

Natural Resources Conservation & Development Board
Meeting Minutes

Monday, June 10, 2013 at 9:00 a.m.

This meeting was held at 550 W. 7th Avenue, Suite 1270, Anchorage, Alaska and by teleconference.

Board members in attendance:

George Woodbury
Cheryl Thompson
Carol Kenley
Bernie Karl
Ina Jones

Others in attendance:

Ed Fogels, Deputy Commissioner, DNR
Shana Joy, Executive Director, NRCDB
Esther Tempel, Legislative Liaison,
DNR
Franci Havemeister, Director, DNR
Division of Agriculture

Brianne Blackburn, Invasive Plant
Coordinator, DNR
Ken Marsh, AACD/ Upper Su SWCD
Darcy Etcheverry, Fairbanks SWCD
Dee Pond, CAO, AACD
Joni Scharfenberg, Fairbanks SWCD
Ryan Stencil, Anchorage SWCD

1. Call to Order – Determination of Quorum

It was determined that a quorum was present and the meeting was called to order by George Woodbury at 9:02 a.m.

2. New Board Member Welcome

The Chair introduced Ina Jones, the new board member representing the Southwest Alaska/Kenai Peninsula region. Ina offered information about her background and agricultural experience in Alaska. She is a life-long Alaskan and makes her home ranching at the head of Katchemak Bay. Her family ran a guide business for 30 years, until 1995. She is on the board to learn and represent agriculture from her area.

3. Approval of Agenda

Shana Joy explained that the NRCS Report (#8 on the agenda) could be removed. Bob Jones, NRCS State Conservationist had to travel out of state unexpectedly and cannot attend the meeting. **Cheryl moved to approve the agenda; Bernie seconded the motion. The motion passed.**

4. Approval of March 26th, 2013 Meeting Minutes

Bernie moved to approve the minutes as presented; Cheryl seconded the motion. The motion passed.

5. Executive Director Report

Shana Joy provided a verbal report to the board. She has been working on updating DNR's department orders (DO) that relate to the SWCDs. DO 120 discusses how DNR's divisions interact with the SWCDs and is still a work in progress. The Divisions of Agriculture, Forestry, and Mining Land & Water are providing feedback to

Shana on this DO for a future meeting. DO 147 appears later on in the agenda. Shana is also working with multiple agencies, the DNR Commissioner's office, and the Anchorage SWCD on the Sand Lake elodea project. She is working to answer SWCD questions regarding state farm conservation plans which will also appear later on the agenda and reviewing HB 207. It has become clear that parts of the District Operations Manual need to be updated; she is working with AACD on financial reports and district audit questions.

6. DNR Deputy Commissioner Comments

Ed Fogels offered comments to the board. Revision of the department orders is important because they lay out how the divisions interact with the SWCDs which has occurred in an ebb and flow in the past. The board should pay special attention to them. He offered a legislative session close-out update for DNR:

- *SB 27* - The wetlands primacy bill passed. This allows DNR to evaluate taking on wetlands permitting from the federal government in Alaska. If DNR could get primacy for wetlands permitting we could be light-years ahead. DNR will hire some folks to work with the US Army Corps of Engineers and the EPA to put together a state wetland permitting program application. It will likely take about two years to do this. EPA has to approve the state's program. Government will have to grow to take this program on and an estimate of staff needs (somewhere between 10 and 50) and funding has to be calculated. Contracting will be looked at. Bernie would like to see the Governor take a stronger position on this issue. Ed noted that primacy for water permitting took about 6 years total.
- *HB 77* (housekeeping items for DNR). This bill contained a couple of items that became controversial. A change to the statutory water reservation language became contentious. DNR manages the quantity of water in the state; DEC manages the quality. Three types of permits DNR issues: a water right (such as for a private well, permanent), a temporary water use authorization (such as for ice road construction, largest workload for DNR), a water reservation (an authorization to keep water in the water-body for wildlife habitat). Alaska is one of the only states in the nation that allows individuals to file for water reservations. In most other states only a public agency can do this. Interest groups have been filing for water reservations in Alaska. Five years of data collection is required to process one of these applications. An interest group has filed for a water reservation in relation to the Chuitna Coal project and claims that for the next 5 years, while the application is being processed, DNR must prohibit any water use from the water-body in question during that time. DNR does not believe that this is good public policy and preventing Alaskans from using their water resources is not a good thing. Removing the word 'person' was taken to mean that Alaskans were losing their rights to water but that is not the case at all. The bill is in the Senate Rules committee. DNR worked really hard but didn't get it done last session. Probably the most public testimony last session was when the bill was heard in Senate Finance.
- *HCR 1* (State Food Resource Development Group). It will create a group of agency folks (state and federal) to put all of the agricultural issues on the table and seek to make progress, on research, local purchasing, etc... Bernie doesn't think it takes another group and the Governor should enforce the existing state law requiring local products purchasing. Franci has worked through several issues with DEC that has helped the agricultural industry. Ed thinks that it will enhance communications between the agencies.
- *HB 40* (municipal tax exemptions). It is intended to give municipalities the ability to give tax exemptions to property owners for agricultural structures. The borough/muni may give an exemption. The scope of an agricultural tax deferment or exemption is broadened. Storage buildings are included.
- *HB 202* – The bison fee bill – has not passed but would raise the lottery fee for a Delta bison tag to \$20. The extra funds would be put toward crop damage mitigation somehow. Representative Feige introduced this bill.

