



# **Kenai Soil & Water Conservation District**

## **2011 - 2012 Annual Report**



**September, 2012**

110 Trading Bay, Suite 160  
Kenai, Alaska 99611  
(907) 283-8732 x108

# GROWING FOOD SECURITY

*Partnering to promote agriculture, conserve farmland and increase food security*

**Assisting High Tunnel Growers** With at least 60 new high tunnels since 2010, high tunnels are the fastest growing agricultural sector in the District. This year we created a web page (see [www.kenaisoilandwater.org](http://www.kenaisoilandwater.org)) to answer the most frequently asked questions from new high tunnel growers, circulated high tunnel news to 112 e-subscribers, surveyed growers, published *Recommended Seed Varieties for High Tunnels*, and hosted five educational events, including a high tunnel tour and Harvest Potluck Symposium.



First year high tunnel growers Craig and Suzanne Phillips of Kenai.

experimental “workplace farmers market” in Soldotna. Promoting Wellness coalition and Kenai Resilience to expand and distribute the Central Peninsula Local Foods Directory. In addition, we co-sponsored the 2nd Annual Kenai Peninsula Ag Forum.

## **High tunnels...**

- Raise soil temperature and extend the growing season in an environmentally-friendly manner
- Improve soil and water quality from reduced fertilizer and pesticide use
- Reduce energy consumed for food transport
- Protect crops from damaging weather and pests
- Improve yields and crop diversity



Experimental workplace farmers market at Central Peninsula Hospital.

## **Cultivating the Local Food System**

The District recruited four farms and a dozen consumers to test an on-line food hub concept using LocalDirt.com, and helped start an experimental workplace farmers market. We partnered with members of the People Promoting Wellness coalition and Kenai Resilience to expand and distribute the Central Peninsula Local Foods Directory. In addition, we co-sponsored the 2nd Annual Kenai Peninsula Ag Forum.

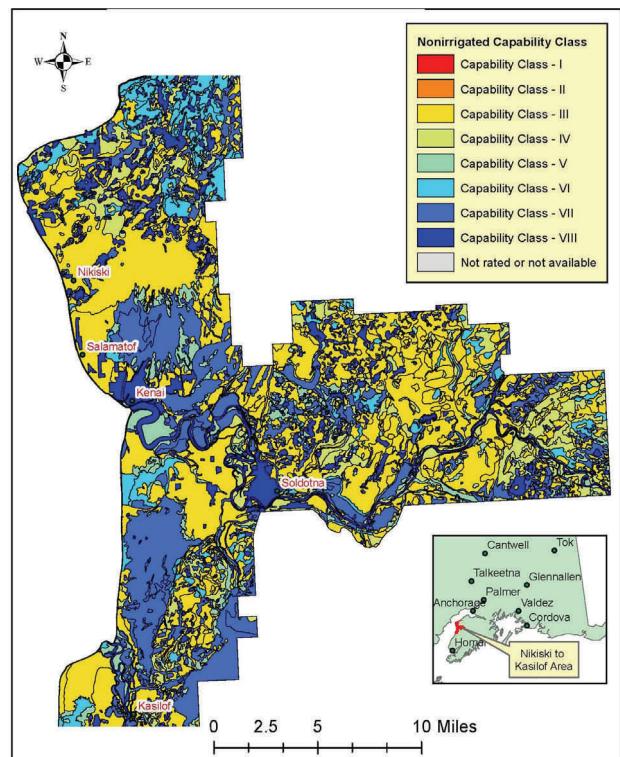


## **Putting Farmland on the Map**

In 2012, the District formally adopted Soils of Local Importance criteria, which is the first step toward recognizing and protecting potential farmland.



Mitch Michaud and Pam Voeller of the Natural Resources Conservation Service take a soil sample during Soil Quality Test Kit training in June, 2012.



A map of the District by soil capability classes. Yellow indicates soils with the best agricultural potential.

**Soil Quality** is the foundation of sustainable agriculture. This year, District staff and supervisors along with NRCS colleagues took training in the use of Soil Quality Test Kit. We shared information about no-till and minimum-tillage practices at the District's spring field demonstration of small farm equipment and tracked local experiments with compost extract, fish fertilizer and cover cropping to improve soil quality.

