

Anchorage Soil & Water Conservation District

2005 annual report



ANCHORAGE SOIL & WATER
CONSERVATION DISTRICT



Hugo may be the most famous resident of the Alaska Wildlife Conservation Center, one of the Anchorage Soil and Water Conservation District's most active cooperators.

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About the ASWCD

For more than 50 years, the area that now operates as the Anchorage Soil and Water Conservation District (ASWCD) was part of the Alaska Soil and Water Conservation District. The Anchorage District separated from the state district in 1997 and is one of 12 districts in Alaska organized by cooperators under State charter to help Alaskans conserve, maintain and improve our natural resources and environment.

The Alaska districts are non-regulatory entities of the State of Alaska under the Department of Natural Resources, and operate under Alaska Statute 41.10, the Alaska Soil and Water Conservation Law.

Board of supervisors and advisors

Greg Bell	Chair
Linda Perkins	Vice-Chair
Jon Nauman	Secretary/Treasurer
Mike Miller	Supervisor
Janey Moen	Supervisor
Ryan Stencil	Operations Manager
Crystal Leonetti	District Conservationist, Anchorage Field Office, Natural Resources Conservation Service



Dear Cooperators,

For the Anchorage Soil and Water Conservation District (ASWCD), 2005 was a year of reconstruction, realignment and new relationships.



We took a hard look at the way the District conducts its business and concluded we could increase our efficiency and reduce our costs by contracting for most of our services. This decision saves several thousand dollars each year and results in superior service and better accountability for you. We now contract for our daily operations, our financial accounting, our communications and for specialized services, including ones associated with our Fuel Reduction Program. We proudly direct you to our financial reports, which are up-to-date, accurate to the penny and carry our independent accountant's stamp of approval.

Several highly visible private property issues are working their way through the public process. The initial drafts of the large animal ordinance were hostile to home-based and agricultural businesses. Ryan Stencel, our operations manager, is working to change the ordinance so it is founded on good science, good public process and is respectful of private property rights.

The rewrite of Title 21 will determine what we can do with our land for years to come. The original drafts were too complex, too restrictive and way too expensive. Ryan worked with community councils and others to slow the approval process down and allow revisions so Anchorage has the time it needs to determine what it wants for its future.

The District also supported an Anchorage Assembly ordinance limiting the power of eminent domain.

The threat of wildfire hangs over much of our community due to the extensive beetle kill of our spruce forests. We've worked on this problem for five years and this year decided to do something different. We took over funding for the Anchorage woodlot and put together an exciting program to work directly with the private property owners most at risk.

New friends bring new opportunities and our work on the fuel reduction program led to two new relationships that should pay dividends for our cooperators for decades. We signed Memorandums of Understanding with the Alaska Moose Federation and the Alaska Forest Association. These agreements will result in healthier forests and moose populations and, perhaps, a new source of non-polluting, more economical fuel.

Much of our work is made possible by our great team at the top – Senators Ted Stevens and Lisa Murkowski, Congressman Don Young and Governor Frank Murkowski. Your support makes our programs happen and we thank you from the bottom of our hearts.

And special thanks to my board for their dedication and hard work as we welcome our newest board member, Janey Moen.

We look forward to seeing next year's goals come to fruition: a full ASWCD technical infrastructure to support our cooperators; small and large-scale, on-the-ground projects; and fulfilling our new responsibilities to Municipal government. We look forward to our new partnership with the Municipality, bringing solid science and property owner support to the system in the spirit of the Alaska constitutional right to self-governance.



Greg Bell
Chair

Wildfire Fuel Reduction Program

The Anchorage District received a \$1 million appropriation in early 2005 to reduce the wildfire danger in the Anchorage area, thanks to the efforts of Alaska's Congressional Delegation and Governor.

The funding will significantly reduce wildfire fuels in priority areas through direct outreach to private property owners.

The District has designed and implemented a program tailored to the needs of the property owners in response to our mission of supporting private property rights and self-governance. The District program fills a void in the local system with a cost-share program that has few strings attached.

private land owners electronically, as listed in the Municipality property tax rolls. The District also drafted a management plan based on sound forest science and the ASWCD's mission, goals and experience.

The District's program incorporates its mission to support property rights and encourage self-governance. Individuals or neighbors in priority areas are eligible for the program. The District works directly with property owners to develop plans individualized to the property and the owner's wishes. The owner hires a contractor to do the work and the District reimburses the owner following an inspection to ensure quality control.



The District created fuel maps of the Municipality that show 40,000 acres of private, residential land in need of treatment.

