

natural connection

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Letter from the Chair



As you can see by the size of this newsletter, it's been a busy time for the District. The most recent event is that your Board of Supervisors changed slightly last month as Mike Miller declined to seek re-election due to a packed schedule and Fred Wolfley was certified in his place. All other supervisors retained their seats in the election.

As a founder of the Alaska Wildlife Conservation Center south of Girdwood, Mike brought a different perspective to the board. Instead of horses and cattle, he deals with bison and bears, providing a refuge for orphaned, injured and ill animals that cannot survive in the wild. We will miss Mike but still expect to see him around occasionally. Mike will always be a part of our extended family.

Fred Wolfley grew up on a ranch in Wyoming, went to Utah State University and came to Alaska in 1964 to teach school in Hoonah. He started the F-Bar-J in 1972 and retired from the Anchorage School District in 1990. Along the way he earned his pilot's license, was a commercial fisherman and then a guide, mostly on camera hunts for brown bear. Fred also owns the Medallion, a charter boat based in Seward.

Fred is a valuable addition to the Board. He is well-respected in the community and I hope you join me in welcoming him.

As we welcome 2007, I look back to the impressive milestones of 2006, but more importantly I am looking forward to 2007 with pride, anticipation and confidence in both our purpose and role in the community and the people who make up the District – you.

❄️ **Happy Holidays and we wish you a happy and healthy 2007 to all of you and yours.** ❄️

ASWCD provides critical assistance

Late last winter, Ryan Stencel, our Operations Manager, received a call that grabbed her attention. Ben Mulligan from Representative Bill Stoltze's office needed someone who could help in Peters Creek and had heard of the ASWCD's involvement and concern with local creeks and the high priority the District allocates to the health of the Municipality's waterways. After hearing the details, the District agreed to take on the project and went to work immediately. One of the first steps was to issue a contract for engineering and hydrology services. DOWL Engineers was the successful proposer.

A large section of Peters Creek experiences significant flooding almost every winter due to the natural relocation of sediment and the rocks and boulders that come down the creek during high water events. The materials "clog" the creek channel in an area where

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Questions and answers about Large Animal Ordinance

By Ryan Stencel, Operations Manager

The deadline is nearing for residents to apply for a free Conditional Use Permit to bring their properties into compliance with the new Large Animal Ordinance. The Anchorage Soil & Water Conservation District (ASWCD) has received many inquiries about what the new ordinance requires and offers these questions and answers.



Anchorage horses come in all sizes.

Q: What is the "Large Animal Ordinance" (LAO)?

A: The LAO was a three-year, sometimes not-so-fun public process, leading to the amendment of several sections of Municipal Code (Title 21) to increase municipal control on properties with horses. The LAO classifies anyone with four or more large animals on their property as a "Large Domestic Animal Facility" (LDAF) and establishes rules for those properties. Properties exceeding one animal per 10,000 square feet of land are required to obtain a "Conditional Use Permit" (CUP). The LAO also limits any structures connected with LDAFs to 10 percent of lot size, up to a maximum of 8,000 square feet. LDAFs with structures or numbers of animals exceeding these limitations require a CUP.

Q: Is it true CUPs are free if the application is filed by February 27, 2007?

A: Yes.

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the decreased slope and velocities provide the perfect place for ice to form. As the ice builds, a dam forms and blocks the creek flow, thereby enabling other dams to form until water – thousands of gallons of water – escape the creek banks and threaten homes.

Now skip forward to November 2006. We had a record summer of rainfall that totally saturated all soils and increased the ground water levels. We had a horrible cold streak. Together, these conditions formed the recipe for the worst flooding residents have seen in their 50 years on the creek.



Excavator works to break up ice dams on Peters Creek.

Lessons learned on Peters Creek:

Lesson 1: Ice dams can construct and reinforce themselves at a phenomenal rate.

Lesson 2: Neither the State nor the Municipality have funds available to provide assistance in these situations. When the plea for help came in, Ryan got on the phone with the District's Board and within hours, Ryan and DOWL went to work on Plan A.

Plan A consisted of an excavator and an experienced operator reaching into the creek to physically break the dams and open the center channel. The Army Corps of Engineers, the Municipality of Anchorage and the Alaska Department of Natural Resources' Office of Habitat Management and Permitting acted quickly to issue all necessary permitting and we descended on Peters Creek.

The excavator company did what it could, but we restricted access to areas with significant vegetation to keep environmental impact at a minimum. With everyone thinking this work was sufficient, we compared notes and hypotheses, said good night to everyone and went home for the weekend.

Lesson 3: Ice dams can construct and reinforce themselves at a phenomenal rate.

By the following Monday, ice dams were again diverting the creek, threatening homes and local road system and forcing us to implement Plan B.

Lesson 4: Explosives, in the hands of an expert, can be the most environmentally friendly option.

With other options exhausted or dismissed, the flooding getting worse by the minute and knowing we were dealing with experienced professionals and competent oversight, we descended on Peters Creek once more. Little did we know it would be for a week, during the worst cold snap in 15 years. We all now own serious winter gear.

Lesson 5: Blasting takes time – lots of time.

Ice blasting methodology dictates that blasting starts at the farthest downstream dam. Open that dam, then move to the next dam upstream. Eventually we reached the damming that was causing the worst flooding. By that time, the enormous ice dams were threatening to damage or destroy the Starner Bridge, a one-lane, wooden structure.

By the time we reached the bridge, the ice had built itself up to within six inches of the bridge. Normally during summer, the clearance between the bridge and water level is about 8 to 10 feet.

At present, the problem section of the creek is staying within its area and efforts are now focused on securing funding to permanently fix the problem. We want to address the flooding and erosion issues and increase fish habitat and salmon numbers to what they used to be.



Ice dam threatens Starner Bridge.

The District, its contractor DOWL, and all the affected residents would like to thank all participating agencies and the Local Road Board for their quick action, advice, oversight and support through this emergency. It has been great working with you.

Lesson 6: Not only can ice dams construct and reinforce themselves at a phenomenal rate, but also, sometimes creeks can be self-destructive and as unrelenting and unreasonable as a mother bear protecting her cubs.