**Laying the Groundwork** The District partnered with Kenai Feed to improve access to its specialized rental equipment, which is highly valued by small-scale intensive farms whether they are growing hay, experimental berry varieties, vegetables for local consumers, or peonies for a rapidly-growing export market.

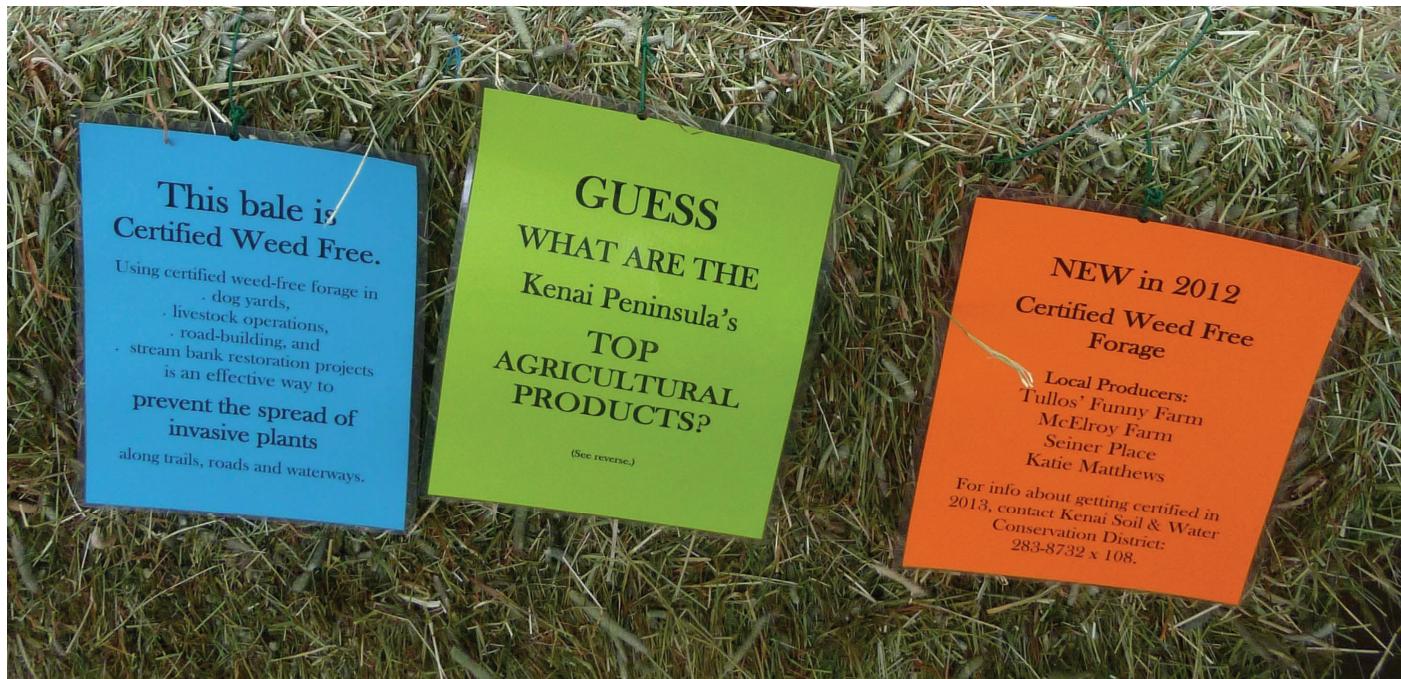


Chisel plow at work during a field demonstration, June, 2012.

**Hay, hay, hay!** Hay has long been one of the Borough's top agricultural products. In support of local hay growers, the District organized its second annual cooperative fertilizer order and featured an eye-catching "Buy Local" display at the 2012 fair in Ninilchik emphasizing that local hay is high quality, economical, and supports the local economy.

# FIGHTING ALIENS

*Working with willing landowners to prevent the spread of invasive plants*



**Certified Weed Free Forage** is beginning to take hold on the Kenai Peninsula. With help from Janice Chumley of UAF Cooperative Extension, the District provided free WFF certification to four growers in 2012, up from one in 2011. The Alaska Plant Materials Center serves as the state-wide headquarters for the weed free forage program. Using weed free products in livestock operations (as feed) and in road-building and streambank restoration projects (as mulch) is an effective way to prevent the spread of invasive plants along trails, roads and waterways. Mushers can help prevent the spread of invasives by using weed free straw for dog bedding at home and on the trail.