- *HB 158* – This bill is for a guide concession program and it has not passed. It would create a regulatory system for big game commercial guides in Alaska. It was very controversial; there are some guides who want to be regulated. The AK Department of Fish & Game says it makes sense biologically for game management. DNR has the regulatory authority already.
 - Ina Jones requested more information on this legislation. Her family was in the guiding business for 30 years and it was regulated at that point. Registered guides were licensed. Her brother was licensed for any game unit in Alaska at one point and as more guides were licensed the number of units each guide could utilize was whittled down to 3 units per guide at the end.
 - Ed pointed out that a system did exist for licensing guides in the past but the Supreme Court tossed invalidated in 1988. Now there are an unlimited number of guides that can hunt any game unit. This new system would limit the number of guides per unit and an application process would be conducted to issue guide licenses for a period of time.
- *SB 28 - Susitna Forest bill* – This bill is still active. It would create a Susitna State Forest. This would not create a park but a legislatively designated state forest for timber management and long-term production. The Southeast State Forest has gone well but timber is a larger industry in that area.
 - George pointed out that some timber industry opposition stems from the loggers not believing the Division of Forestry will actually conduct timber sales. The Mat-Su Borough is a difficult place for timber companies because the borough enacted an ordinance over-regulating timber harvesting operations. The loggers have got to get behind the legislation.
 - The creation of a state forest in the area is still a good action for the future and perhaps the borough assembly will change the ordinance in question. DNR is trying to do their part to support the timber industry. This bill has not had a single hearing so far. The creation of this forest will drive access development too. It ties in with the Governor's Road to Resources effort.
 - Bernie pointed out that the other timbered areas such as university land and mental health land would not become part of the state forest.

The western Susitna access project would provide access across the Big Susitna River. HDR (a contractor) has been looking at all of the natural resources in that region: timber, minerals, settlement etc... The public will be involved in this project too. There have been 177 fires so far in Alaska this season. Two staffed fires right now – the Gold Mine Fire near McGrath and the Bitter Creek fire near Tok. So far the Division of Forestry has a handle on it. George proposed a Division of Fire so the Division of Forestry would not be hampered by fire season. The largest component of their budget is for fire. The State Forester is completely occupied during fire season.

7. Alaska Association of Conservation Districts Report

Ken Marsh, AACD President, offered a report. The spring conference went very well but it was too bad that the NRCDB did not hold a meeting at the conference. Hopefully, the board will be able to meet with the fall conference and attend the conference to generate communication back and forth. A real open budget process with the AACD board was held at the conference which clarified a lot for the board members. It was very worthwhile. Dee and Cat are organizing and changing up processes within AACD, working with an accounting firm, and increasing transparency. The association is getting to be a closer group. He thinks that AACD needs to work closely with Shana on district audits because it is a little too loose right now; it needs to be sensible and affordable without AACD being too intrusive into individual districts. Ken reported that AACD is in great shape and their efforts to secure funding seem to be effective for now.

11. DNR Department Order #147

Shana provided a brief explanation about the purpose of this department order. Originally (2005) it was to prescribe duties for the soil and water conservation districts prior to the adoption of the District Operations Manual. It has been amended to re-affirm the District Operations Manual with edits to reflect its adoption in 2006.

Bernie moved to approve the department order as amended. Cheryl seconded the motion. The motion passed.

12. State Farm Conservation Plan (SFCP) Guidance

Shana introduced a draft memo to the SWCDs, included in the meeting packet, containing some guidance regarding the handling of state farm conservation plans by SWCDs. The purpose of the memo is to try and sort out some legal questions from the districts about their obligations with respect to SFCP. The districts are there to help landowners develop a SFCP and help with issue resolution over time and Shana believes that this is widely understood by the districts. How do districts figure into civil suits between landowners when a SFCP is part of the suit and do they have liability?