Working with consultant Carl Kerr from Northern Economics, who has more than 40 years' experience, the District spent most of the year developing proposed fuel treatment prescriptions, confirming prescription accuracy on a private lot and creating fuel maps to determine priority areas. The District is now able to tie affected beetle-killed areas to

The reimbursement level ranges from 100 percent for financially disadvantaged property owners to 40 percent for removal of woody debris such as limbs only. Generally speaking, the larger the tract to be treated, the larger the reimbursement level. Neighboring property owners can band together to meet acreage requirements.

The cost-share program continues a campaign that dates back to 1999 when the ASWCD initiated a \$444,627 mitigation and education program in partnership with the Municipality, U.S. Forest Service, State of Alaska Division of Forestry and other organizations and agencies. A second grant of

\$265,000 from the Municipality went to reduce fuels and expand the public wood lots. A third grant of \$438,000 funded outreach and community education.

Test site proves value of removing spruce

The Anchorage Soil and Water Conservation District started its Fuel Reduction Program in the spring of 2005. Research and discussion with land managers, foresters and agency staff suggested no one had quantified the benefits of dead spruce removal, as far as a specific percentage reduction in fire hazard. There was general consensus that removing both short-term and longer-term fuels (i.e., smaller material and large tree trunks) would reduce fire potential but the District felt a small test site was needed to answer these questions.

A private landowner above Potter Marsh agreed to permit us to use his three-acre property for this test. Detailed vegetative information on both dead and down spruce was recorded in late summer and a contractor was hired to treat the property according to the District's initial prescription. An estimated 40 tons of material per acre was projected before treatment. Large material was hauled to the Anchorage woodlot and measured for quantity and quality. Of the total 120 projected tons, an estimated 90 tons was hauled to the woodlot, while other smaller debris was chipped on site and spread on the cleared ground for mud control. There is an estimated 25 percent reduction in fire hazard as measured by U.S. Forest Service fire behavior models.



Anchorage woodlot

After supporting the Anchorage woodlot for several years, the District will take over its operation in 2006.

The woodlot provides Anchorage residents with an easily-accessible place to safely dispose of non-construction woody debris, thereby reducing fire danger on their property. For the last several years the lot has been located near the intersection of O'Malley and C Street. It was heavily used by Anchorage residents who deposited 14,000 yards of material during 2005. That's approximately 10,000 pickup truckloads of woodchips, or more than 3.5

Woodlot popular with residents

Type	Quantity
Deposited woody debris	5,601,000 pounds
Deposited woody debris	2,801 tons
Pick-up truckloads	10,000
Estimated acres treated	2,500
Estimated cost per acre	\$90



– Thanks, Anchorage Soil and Water Conservation District for extending the Anchorage wood lot hours, for offering free wood chips to me and my neighbors and for your effort to reduce the abundant fuels on the Hillside. –

K.N. / Anchorage Hillside

million pounds of dead spruce and other flammable vegetation.

The District's contractor uses a large tub grinder to manufacture mulch and woodchips, which are used on playgrounds, trails and for landscaping projects. Work is under way to investigate other marketable uses for the deposited biomass, including potential wood-to-energy uses.

The ASWCD increased the woodlot's funding after the Anchorage Fire Department announced it would significantly reduce the hours of operation in 2005. The District sponsored two-thirds of the lot's hours during 2005 and kept it open for an additional month, because of property owner demand.



Debris deposited at the Anchorage woodlot is ground into mulch and woodchips. The District is exploring alternative uses of the biomass.

Chester Creek returns to natural state and original creekbed

The largest ASWCD Cooperator project of 2005 is the restoration of the section of Chester Creek within the Creekside Town Center project.

The Venture Development Group returned a quarter-mile section of Chester Creek to its original state, capable of supporting natural habitat for wildlife, thanks to technical and financial assistance from the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and the support of the Anchorage Soil and Water Conservation District.

This portion of Chester Creek was severely damaged when the site was developed as the Alaska Village Trailer Park back in the 1960s. The once vital creek was rerouted into an irrigation ditch that dissected the property, destroying the natural flow and filtering of the stream, compromising wildlife habitat, and decreasing the value.

Venture began acquiring property in 1999 to develop the Creekside Town Center, a concept that incorporates a mix of open spaces with a variety of housing options, retail, commercial and community

use facilities. It took \$2.5 million to bring the trailer park site up to environmental standards suitable for new development.

The creek rehabilitation, which cost approximately \$480,000, included realigning the waterway to create curves, pools, riffles and a floodplain. Some 32,000 willow shrubs and other native trees and plants were planted to reduce stream bank erosion. Birch and spruce trees were added along the stream corridor.

