



Alaska Current Developments Spring 2003

NRCS Alaska hosts New Employee Workshop



NRCS State Conservationist Shirley Gammon and Training Coordinator Cal Miller, left, thank Herb Anungazuk, National Park Service anthropologist, for participating in the NRCS Alaska New Employee Workshop.

Working for NRCS in Alaska presents a special set of challenges and opportunities for conservation technical specialists who assist Alaska's landowners and communities in improving conservation practices on their lands for long-term use. Employees new to Alaska come with experience and training from working in the Lower 48 in the traditional delivery of USDA programs and services. The NRCS Alaska New Employee Workshop helps new employees take the skills they bring with them and adapt them to the many unusual geographic and demographic contrasts that they find throughout the state in order to provide the best service to all eligible landowners. More than twenty-two new employees attended the two-day workshop in Anchorage.

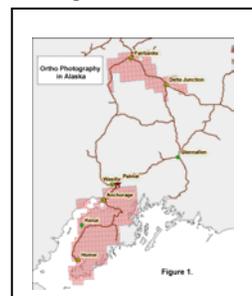


Ortho-Imagery

Ted Cox, NRCS GIS Specialist

An accurate and detailed base map is a fundamental requirement for any planning activity or resource based inventory. While traditional aerial photography provides a high level of detail, it also has severe limitations due to distortions induced by terrain and the camera which can lead to serious errors when users try to measure area or distance on an uncorrected photo base. Distortions normally present in aerial photography can be removed through the application of photogrammetric techniques and a representation of the earth's surface known as a digital elevation model. The result is a distortion-free base map known as a digital orthophoto quad, or DOQ. Because DOS's are digital they offer distinct advantages over traditional photography. Besides being highly accurate base maps, they can also be used in a Geographic Information System (GIS) such as ArcView. Other digital datasets including soils, field boundaries, or points collected with a Global Positioning System can be displayed on top of the orthophoto, and printed at almost any scale.

While orthophotography has been available in the Lower 48 for several years, Alaska is just starting to receive it for select areas along the road network. A block of ortho-photography covering most of the Kenai Peninsula was delivered by the NRCS State Office to the Homer and Kenai Field Offices. A block of DOQs covering much of Fairbanks and Delta Junction is scheduled for delivery this winter (figure 1). Orthophotos are available to the public at minimal cost on-line at <http://edcns17.cr.usgs.gov/EarthExplorer/>.



Ortho-imagery is a powerful tool for conservation planning in Alaska

Service and Partnership – Reaching out to all Alaskans

Jeanette Colville, Alaska State Public Affairs Specialist

Reflecting the NRCS Guiding Principles of Service, Partnership, Community Action, and Technical Excellence, the NRCS Alaska State Office dedicates itself to fulfilling the USDA Civil Rights pledge to "ensure that underserved individuals and groups are made aware of, understand, and have a working knowledge of USDA programs and Services." Many unfamiliar with the Alaska cultural and geographic landscape may think of Alaska winters as a dark and quiet time of inactivity. But those in Alaska know it to be a time of heightened activity in the economic and political arena as a number of prominent non-profit and government groups gather to plan, strategize, and promote issues of great importance to their lives.

During the past winter months, NRCS Alaska has actively participated in a number of these events which provide excellent opportunities to meet with those unfamiliar with our programs and services, to establish the beginnings of new partnerships, and to demonstrate our commitment to serving all of the communities of Alaska's complex and varied geographic regions.

NRCS participated in the annual conferences of the Alaska Federation of Natives, the largest organization of Alaska Natives promoting the cultural, economic, and political voice of the entire Alaska Native community since 1966; Alaska Village Initiatives, promoting the economic well-being of rural Alaskans through economic development assistance, networking, advocacy, and education since 1968; the Bureau of Indian Affairs Provider's Conference, promoting improved quality of health services in rural Alaska; and the Alaska Forum for the Environment, promoting conservation of natural resources and wildlife for the benefit of all Alaskans. Conference themes ranged from "New Horizons for Rural Alaska," "Unity Through Communication," "Strength, Hope, Beauty," and "Our Children, Our Spirit, Our Life," reflecting the concerns and values of the Alaska Native communities. Participating in these gatherings gave NRCS the opportunity to meet with up to 5,400 Alaska Native village leaders and tribal delegates.