Joni Scharfenberg thinks the memo addresses some of the issues. The SFCP form has changed and now it seems that the district is expected to sign off on the SFCP and assumes that districts have conducted a site visit. The Fairbanks SWCD receives a plan, their technician looks at it for conservation issues such as erosion or water quality, and then the board signs off on the plan. Now it seems that the district is expected to verify and approve the location and purpose of buildings and other structures that are not directly related to soil/water conservation. In order to do this a site visit would be necessary but that hasn't been the process in the past for the Fairbanks district. Her board has decided to write a separate letter for each SFCP brought before them as to what they have reviewed and the board's opinion of it. The Division of Agriculture is looking more closely now at SFCPs. The Fairbanks SWCD is concerned that by signing off on the plan they are open to legal problems when they are not reviewing or verifying other components of the plan outside of soil/water conservation matters. Shana believes that this particular question has been addressed in the memo; districts should state what they have done, what they are approving and what has been reviewed for each SFCP so the Division of Agriculture is provided with a clear statement from the district.

Joni also pointed out that funding is an issue for staff-time to conduct site visits for SFCPs. The Fairbanks SWCD would like it addressed that districts are only looking at soil/water conservation matters. It is still unclear what the districts responsibilities are with respect to SFCPs.

Franci Havemeister pointed out that the contents of the SFCPs are in regulations including all the pieces of information that should be there. When a plan is being amended later on, the Division of Agriculture needs to know what actually exists on that parcel of land (as compared to the original plan). She understands that the district is not necessarily an expert on farm structures but the structures should be noted on the plan either way.

Joni pointed out that plans change and what the land looks like now is likely to be different from the original plan especially since it is being updated by the landowner. Cooperators have commented to the district that there should be an easier way to update SFCPs and that the SWCD should only be looking at conservation issues. Joni replied – Probably see 3 to 6 plans each year depending on land sales activity.

Joni – What if there is a lawsuit? The district should not be involved in any lawsuits with respect to SFCPs. The Fairbanks SWCD did look at the Riddle plan that is currently under litigation. Records were subpoenaed from the district.

Franci pointed out that the Division of Agriculture is mainly interested in acquiring accurate information. Land discussions are ongoing within DNR and SFCPs have been part of those discussions. She offered to add a checkbox to the SFCP form for districts that they have addressed only soil/water conservation issues. Joni is concerned that districts might be viewed as regulatory even if they are funded to conduct site visits. Franci – the district only has to say that the information on the plan is as presented or not. Joni stated again that compensation for staff time would be needed. The Division of Agriculture would be happy to provide a letter of support for the good work that the SWCDs do but funds are short all around.

Bernie pointed out the value of having a SFCP and following it for the protection under the Alaska Right to Farm Law. George asked Franci to make the change to the SFCP form so the district could utilize the Division form rather than write separate letters. Bernie thinks that a fee should be charged for SFCP inspections. Joni pointed out that lots of other issues will come up to the NRCDB about SFCPs and what should be included in them. Franci added that the SFCP requirement itself is under discussion. There are variations of requirements for agricultural land depending on the title itself – homestead, old title, or new title.

The memo is a good start but doesn't fully address the district's questions. Franci offered to follow up with the Fairbanks SWCD on amending the form. Shana will continue to follow the discussion as well. The memo will remain draft until further ironed out with the Division of Agriculture.

10. DNR Division of Mining, Land & Water Overview

Brent Goodrum, Director, and Marty Parsons, Deputy Director provided an overview of the structure and functions of their division.

Bernie asked about municipal land entitlements. Marty Parsons explained that the amount of land for municipalities depends on a formula based on the size of the borough/municipality. The formula, perhaps 10%, is in statute. The Fairbanks North Star Borough has not done much to sell the lands appropriated to them into private ownership. The main point of the land is for economic development and to build a tax base. Bernie would like to see state funding to municipalities halted until that land is put into private hands; it would provide an incentive.

The current statehood land entitlement for Alaska is about 105.8 million acres. Approximately 5.4 million acres remain (either selected or top-filed) to be received by the state. The state has top-filed for lands currently held by military installations or other federal uses so that those lands could become state lands if the federal government ever divested interest in those lands. It is a good thing to be patient and diligent in land selection to make the best possible choices. The Alaska native corporations have approximately 2 million acres left to receive which is a priority over the state's entitlement. All state land selections had to be submitted by 1993 to the federal government.

