

Annual Report for FY05 (July 1, 2004 – June 30, 2005)
Alaska Soil and Water Conservation District

Prepared for:
 USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service
 and
 State of Alaska Department of Natural Resources

The Alaska Soil and Water Conservation District covers all areas of the state not organized into a local Soil and Water Conservation District. This area encompasses over 331 million acres of rural Alaska. A board of directors representing regions—Southeast, Southwest, Southcentral, Northwest/Arctic and Interior—governs us. These board members are appointed by the governor and also serve as the Natural Resources Conservation and Development Board that advises the Commissioner of the Department of Natural Resources.

Our board of directors for this fiscal year included:

Southcentral: Dick Zobel, Chair
 Southeast: David Rogers
 Southwest: Jim Van Oss
 Northwest/Arctic: Perry Mendenhall
 Interior: Vacant

In March 2005, the governor replaced this board, but the new board had not been seated by the end of this fiscal year.

The Alaska Soil and Water Conservation District is headquartered in the NRCS Anchorage Field office with a satellite office in the NRCS Juneau Field Office. The Alaska SWCD experienced significant staff turnover during FY05 with the resignation of our Administrative Assistant, Southeast Coordinator in Juneau, and District Manager, as well as replacement of our board of directors. While the former District Manager was on family leave in 2004 and since her resignation in January 2005, our Watershed Specialist has been also serving as Acting District Manager with assistance from the Alaska Association of Conservation Districts (AACD). In addition, we had an exempt Water Quality Technician on staff during summer 2004 and March 2005 to assist the Watershed Specialist.

Alaska SWCD Programs

The Alaska SWCD has five main program areas—Watershed Stewardship, Invasive Plants, Nontimber Forest Products, Conservation Education and District Outreach. During FY05, the following amounts were charged to these NRCS FY03 and FY04 grant categories:

Category	Grant #3 (FY03 funds)	Grant #4 (FY04 funds)	Total NRCS funds spent in FY05
Personnel	\$34,777.79	\$13,585.40	\$48,363.19
Fringe Benefits	\$ 7,056.70	\$ 5,026.48	\$12,083.18
Travel	\$ 3,068.28	\$ 1,902.49	\$ 4,970.77
Equipment	\$ 151.39	\$ 0.00	\$ 151.39
Supplies	\$ 341.73	\$ 29.98	\$ 371.71
Contractual	\$ 340.52	\$ 833.36	\$ 1,173.88
Operations	\$ 1,680.11	\$ 197.08	\$ 1,877.19
Total	\$47,416.52	\$21,574.79	\$68,991.31

Grants other than NRCS funds from FY03 and FY04 are noted by project. In FY05, we spent a total of \$38,372.56 in non-NRCS grant funds.

Watershed Stewardship Projects

Engaging Rural Communities in Watershed Stewardship

This project was an expansion of the Kobuk Watershed Stewardship Project. In addition to working with the five communities along the Kobuk River, we worked with the communities in the Lake Iliamna and Kuskokwim Delta watersheds. This project began in September 2003 and was completed in March 2005.

This project incorporated resource protection, education and community service. The purpose of this project was to provide localized technical assistance in watershed stewardship issues, to provide local training in stewardship concepts and monitoring protocols and to help establish baseline data in each watershed. We have worked with these communities to provide local training in regards to surface water quality monitoring. We also assisted the communities to collect their first set of data. And, we worked with several environmental coordinators to provide age-appropriate watershed stewardship education for school children.

We received \$33,234.00 in grant funds from the Coastal Management Program for this project in 2003. In FY05, we spent \$16,442.51 in grant funds and thus completed this grant (AACD code 72). We also spent \$5,307.94 in funds during FY05 from a grant through the Department of Community and Economic Development (AACD code 45). In addition the local villages were responsible for paying travel costs for the Watershed Specialist during these visits. We are continuing to search for funds to continue this project. Upon completion of these grants, salary for the watershed specialist for this task was charged to the NRCS grant.