NRCS State Conservation Engineer Rob Sampson and Anchorage's NRCS District Conservationist Crystal Leonetti provided technical assistance. Other partners included the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Cook Inlet Housing, Anchorage Waterways Council and the Municipality of Anchorage.

NRCS supplied Venture with \$221,752 in cost share assistance under its Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP). Venture will actively maintain and manage the project for the next 10 to 20 years.



As shown in the photo at left, taken in 2000, and the photo at right, taken in 2005, Venture Development used a WHIP grant to restore a quarter-mile section of Chester Creek to its original state.

Alaska Moose Federation

The ASWCD has reached agreement with the Alaska Moose Federation to help that organization further its goals of active habitat management, increasing public safety, healthy forests, effective wildlife management, sound land management practices and the conservation, development and utilization of Alaska's renewable natural resources.

Essentially the Federation mission includes all the natural resource categories that the ASWCD focuses on, including air, water, soil, plants and humans and animals.

The Memorandum of Understanding allows the District to administer certain grants and appropriations for the Federation and to cooperate in mutually beneficial educational projects.

The Federation was organized in 2000 by a visionary, Gary Olson, and a group of biologists and others



Hillside willow are mature and generally too tall for moose to eat. A younger, more vigorous stand of willow or other hardwoods provide better moose browse. These are normally the result of fire, land clearing or vegetative removal. Moose will be drawn to this browse, especially during late winter and early spring, and away from roads and schools.



– Thank you Anchorage Soil and Water Conservation District for accepting our request to partner in our pursuit of rebuilding Alaska's moose populations. This commitment will make Alaska a better, safer place for both people and moose. –

Gary Olson / Alaska Moose Federation

concerned about the loss of moose habitat and the increasing number of moose-human encounters.

The group's advisory board includes the Alaska Congressional Delegation and many state legislators. The group advocates for sustainable, responsible use of resources and has developed programs to keep

moose off school grounds, away from railroad tracks and off the highways. The group's first project was to install electrical mats at a small airport property, thereby preventing moose from entering the airport and cutting to zero the airplane-moose encounters on the tarmac.

Ponds improve habitat at Center



The Alaska Wildlife Conservation Center provides refuge for orphaned, injured and ill animals and is an important source of wildlife education and awareness in Southcentral Alaska.

Another ASWCD Cooperator, the Alaska Wildlife Conservation Center (AWCC) near Portage, used the Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP) and EQIP to help with several projects on the 140-acre property.

Ponds built with WHIP grants provide a refuge for migratory and injured birds ready for release. Both the Bird Learning and Treatment Center in Anchorage and the Alaska Raptor Center in Sitka send ducks to the ponds for a “soft release.” The birds stay around the ponds until freeze-over sends them on their way south. An island provides a safe nesting area and a growing fish population inhabits the water.

As an alternative energy advocate, the center keeps one pond filled by using a windmill that powers a water pump.

WHIP is a voluntary program of the Natural Resources Conservation Service for people who want to develop

and improve wildlife habitat. The program provides technical assistance and up to 75 percent cost-share on approved projects. The Center’s ponds cost \$78,000 and are two of the four NRCS program grants the Center has received.



The Center built a pier and observation center that includes interpretative signage that provides information about the importance of wetlands.

Other activities

- The District replaced its full-time executive director and staff position with a contract operations manager, a move that saves money and increases efficiency.
- The District is concerned that private property rights are protected in the Municipality with several issues pending, including major rewrites to Anchorage's land use regulations (Title 21).
- The District refurbished its website – www.aswcd.org - to better serve the public, adding current District information, including Board agendas and financial information, and posting program applications online to make the application process easier for Anchorage residents.



Chips from debris deposited at the Anchorage wood lot were sold for several community projects, including this playground at Fort Richardson.

- The District provided financial support to Alaska Youth for Environmental Action to help host a workshop and to the Anchorage Chapter of the National Barrel Horse Association to underwrite start-up costs at the Chamberlain Equestrian Center in Anchorage.
- The District donated several dump truck loads of woodchips from the Anchorage woodlot for use on an area trail and community center. The District also paid for the trucking costs.



The District revived its newsletter and gave it a new look and new name and new purpose.