Resource Soil Scientist Joe White hosts the NRCS Programs and Services exhibit at the Alaska Village Initiatives Economic Development Conference in Anchorage



**Quick Reference for
Alaska Weed Information**
The Committee for
Noxious and Invasive
Plant Management has a
new web site for Alaska.
Check it out @
www.cnipm.org

Congratulations, Team Great Job!



NRCS State Conservationist Shirley Gammon (center left) presents Certificates of Merit to technical specialists for outstanding service at the NRCS All Employees Meeting held in Anchorage.

Alaska High Schoolers Dig Learning about Soils

Dennis Moore, Alaska State Soil Data Quality Specialist

Alaska soil scientist Dennis Moore knows how to spark interest and liven up a conservation education session with high schoolers when introducing the fundamentals of soil genesis and morphology, the water cycle, and the importance of wetlands. Moore's enthusiasm for his subject is infectious, but just in case interest wanes he has extra incentives up his sleeve for getting young folks interested in the amazing world of soil science.

At a recent presentation to a Wasilla High School ecology class where he gave demonstrations on soil texture and uses, and discussed the history of soils in the Wasilla area, Moore challenged the students to a competition of critical thinking on the role of soils in our everyday life. The class of seventeen students

engaged in a rousing competition for coupons to Burger King and Wendy's, with the first place winner receiving a

pan pizza from Pizza Hut. A good time and a good learning experience were had by all.



Partnerships Pay Big Dividends

The Harding Lake Watershed Rehabilitation Project

Jeffrey Durham, Salcha-Delta Soil & Water Conservation District Program Administrator



Harding Lake

Over the last fifty years, natural and man-made forces have resulted in the diversion of Rogge Creek, a critical source of water for Harding Lake, resulting in significant decreases of the lake's water level. The falling water level has dramatically impacted the lake. North shore wetlands, the lake's critical spawning ground for native fish and a vital feeding and rearing habitat for migrating waterfowl and other animals, have dried up and disappeared. Harding Lake, 35 miles southeast of the urban center of Fairbanks, along the Richardson Highway, is the largest road accessible lake north of the Alaska Range. Claiming its title as the most visited recreational lake in the Interior of Alaska, Harding Lake supports residential development around 70 percent of its shoreline and plays host to large seasonal populations of recreational visitors.

One of the most visible impacts from the devastating loss of critical wetland habitat is the recruitment failure and subsequent population crash of the lake's native pike fishery. In 2000, the population crash led to the Alaska Department of Fish and Game declaring an emergency closure to Harding Lake pike fishing. This was made permanent several months later.

A group of private landowners organized the Harding Lake Association in response to the declining conditions at the lake. In January 2000, the Harding Lake Association and representatives from NRCS and the Salcha-Delta Soil & Water Conservation District met to discuss the possibilities of rehabilitating the lake's wetlands. It was decided to form a Watershed Council which would represent area stakeholders and would be sponsored by NRCS and the Conservation District. This group would develop a watershed plan to be used as the basis for project support and funding.

The Watershed Plan concept, based on the NRCS Nine-Step Planning process, was embraced by area stakeholders. NRCS has received a \$300,000 construction appropriation for a water diversion structure which is currently being developed by NRCS engineers with assistance from the Salcha-Delta Soil & Water Conservation District and the Harding Lake Watershed Council.

Earth Team Volunteers Mean the World to Us! Earth Team Volunteer Program breaks national record

Michele Eginore, NRCS National Earth
Team Coordinator



The NRCS Earth
Team Volunteers
program had a
record breaking
fiscal year 2002
with more than

one million hours of service donated
to conservation activities across the
nation. The total value of volunteer
time was more than \$17 million based
on the \$16 hourly rate established by
the Points of Light Foundation.

Since the Earth Team Volunteer
program began in 1982, the number of
volunteers has gone from 327 to more
than 38,000. Alaska NRCS worked
with 139 volunteers in fiscal year
2002, reporting 1,525 volunteers
contributed to Alaska's conservation
program.

For information on how you can
support or participate in the Earth
Team Volunteer program visit the
NRCS Earth Team Volunteer web site:
www.nrcs.usda.gov/feature/volunteers

Snow, Water & Climate

Rick McClure, State Hydrologist

The NRCS Snow, Water & Climate
Services continues to provide assistance to
various private utilities in Alaska. A good
example is the assistance provided to the
Ketchikan Public Utilities (KPU) Swan
Lake hydro-electric project where the snow
water content is measured each spring to
give KPU a good estimate of the water
available for power generation in the
coming months. The more water, the less
KPU will need to run its expensive diesel
generators. KPU employees are maintaining
the aerial markers where the snow is
measured. The measurement sites were
established and the markers were installed
with NRCS assistance in 1993, with records
beginning the following winter.