Whittier Watershed Council

Our District Manager provided support in partnership with NRCS for the formation of the Whittier Watershed Council. Tasks included contacting stakeholders, creating meeting agendas, and facilitating meetings. Upon her resignation, these tasks were taken on by NRCS and Alaska Rural Water Association personnel. Expenses for this task were charged to the NRCS grant.

Unspecified Watershed Stewardship Activities

Funds were expended for these activities to hire a Water Quality Technician. The Water Quality Technician assisted the Watershed Specialist with field work, report writing, and data management. He also made a trip to Newhalen to speak to their school children about water quality testing at the Environmental Coordinator's request. We also have been invited to provide technical assistance to the Native American Fish and Wildlife Society's Tribal Water Quality Training Program. Our Watershed Specialist served as an instructor at the NAFWS Phase I training in Anchorage in May 2005 through a contract agreement. Expenses for this task were charged to the NRCS grant.

Upcoming Watershed Projects for FY06

During this fiscal year, we secured DEC Alaska Clean Water Actions funding to perform a baseline water quality and fecal coliform assessment of the lower Nushagak River for FY06 (\$24,175). We began work on this project on July 18, 2005. Partners in this project include Bristol Bay Native Association, the Nushagak-Mulchatna Watershed Council, and Choggiung Limited.

Invasive Plants Projects

Cooperative Weed Management Areas and Garlic Mustard Eradication

The Alaska Soil and Water Conservation District is working with four communities in Southeast Alaska to establish Cooperative Weed Management Areas (CWMAs). CWMAs are formal partnerships between local landowners, state and federal agencies and other concerned citizens working together to prevent the spread of invasive plants and to control outbreaks. Since 2003, the Alaska Soil and Water Conservation District worked extensively in Juneau to establish the first ever Alaska CWMA. The boundaries of this CWMA coincide with the City and Borough of Juneau. During this fiscal year, we have worked toward establishing CWMAs in Wrangell/Petersburg, Sitka, and Prince of Whales Island.

In addition to CWMA development we have been working on the eradication of garlic mustard. Garlic mustard is a highly invasive plant that has the potential to destroy valuable habitat because it will out compete native vegetation wherever it can become established. Garlic mustard has only been found in Alaska in seven acres of downtown Juneau. Our former Southeast Coordinator was heavily involved in this effort. Though this position is vacant, the Juneau Invasive Plants Action (JIPA) and other active partners (USFS, NRCS, City and Borough of Juneau, Central Council of the Tlingit and Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska, USFWS, Capital Disposal, AACD, and several private landowners) have continued the plant pulls. These key players are eager to have a Alaska SWCD Southeast Coordinator on board.

We received \$57,060 in 2003 from the USFS, State and Private Forestry, Forest Health Protection Program for garlic mustard eradication and development of the first Cooperative Weed Management Areas in the state. In FY05, we spent \$4,888.37 and have \$30,964.80 remaining in the grant (AACD code 42). We have also received in-kind support from state and federal agency personnel and volunteer weed pullers. This work will continue through 2005, and we will be searching funds to support this work beyond this time.

Southeast Invasive Plants Project

This project complements the work of our other invasive plants project, Cooperative Weed Management Areas and Garlic Mustard Eradication. However, this project is supported by the US Fish and Wildlife Service. There are two main components to the project—the Garlic Mustard Conservation Plan and Southeast Invasive Plants Outreach.

The Garlic Mustard Conservation Plan involves getting all landowners in the infestation area to agree to a set of management practices to be applied throughout the infestation area under a single NRCS conservation plan. We will use the NRCS Conservation Planning Process to help landowners identify means of eradicating garlic mustard that are consistent with their own objectives for their properties. The USFWS is providing a 50% cost-share match for practices applied on the ground. These practices could include weed tarps, herbicide application and weed pulls. The Garlic Mustard Conservation Plan is expected to cover 7-10 acres of downtown Juneau and could involve as many as 30 landowners. By working with these landowners on a conservation plan we will also have the opportunity provide education and outreach about good conservation practices, invasive plants and the Alaska SWCD. The NRCS Juneau Field office is a significant partner on this part of the project. We are also working with the Central Council of Tlingit and Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska who are facilitating communication with tribal members living or owning property in the infestation area that is also within the Juneau Indian Village. This will be the first NRCS-certified conservation plan in downtown Juneau.

