving Crop Quality and Yield at Offbeet Farm

One of several producers Aleya works with is Sam Knapp of Offbeet Farm. Sam has been farming in Fairbanks for five years. He is originally from northern Wisconsin and previously farmed in the upper Midwest. Sam intensively farms just over one acre of cropland and can produce up to 25,000 pounds of produce in a year. He focuses on root vegetables and brassicas that grow well in cold weather, such as carrots, potatoes, beets, turnips and cabbage.

Aleya has been working with Sam to understand the soil in his vegetable beds. She interprets lab results, makes nutrient recommendations, and facilitates access to soil amendments. "Finding local amendments or getting them shipped to Alaska is a challenge, so I'm appreciative of having Aleya as a resource to help," Sam said. "It was really helpful getting the soil test," Sam said. "There aren't well-defined nutrient guidelines for Alaska, so having someone to help interpret the results and recommend applications was invaluable. It's like free consulting."

Sam intentionally manages for soil health and has adopted soil-friendly practices such as leaving the crop stubble on the ground after harvest to provide soil cover and organic matter. He minimizes tillage as much as possible and uses organic farming practices such as not applying pesticides or fungicides. He is working with NRCS on planting a cover crop of annual rye grass in between crop rows and managing soil nutrients using the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP).



Aleya Brinkman, agriculture specialist with the FSWCD helps producer Sam Knapp (right) test his soil and manage nutrient applications.

"I'm a big believer that healthy soil ecosystems matter," Sam said. "I started cover cropping as a means to generate organic matter. I started out at three percent organic matter and now I'm up to seven percent since doing the cover crops."

Sam highly recommends other farmers to work with NRCS and the Fairbanks SWCD, especially for nutrient management.

"Nutrient management improves the marketable quality of the food," he said. "It's a good farming practice. It helps you build on what you have to get a better crop and keep costs down. I'm making more money than I would if I didn't use it."

Managing Nutrients inside a High Tunnel at Growing Roots Farm

Aleya also works with growers who produce inside seasonal high tunnels or hoop houses. These structures consist of an arched metal frame enclosed with plastic sheeting, with walls at the ends. High tunnels create a controlled environment for crop production. They can protect crops from harsh weather, extend the growing season, and allow for production of a wider diversity of crops that otherwise may not grow well outdoors. April and Mark Smurda grow food on their homestead in a high tunnel, outdoor raised beds, and a food forest. They also raise and sell heritage breed chickens, and they operate a farm stand that continues to grow in popularity and demand.

Managing Nutrients inside a High Tunnel at Growing Roots Farm (continued)



Mark and April Smurda with Aleya Brinkman (Fairbanks SWCD) and Emily Donaldson (NRCS) look at corn and tomato crops grown inside a seasonal high tunnel.

April and Mark worked with NRCS to install their high tunnel through the EQIP program and are also doing nutrient management as a conservation practice through EQIP. They are working with Aleya on a project to compile a guidebook of best practices for high tunnel installation and management in Interior Alaska. The guidebook will include feedback from high tunnel producers in the area and help future high tunnel operators better understand and navigate challenges and benefits of high tunnel farming in Interior's unique conditions.

April and Mark are also working with Aleya on nutrient management practices within their high tunnel. They grow a wide variety of crops in the tunnel such as corn, zucchini, cucumbers, green beans, tomatoes, basil, lavender, garden huckleberries, and more. "The soil testing makes it easier for me, so I can better understand my soil," April said. "Aleya helps me interpret the results, so I know what I need, how much I need, and where to find it." April says she has noticed a dramatic difference in crop quality and production since working with Aleya. "I'm starting to build a nutrient history to work from. Productivity is increasing every year," April said.

To read the full article follow the link:

<https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/5eece194a1fd4838a9eec1eae9fc36a>

Growing Partnerships with Other Producers

Both Offbeet Farm and Growing Roots Farm are mentors in an exciting new program called AFFECT—the Alternative Fairbanks Farming Educational Cooperative Training Program. The program just finished its second year in 2025 with 14 farmers who graduated from the program.

AFFECT provides growers with 14-weeks of training throughout the summer to learn from other farmers in the community. Participants attend weekly workshops and hands-on training events with other farmers where they learn about farm finance and business, infrastructure development, and skills needed to grow in Interior Alaska's unique climate. April and Sam hosted participants on their farms this summer and shared their knowledge, including information about nutrient management and USDA assistance. The program is spearheaded by Mel Sikes, Natural Resource Education Specialist with the FSWCD.



Mark Smurda and Mel Sikes at Growing Roots Farm.

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 FSWCD's 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 program, 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

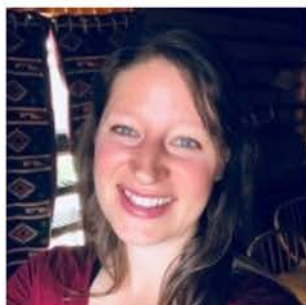
Aditi runs our Habitat Restoration and Conservation Program. She leads the Interior Alaska Elodea Taskforce, and has been working on eradicating the invasive aquatic plant elodea from interior Alaska. She also manages terrestrial invasive plant survey and control projects in Fairbanks, and surrounding 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 19 years and is a huge supporter and consumer of locally grown food.

Our Staff



Hazel Berrios - Habitat Restoration and Conservation

hazel.fswcd@gmail.com

Hazel actively manages 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.



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 FSWCD's Riparian projects.



Autumn Fish - NA-CISMA Coordinator

aafish11@gmail.com

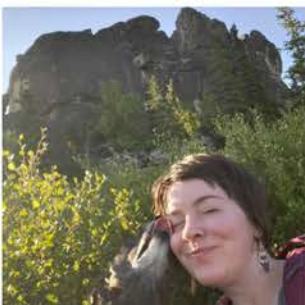
Autumn joined the Habitat team in 2023, as a seasonal technician. She now maintains the position as the NA-CISMA (Northern AK Cooperative Invasive Species Management Area) Coordinator. She also assists the Habitat crew where needed in their surveys, herbicide applications, and outreach events. She has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



Felicia Gunn - Financial Manager & Compost Program Coordinator

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 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 continue learning more about our programs and support the growth and mission of Fairbanks Soil and Water Conservation District.