Tempco
helicopter pilot
Eric Vognild with
KPU is unloading
equipment at the
Lake Grace Pass
snow course/aerial
marker. Site
maintenance
includes aerial markers straightened and
re-guyed.



Grady Weisz
of KPU at the
Upper Swan
Lake snow
course/aerial
marker.

Photos by Scott Anderson
KPU Swan Lake plant manager

Cows and migratory waterfowl share the land at Fox River Flats

Karin Sonnen, Homer Field Office
Range Conservationist

Each fall the NRCS Homer Field Office assists the Fox River Cattlemen's Association and the State of Alaska Dept. of Natural Resources in completing the annual fall grazing assessment on the Fox River Flats, a 16,400 acre grazing lease located at the head of Kachemak Bay. Funding last fall was provided through the NRCS's Grazing Lands Conservation Initiative to fly via helicopter to four remote, key grazing areas where permanent transects have been established. Photo transects are recorded, grazed and ungrazed plants are measured, and the current year's utilization is determined.

The Fox River Flats are a unique ecosystem of rivers and tidal flats that are periodically inundated by the salt waters of Kachemak Bay. Small lakes and ponds speckle the Flats, providing excellent habitat for waterfowl including Trumpeter Swans, Canadian Geese, plus many species of ducks, all of which use the area as a resting stopover during migrations north and south. Many of the birds will stay and nest for the summer.

Biologists with the Alaska Department of Fish and Game view cattle grazing on these tidal flats as beneficial to the waterfowl that use the area. The cattle keep the grasses and sedges at a lower height, enabling ducks and geese to use this habitat. Waterfowl need to be able to see for long distances in all directions to feel comfortable that no predators are sneaking up on them while feeding, nesting, or resting. The re-growth that occurs after cattle have grazed an area is also providing a more nutritious feed for the waterfowl in the fall when ungrazed plants become rank and unpalatable.



Karin Sonnen, NRCS Range Conservationist, Mark Kinney, Homer District Conservationist, and Tommy Stephens, Farm Service Agency check utilization near one of the four photo transects at Fox River Flats.



Migratory trumpeter swans rest on lakes at Fox River Flats before their migratory push south.

Partnerships with Alaska Native Communities

Paul Coffey, Southeast Conference
RC&D Coordinator, Craig, Alaska



The NRCS Southeast Conference Resource Conservation & Development office has been working closely with the Alaska Native Klawock Watershed Council to implement restoration efforts on a critical watershed impacted by a variety of developments. The Klawock

Watershed is located on Prince of Wales Island in Southeast Alaska. The two driving forces behind the formation of the Council were the concerns over potential impacts to the Klawock municipal water supply, and the need to maintain high quality habitat for the Klawock River run of Sockeye Salmon, an anadromous fish that spawns in the Klawock watershed and has historically been a significant component of the Klawock cash-and-subsistence economy.

Development within the watershed has generated sediment, jeopardizing planned improvements to the municipal water supply. Recent declines in the salmon population may be attributed to sedimentation of the spawning gravel, residential development adjacent to historic spawning channels, and road development within the watershed. Though a partnership with NRCS, the Klawock Watershed Council has been successful in acquiring \$740,000 from three sources to assess the different influences on the watershed through field data collection, and to develop a plan for restoration. Funds generated will also finance the restoration work, which may include culvert and bridge replacement, vegetative and/or mechanical bank stabilization, revegetation of exposed soil, and large woody debris placement in streams to create spawning habitat enhancement.

The efforts and dedication of the Klawock Watershed Council have been key to the development of an agreement between the State of Alaska and the Southeast Conference, an Alaska regional economic development organization and RC&D Council, to use \$700,000 of Sustainable Salmon Fund dollars to establish four additional Watershed Councils in Southeast Alaska.