- The District donated 750 stethoscopes to Rogers Park School for use in its science curriculum.
- The District instituted the “Conserving Our Community” grant program to support conservation activities within the Municipality. Projects eligible for funding includes those that enhance, rehabilitate or wisely use natural resources. Funded projects include Dragonfly Park, Fish Creek restoration and vegetation restoration.
- The District neared printing of the updated “Field Guide to Anchorage Wetlands.” In partnership with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the guide describes wetland types, plants, fish and wildlife resources, and property owner/developer assistance.
- Four Cooperators were approved for EQIP and WHIP grants and will begin construction this summer to address issues on their property. These grants will match the property owners’ money with more than \$53,000 of NRCS funds.

Statement of functional expenses

	NRCS Appropriation	Fuel Reduction Program	US FWS Wetland Grant	Wildfire Education Grant	Ft. Richardson 5% Program	US FWS Fish Creek Grant	SOA DNR Approp.	US Forest Service CWMA	FY 2005 Totals	FY 2004 Totals
Expenses:										
Salary Wages	\$ -----	\$ -----	\$ -----	\$ -----	\$ -----	\$ -----	\$ -----	\$ -----	\$ -----	\$58,702.25
Travel	\$ 5,371.90	\$ 5,942.71	\$ -----	\$ -----	\$ 537.38	\$ -----	\$ -----	\$ -----	\$ 21,851.99	\$ 22,082.05
Office Supplies	\$ 124.39	\$ -----	\$ -----	\$ -----	\$ 298.36	\$ -----	\$ -----	\$ -----	\$ 422.75	\$ 907.72
Office Operating	\$ 2,983.68	\$ -----	\$ -----	\$ -----	\$ 471.28	\$ -----	\$ -----	\$ -----	\$ 3,454.96	\$ 4,032.83
Contractual	\$ 69,262.12	\$ 11,070.67	\$ -----	\$ -----	\$ 8,465.76	\$202.04	\$ -----	\$ 420.00	\$ 89,420.59	\$ 34,644.72
Board of Directors	\$ -----	\$ -----	\$ -----	\$ -----	\$ 2,781.63	\$ -----	\$ -----	\$ -----	\$ 2,781.63	\$ 1,978.53
District Outreach	\$ 11,900.13	\$ 710.00	\$ -----	\$ -----	\$ -----	\$ -----	\$ -----	\$ -----	\$ 12,610.13	\$ 10,095.69
Equipment	\$ 287.86	\$ -----	\$ -----	\$ -----	\$ 127.08	\$ -----	\$ -----	\$ -----	\$ 414.94	\$ 645.40
Dues	\$ 1,675.00	\$ -----	\$ -----	\$ -----	\$ 100.00	\$ -----	\$1,775.00	\$ -----	\$ 3,550.00	\$ 1,775.00
Other	\$ 1,557.50	\$ -----	\$ -----	\$ -----	\$ -----	\$ -----	\$ -----	\$ -----	\$ 1,557.50	\$ 927.70
Program	\$ 1,215.00	\$251,723.75	\$ -----	\$487.50	\$ 14.00	\$ -----	\$ -----	\$ -----	\$253,440.25	\$141,251.77
TOTAL EXPENSES	\$104,377.58	\$269,447.13	\$ -----	\$487.50	\$12,795.49	\$202.04	\$1,775.00	\$ 420.00	\$389,504.74	\$277,043.66

Statement of grant - appropriation activity / summary

	Balance December 31, 2004	FY 2005 Grants/ Appropriation	FY 2005 Expenses	Balance December 31, 2005
USDA/NRCS Appropriations	\$ 74,281.67	\$ 99,200.00	\$ 104,377.58	\$ 69,104.09
Fuel Reduction Program	\$ -----	\$ 986,000.00	\$ 269,447.13	\$ 716,552.87
US FWS Wetland Guide Grant	\$ -----	\$ -----	\$ -----	\$ -----
Wildfire Education Grant	\$ 57,154.84	\$ (56,667.34)	\$ 487.50	\$ -----
Fort Richardson 5% Program	\$ -----	\$ 24,453.00	\$ 12,795.49	\$ 11,657.51
USFWS Fish Creek Grant	\$ 202.04	\$ -----	\$ 202.04	\$ -----
SOA DNR Appropriation	\$ -----	\$ 4,000.00	\$ 1,775.00	\$ 2,225.00
US Forest Service CWMA	\$ 3,599.62	\$ 2,656.00	\$ 420.00	\$ 5,835.62
TOTALS	\$ 135,238.17	\$ 1,059,641.66	\$ 389,504.74	\$ 805,375.09

Mission statement

Supporting self-governance and private property rights, to assist landowners and land managers with conservation and development through technical, financial and educational programs.



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Anchorage Soil & Water Conservation District Partners