**Collaborative efforts** are key to containing and eradicating invasive plants. Thanks to funding from NRCS, the District has been an active partner of the Kenai Peninsula Cooperative Weed Management Area, which in 2012 sponsored a second successful Weed Smackdown and an annual conference organized by our Integrated Pest Management specialist, Jen Kain. In addition to helping landowners develop and implement pest management plans, Jen completed a spray trial which eradicated orange hawkweed at the test site. Additional areas were tarped through a cost-share agreement with Homer Soil & Water Conservation District and the US Fish & Wildlife Service.

This year's Weed Smackdown targeted bird vetch (*Vicia cracca*), a tenacious weed that blankets and chokes out everything in its path.



**What is an invasive plant?** Invasive plants are non-native species that spread rapidly and have negative impacts on fish, wildlife, agriculture or human health.

### **An ounce of prevention...**

Weed seeds can spread via mobile equipment, so the District developed a “Best Management Practices for Shared Farming Equipment” brochure, which is distributed with every equipment rental.

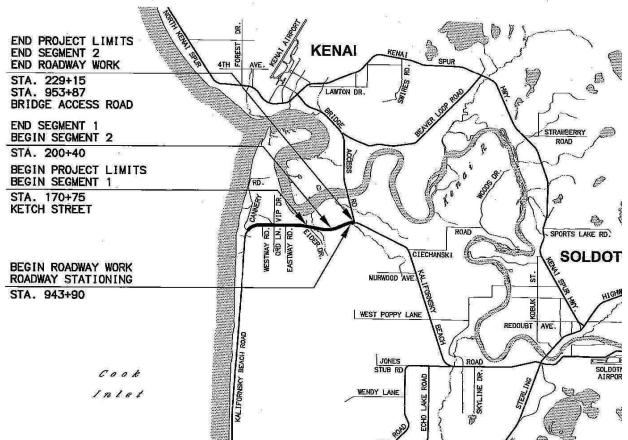
**Road contractors and landscapers** can inadvertently spread invasive plants if they are not careful to use weed-free seed and mulch. Student summer hire, Olivia Pfeiffer, monitored and removed invasives from about 14 miles of recently reseeded roadsides in Kenai, Soldotna and Kasilof under a \$1300 grant from the AACD Invasive Plant Program funded by the USDA Forest Service. In the year ahead, the District will continue to help raise awareness about the importance of preventing weed problems before they start.

## **STATE OF ALASKA DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION AND PUBLIC FACILITIES**

### **PROPOSED PATHWAY PROJECT**

### **KALIFORNSKY BEACH ROAD, PEDESTRIAN PATHWAY (GF) PROJECT NO. 51482**

GRADING, DRAINAGE, PAVING, SIGNALIZATION,  
SIGNING AND STRIPING



One of four road projects included in the Central Kenai Peninsula Road Projects Follow-Up study.



Jen Kain (back row, 3rd from right) and Seward summer program students and teachers after a successful weed pull targeting bird vetch.

### **Assisting individual landowners**

The Kenai SWCD provides Pest Management Plans to cooperators and other willing land owners upon request. These plans give specific guidance for controlling invasive plants using the least toxic, most effective means possible. The District also helps its cooperators develop Conservation Plans, which are tailored to the land user's changing needs over time. Conservation Plans provide clear guidance based on best practices for goals such as land clearing, erosion control, wetlands and habitat preservation, agricultural development, and pasture management.

# PLANTING THE SEED

*Good stewardship of natural resources starts with inspiring young people*

**Alaska's Amazing Soil Tunnel** was a great educational tool at the Kenai River Festival this year. Kids and their parents had fun identifying the vegetable roots overhead ("Is that a *tomato*, Dad??") while learning how soil is made and why people need healthy soil. The District partnered with NRCS to bring the soil tunnel to the peninsula.



**Schoolyard Habitats** Connecting kids with nature lays the foundation for long-term soil and water stewardship. Thanks to a \$25,000 grant, the District was able to hire Dan Funk to spearhead the development of Schoolyard Habitats starting fall, 2012. Schoolyard Habitat is a nationwide program developed and funded by U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service that involves students and community at every phase of visioning, designing, constructing, use and maintenance of projects on school grounds that create habitat for birds, fish, and native plants and gets kids learning outdoors.