Big Game Alaska Center

Michelle Schuman, Anchorage District
Conservationist

Big Game Alaska Wildlife Center opened in 1993 to meet the growing interest in wildlife conservation in Alaska. Visitors to the Center have had an opportunity to learn about Alaska's wildlife and ecosystems. Over 200,000 people visited Big Game Alaska in 2000 and the number keeps growing. And so does the number of animals. The Center is located in Portage, one of the most unique areas in Southcentral Alaska. The Placer River and Turnagain Arm estuary is an area where many forces of nature come together. Glacial effluence mixes with the seawater of Turnagain Arm causing a rich area where hooligan and spawning salmon return each year bringing with them bald eagles, beluga whales, and a host of other species. Migrating Sandhill cranes, Canada geese, Tundra swans and numerous shorebirds rest, forage and nest here every spring and fall.

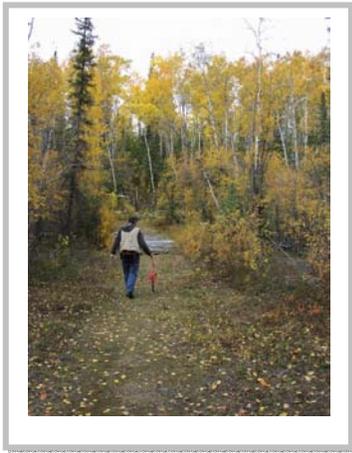
The NRCS Anchorage Field Office is helping Big Game Alaska develop a conservation plan to protect and conserve Alaska's coastal habitats and to help manage the Center's growing number of wildlife. This year it took in six abandoned moose calves and two abandoned black bear cubs. Some of the wildlife species that are managed at the 108-acre Center are moose, caribou, Sitka deer, musk ox, grizzly bear, elk, and bison. The Center has also received a Captive Bred Wildlife Permit and Endangered Species Import permit to import genetically pure Canadian Wood Bison. This is a joint program with Alaska Fish and Game to reintroduce the Canadian Wood Bison back in central Alaska.

To enhance shorebird and migratory waterfowl habitat, two shallow water areas have been planned and funded through the NRCS Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program. Several shorebirds, Canada geese and Sandhill cranes have already taken refuge in one of the completed projects. As a result of the 2002 Farm Bill, Big Game received Environmental Quality Incentives Program funding for fencing and development of water facilities to utilize current unused. NRCS is assisting the Center in developing a Range Management Plan that incorporates a grazing system for several animal types with diverse forage requirements as well as meeting the Center's needs to provide wildlife viewing for visitors.

Glennallen Trail Project

Arlene Rosenkrans
Copper Valley RC&D Coordinator

The Copper Valley Economic Development Council, in partnership with the NRCS Copper Valley Resource Conservation and Development Council, has initiated a Glennallen Trails Project that will benefit folks of all ages who enjoy the great outdoors of beautiful Copper Valley.



This community project is designed to upgrade the existing loop trail on Alaska Bible College lands by doing badly needed brush work, creating small reroutes to decrease the gradient on two hills, creating a

trailhead, and installing two small bridges and areas of boardwalks. Another important part of the plan to enhance the educational value of the project is the design and installation of interpretive signs identifying local plants, wildlife, and forest ecosystems.

The Glennallen Trail Project has garnered strong community support from a wide range of organizations in addition to the Alaska Bible College, including the Wrangell Institute for Science and the Environment, the Boy Scouts of America, and the regional office of the National Park Service which is contributing funding support through their Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance Program.

“The success of the project will depend on community involvement and support,” said Arlene Rosenkrans, NRCS Copper Valley RC&D Coordinator. John Downes, Executive Director of the Copper Valley Economic

Development Council urges folks who are interested in joining this community team effort in making the project a success to contact him or Arlene at 907/822-5111 or 907/822-5001.

Yukon Flats RC&D Sawmill Survey Project

Carrie Supik
Yukon Flats RC&D Coordinator

Through the Yukon Flats RC&D program the Circle Village Tribal Council sponsored the Yukon Flats Sawmill Survey Project. The project goal is to assess and identify the Council of Athabascan Tribal Governments villages’ forestry and sawmill needs for effective future program development. The RC&D program raised funding from the Tanana Chiefs Conference Forestry Department and the U.S. Forest Service so that a local coordinator could be hired to complete the survey.

The RC&D program gained technical assistance from NRCS forester Mitch Michaud to develop the survey and provide assistance in analyzing the completed surveys. The Circle Village Council handled the administration and Paul Shewfelt of Fort Yukon completed the surveys. Mr. Shewfelt has visited the eight villages of Arctic Village, Beaver, Birch Creek, Chalkyitsik, Circle, Fort Yukon, Stevens and Venetie. In each village Mr. Shewfelt met with Tribal Government officials and staff, as well as interested village residents to collect as much local information as possible regarding the use of the sawmill and of village lumber use and production. A common thread between the villages is the hope for future use of locally harvested timber in their housing programs.