The Southeast Invasive Plants Outreach consists of the creation and publication of an invasive plants field guide for Southeast followed by distribution of the guide to the public through community events, such as the Southeast Alaska State Fair in Haines, and various outreach programs. The guide will contain information on why invasive weeds are important, how to identify them, descriptions of major species, how to report occurrence to the statewide database, species-specific management information, and guidelines on herbicide use. It is intended to be both a resource for the professional land manager and useful and interesting to the general public.

Drafts of the guides were printed and reviewed during this fiscal year. We expect the final printing to be completed in September 2005, and guides will be distributed shortly after this.

The main partner in this project is the USFWS, Partners for Fish and Wildlife program. The USFS, State and Private Forestry, Forest Health Protection Program has volunteered staff time to help with the research and writing.

The US Fish and Wildlife Service has provided \$17,000 for this project work in 2003. Of these funds, \$12,000 is allocated to printing the Southeast and Southcentral Invasive Plants Guide, and \$5,000 is for salary time of the Southeast Coordinator. In FY05 we spent \$117.03 and have \$15,950 remaining in the grant (AACD code 70).

Upcoming Invasive Plants Projects for FY06

During this fiscal year, we acquired a \$5,000 grant from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation for garlic mustard eradication in Juneau. Grant paperwork is expected to be completed in August 2005.

Nontimber Forest Products

This year the Alaska SWCD once again participated on the conference planning committee for the Alaska NTFP Workgroup. We were an integral part of the planning for the first ever Alaska NTFP Conference in November of 2001. This year we supported the conference that was held in October 2004 in Sitka. Through AACD, we are also serving as the grant administrators for conference funding and with conference registration.

The Alaska Nontimber Forest Products Workgroup has the following mission:

- Providing a forum for discussions of policies, ethics and programs concerning nontimber forest products.
- Supporting the development of best management practices for products harvested in Alaska.
- Identifying research needs regarding economic, social and biological aspects of NTFPs in Alaska.

The partners in the Alaska Nontimber Forest Products Workgroup include:

- Alaska Association of Conservation Districts
- Alaska Soil and Water Conservation District
- Cooperative Extension Service, University of Alaska Southeast
- Natural Resources Conservation Service
- Sitka Tribe of Alaska
- Sitka Wood Utilization Center
- US Forest Service

We raised over \$38,665 in conference sponsorships since 2001. Of this, we spent \$3,037.36 in FY05 and have \$5,113.03 remaining (AACD code 24). We received a USFS grant during this fiscal year for \$16,905.00 to pay for approved speaker travel to the NTFP Conference. We spent \$7,769.37 of these funds and have \$9,135.63 remaining (AACD code 92). Additional grant funds included a USFS Civil Rights Outreach grant to increase participation of underserved populations in activities of the Alaska NTFP Workgroup. In FY05, we spent the remaining \$809.98 of our \$5,000 grant, thus completing this grant (AACD code 48).

Conservation Education and District Outreach

We had no formal projects in these program areas this year except for the District Manager coordinating the NACD Western States meeting. Expenses for this task were charged to the NRCS grant. We always incorporate district outreach into our project in our other program areas. In addition, whenever possible, we also incorporate conservation education. Our Engaging Rural Alaskan Communities in Watershed Stewardship is a perfect example of this.

Our greatest challenge with these programs is the tremendous area within the Alaska SWCD boundaries and the great expense and time it takes to reach our landowners and cooperators. As we continue to expand our staff and our funding, we hope to do more in these program areas in the future.

Alaska Soil and Water Conservation District Staff

Watershed Specialist, Acting District Manager: Lisa Ferber
Water Quality Technician: Joe Stock (temporary hire), Vacant
District Coordinator: Rachel Morse (resigned), Vacant
Southeast Coordinator: Vacant
Administrative Assistant: Vacant