# BUILDING ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY

## *Higher Profile*

The District dramatically increased its ability to connect with the public and share information by launching its first ever **website** in April, 2012. The site features beautiful photography by District Supervisor Bill Johnson, news updates, current project descriptions, an extensive high tunnel resources page, and an equipment reservations calendar. We've been on the **radio** to talk about high tunnels and building a local food system. We've visited **schools** to introduce the Schoolyard Habitat program. And we've been a more visible presence than in recent years at events like the **River Festival** and the **Kenai Peninsula State Fair**.



From left to right, Kerry Nelson, Steve Albers, Michelle Martin, Bill Johnson, Heidi Chay and Judy Queen. New website on the screen.

## *Expanded Membership*

Eleven new cooperators joined the District in the past year, including high tunnel growers, peony growers, people just beginning to develop land for agricultural purposes, and the Kenai Peninsula Borough. The District expanded communication with cooperators to include a new e-newsletter.

## *Engaged Board*

The District is fortunate to have five dedicated volunteers who serve on the elected Board of Supervisors, each of whom have contributed their unique talents and interests. Among other things, District Chair **Kerry Nelson** organizes the fertilizer co-op, handles equipment needs and attends every statewide meeting. Vice Chair **Steve Albers** marshalls other volunteers for projects at the Food Bank's Demonstration High Tunnel whenever needed. Steve and Kerry have both provided test sites for experiments with locally made fish fertilizer and compost extract. District Treasurer **Michelle Martin** lends her expertise in invasive plants and mentored our summer student worker. Her soon-to-be-toddler, Dexter, provides excellent entertainment at meetings. In addition to serving as the District photographer and Secretary, **Bill Johnson** personally contacted every co-operator to update our email and mailing lists. And **Judy Queen**, who took office in January of 2012, is a great ambassador for the District at public outreach events and is leading the way to explore ways the District can encourage the better use of fish waste in this fish-centered community.

## *Effective Leadership*

District Manager, Heidi Chay, has been with us a full year and energized this District to new heights. She keeps the Board informed and prepared for action with her ability to capture relevant information from a wide variety of resources and then eloquently articulate it in a concise, manageable form. Her fresh ideas and approach to problem solving are both effective and appreciated. As a master of time management, she gets the job done on time and in great order, as evidenced by the activities outlined in this annual report. The Board looks forward to working with and through Heidi in times to come and gives her highest praise for the progress made this year. As many have put it, "She makes our job easy!"

# The Kenai Soil & Water Conservation District



## About Us

Area homesteaders founded the Kenai Soil & Water Conservation District soon after Alaska statehood in 1959. Originally known as the Kenai-Kasilof Soil Conservation District, the District is a locally-controlled, state-authorized entity with responsibilities delegated by the Alaska Department of Natural Resources' Commissioner under Alaska Statute 41.10. A five-member volunteer Board of Supervisors elected from among the District's cooperators oversees District staff and establishes goals and projects to meet cooperators' needs. The District is funded in part by the State of Alaska. Other sources of funding include private and federal grants, donations, and fees-for-service.

In the wake of the 1930's Dust Bowl disaster, the initial focus of soil and water conservation districts in Alaska and nationwide was to promote environmentally-sound methods of farming to prevent soil erosion. Today, Alaska's 12 districts carry out projects not only to promote sustainable agriculture and conserve farmland, but also to protect wetlands and watersheds, promote forest health, fight the spread of invasive plants, and engage youth in learning about resource conservation.



District Chair Kerry Nelson with her mother, Mary Jo McElroy, taking a break from harvesting certified weed-free hay in July, 2012. Mary Jo and her husband, Patrick, were founding cooperators of the Kenai-Kasilof Soil Conservation District. They operated a dairy in Kasilof in the 1970's and early 1980's.



2012 logo for the annual Conservation Poster Contest sponsored by the National Association of Conservation Districts.

To help contain the spread of invasive plants, we will focus on educating producers and consumers about the value of Weed Free Forage. A new on-line directory of hay growers will help farmers and customers connect.

And we'll expand our work with youth by facilitating development of the first Schoolyard Habitat projects on the Kenai Peninsula. We hope that this year's poster contest theme, "Soil to Spoon," will get kids of all ages thinking about the value of soil, on which all human life depends.