Northern Exposures

NRCS Alaska Welcomes New Folks



Casey

Casey Schroeder

Hi! My name is Casey Schroeder and I am your new Soil Scientist in Fairbanks. I am originally from the small town of Antigo, Wisconsin where I grew up on a dairy farm. After graduating from

high school I journeyed to western Wisconsin to attend the University of Wisconsin River Falls. I received Bachelors of Science Degrees in Soil Science and Natural Resource Conservation from UWRF in May 2002. My career with NRCS started as a Biotech on the Fort Greely Soil Survey this past summer. I was then offered a full-time position as a Soil Scientist on the Greater Nenana Soil Survey.

The winter has been fun here in Fairbanks and I am looking forward to the upcoming field season. I am enjoying my job and have met many new people. I look forward to meeting and working with all of you.

Kristi Hicks

I was born and raised in central Ohio with a bent for wandering. After graduation from college I joined the U.S. Army to see the world and I served ten years as an Administrative/Personnel Officer. I served in Texas, South Korea, New Jersey, and finally in Fairbanks. I lived in the Fairbanks area for six years before moving to northern Arizona where I worked as an Information Assistant with the U.S. Forest Service.

My family and I spent two and a half years there before coming to our senses and returning to Alaska to live in Cold Bay (though some would doubt that we came to our senses living in the number one cloudiest and number two



Kristi

windiest place in North America), at the end of the Alaska Peninsula. We lived there happily for four years, enduring the wind and rain to enjoy the unique beauty and abundant wildlife of the area. I worked at the Izembek National Wildlife Refuge as the Administrative Technician and my husband was the City Clerk/Manager. I now work as Office Automation Clerk in the NRCS Alaska State Office and live in Willow with my husband Steve, 12-year-old son Grant, and dogs Tink and Hector.

Catherine Avery



Catherine

I arrived in late September 2002 to begin work as Statistical Assistant to Rick McClure, Hydrologist and Data Collection Supervisor. I compile data and assist in the publication of the monthly Basin Outlook Reports and Annual Data Summary Report. Verifying the accuracy of snow, water, and climate data records received from the Alaska Meteor Burst Communication System and providing that information to the Water and Climate Center and Central Forecasting System are among other duties that I perform.

I come with a rural Montana background seasoned with work experiences in the western states and Southeast Alaska.

Welcome, Brian, new Bering Straits R&CD Coordinator

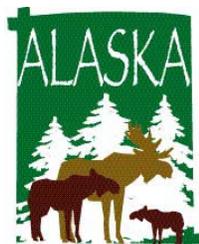
Brian Bourdon has been selected under the Career Intern Program as the Community Planner assisting the Bering Straits Resource Conservation & Development Council in Nome, Alaska.



Mark Your Calendars!

**Alaska State Fair
"Home Grown Fun"
Aug 21 - Sept 1
Palmer, Alaska**

**Copper Valley
Arts & Crafts Fair
NRCS RC&D & The
Copper Valley Economic
Development Council
July 4 - 5
Glenn & Richardson H'ways
Glennallen, Alaska**



NRCS Alaska Current Developments

www.ak.nrcs.usda.gov 907/271-2424

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2002 Farm Bill Anniversary

**Bruce Knight, Chief
Natural Resources Conservation Service**

May 13 marked the one-year anniversary of the day President Bush signed the Farm Security and Rural Investment Act of 2002 – the 2002 Farm Bill. The 2002 Farm Bill represents the single most significant commitment of resources toward conservation on private lands in the nation's history – an increase of more than \$18 billion over 10 years. Last summer, farmers and ranchers entered into more than \$700 million in contracts for conservation work under the new Farm Bill. This spring, Agriculture Secretary Ann M. Veneman announced the release of another \$1.9 billion for NRCS farm bill programs during the current fiscal year. President Bush's budget

Today we are in a position to help more landowners accomplish more conservation than ever before! Our hard work will help farmers and ranchers make the "next golden age of conservation" a reality. More conservation on the land means healthier soil, cleaner air and water, increased wildlife habitat, more economically stable rural communities, and increased scenic beauty -- benefits that all Americans can enjoy.