## Looking Ahead — Goals for 2012-13

In the year ahead, our goals include getting to know District cooperators, new and old, and involving them in shaping long-range plans for the District.

To strengthen the local food system, we will work with multiple partners to help producers develop sustainable farming methods and new markets, build on initial steps to map and protect potential farmland, and make a DEC-approved test kitchen available for value-added processing. We look forward to opening a new lending library of sustainable agriculture publications.

For the latest District news, visit us on the web at [www.kenaisoilandwater.org](http://www.kenaisoilandwater.org).

**Kenai Soil and Water Conservation District**  
**July 1st, 2011 to June 30<sup>th</sup>, 2012**  
**Annual Report**  
**Budget Summary**

Goal/Project	Personnel	Fringe	Travel	Supplies	Contractual	Other	TOTAL
1. Agriculture	2000.00	208.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	2208.00
2. Agricultural Equipment	2000.00	208.00	0.00	70.00	0.00	1425	3703.00
3. HT Project/Conservation Plans	16267.25	1669.42	1799.66	114.13	1127.00	85.00	21062.46
4. Integrated Pest Management	6985.75	921.59	2174.24	88.68	0.00	0.00	10170.26
5. Education and Outreach	2000.00	208.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	2208.00
6. District Expansion	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
7. Administration (Other = dues, insurance, postage)	14395.25	1497.28	975.00	477.02	2168.30	2725.64	22238.49
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>43648.25</b>	<b>4712.29</b>	<b>4948.9</b>	<b>749.83</b>	<b>3295.3</b>	<b>4235.64</b>	<b>61590.21</b>

**Sources of Income**

Equipment Rentals/Lease	3,798.00
Ag Forum Ticket Sales	345.00
State FY12 Grant	33,300.00
DNR Cooperative Agreement	2,500.00
NRCS FY09 Contract	47,408.00
Bank Interest	6.50
<b>Total Income:</b>	<b>87,357.50</b>

Reviewed and approved by  
District Board of Supervisors,  
Sept. 20, 2012

  
District Chair

# Kenai Soil & Water Conservation District

## Board of Supervisors

**Chair** – Kerry Nelson

**Vice Chair** – Steve Albers

**Secretary** – Bill Johnson

**Treasurer** – Michelle Martin

**Member** – Judy Queen

## Staff

**District Manager** – Heidi Chay

**IPM Tech** – Jen Kain

**Schoolyard Habitats** – Dan Funk

## Partners

Natural Resources Conservation Service

US Fish & Wildlife Service

Alaska Division of Agriculture

UAF Cooperative Extension Service

Kenai Peninsula 4-H

Boys & Girls Clubs of the Kenai Peninsula

Kenai Peninsula Resource Conservation & Development Inc.

Kenai Peninsula Food Bank

Kenai Peninsula Cooperative Weed Management Area

Kenai Peninsula Fish Habitat Partnership

Kenai Feed

Kenai Resilience

Kenai Watershed Forum

Central Peninsula Garden Club

People Promoting Wellness,  
Local Foods Group

Homer Soil & Water Conservation District

Resurrection Bay Conservation Alliance

## Contact Us

110 Trading Bay Rd., Suite 160

Kenai, AK 99611

(907) 283-8732 x 108

Email: [kenaiswcd@gmail.com](mailto:kenaiswcd@gmail.com)

Website: [www.kenaisoilandwater.org](http://www.kenaisoilandwater.org)

## Rental Equipment

Meri Crusher, for soil preparation

Truax No-Till Drill, for re-seeding

John Deere 660 Roto Tiller

McHale Square Bale Wrapper

John Deere 45-gal. Tow-behind Sprayer

Solo Backpack Sprayers (2)

Buckeye Vegetable & Flower  
Planting Tools:

- Chisel plow
- Spring tooth harrow
- Disc pre-bedder/hiller
- Raised bed shaper
- Plastic mulch/drip tape layer
- 2-row vegetable & flower planter
- Mulch row remover

Broadcast Spreader (hand-cranked)

Earthway Precision Seeder

Thomas Hart Broadfork

For more information, visit the Equipment Rental page at [www.kenaisoilandwater.org](http://www.kenaisoilandwater.org).

**Please join us!** By becoming a cooperator of the Kenai Soil & Water Conservation District, you join a community of local landowners who have pledged to follow a conservation ethic when developing natural resources on their land. For information on membership, visit our website.