Ina asked if the division conducts local research before selecting a piece of land. In her area there were some remote 10-acre parcels purchased from the state some time ago and the new landowners didn't stay on the land partly because there was no access to it and the area was far from community infrastructure. At about the same time an area alongside the highway was turned into a state park which frustrated local people because it would have been prime land for settling rather than the remote areas the state made available. Marty Parsons explained that the state park was designated legislatively and so DNR has to manage it for that purpose. When the division creates land management plans areas that are suitable for settlement are identified and there is a full public process involved in the finalization of those plans. Often after municipal entitlements, parks, and other specific land uses the areas suitable for settlement are sometimes not the most accessible parcels. Ed Fogels added that the state simply does not have readily accessible land available to offer and the state receives a lot of pressure to sell state land into private ownership. The current program is the remote recreational land sales program. The

homesteading programs no longer exist. Often the readily accessible lands near to established communities were selected by those communities and ownership transferred to them as part of their entitlements.

Bernie asked if large sections of land could still be staked and purchased by individuals. The parcel size limit is 20 acres for the remote recreational programs. Under agricultural land sales larger parcels are allowed. Franci Havemeister said that a variety of parcel sizes are being considered for the Nenana area. Staking of agricultural land is not allowed. The state surveys and appraises the land for any land sales.

A backlog of permit authorizations existed in the division when Brent came on board. Some success has been achieved, reducing the backlog by 1,000 authorizations. This backlog included leases, easements, land use permits, and water authorizations. Many of the water reservation applications in the backlog were applied for the US Fish & Wildlife Service on the North Slope. The Unified Permit Project is an automated web-based permitting platform to track permit processing that is being implemented and permit areas are working into this system over time. This platform may be implemented throughout the department to utilize a similar system to increase efficiency in authorization processing.

Bernie asked about grazing permit renewals. Who is in charge of processing those? Rick Thompson is the regional leader for South-central and perhaps Adam Smith may be a good contact as well. Franci pointed out that a couple of new short-term, revocable, grazing permits have been issued in the past couple of years. Bernie asked if fencing was allowed as part of such a state lease/permit? He pointed out the issues with the plains bison and concerns over re-introduction of the wood bison and the potential impacts to agriculture; if a large enough lease were created couldn't the wood bison be fenced into a specific area and managed by private individuals. Ina pointed out that it had already been tried on the Kenai Peninsula and it was a failure; fencing was ineffective in containing the animals. Bison carry brucellosis which is concerning to wild ungulates. Ed Fogels pointed out that a final decision on release of the wood bison has not been made as yet. Anyone can apply for a grazing lease or permit but the demand is not very high right now. A permit/lease only allows the holder to graze animals in the area – it does not preclude other uses of the land such as recreation.

9. HB 207 Discussion

Representative Feige opened with a few comments about his bill. His reasoning includes consideration of constituent comments that interaction with the Division of Agriculture could be improved, and communications overall between the state and the agricultural industry. The Board of Agriculture & Conservation (BAC) is a loan-approval body for ARLF. He wants to make the BAC more of an advisory board to facilitate communications. There is a limitation on the BAC in that if a person is utilizing the ARLF they cannot serve on the board. Rep. Feige sees this as a hurdle to including appropriate citizens on that board and was looking for a way to solve this problem. Approving the loans elsewhere (Dept. of Commerce) is the way to go and creating a new board was not practical. Combining the BAC and NRCDB would accomplish the advisory function needed and also realize cost-savings to make the bill more appealing to the current legislature. This bill will help advance the agricultural industry in Alaska. He is open for comments and suggestions.

George pointed out that in Southeast Alaska the agriculture is timber and aquaculture but timber is not mentioned in the bill and aquaculture is eliminated. A new district in Southeast was just formed and while they do tackle other projects managing timber on private lands and aquaculture is getting a foothold in the area. There are several oyster farmers in the area now. The bill should acknowledge the broader scope of agriculture than it currently does. Rep. Feige responded that forestry is currently dealt with under the Division of Forestry and the Board of Forestry. As for aquaculture, the exclusion of oyster farming was not intentional and the definition may need to be adjusted. George pointed out that state lands are limited in Southeast and so the Division of Forestry has a limited scope of authority there; it is primarily federal and native corporation lands.

Bernie asked about increasing the ARLF back to where it used to be. Franci said that historically some funds from the ARLF were used for Division of Agriculture operations. Rep. Feige believes that is a separate issue from HB 207 and the current capitalization seems to be meeting the demand for loans but if that demand changes there may be a need to increase capital in the fund. Ed Fogels pointed out that long-term 10 year plans exist for all of the agencies and predicting an increase in demand for ARLF loans is difficult. The current funding seems to be adequate but an increased appropriation can be requested later on. Rep. Feige is comfortable advocating for an increased appropriation to ARLF if that becomes necessary. Bernie doesn't have a specific issue with the bill; it may cut down on duplicity and could make some things better – what is the time frame for this bill and implementation. Rep. Feige pointed out that it would depend on passage of the bill but he plans to hold committee hearings next year. Feedback has been positive so far; the Farm Bureau has been supportive.

Mr. Paschall – individuals have been asking questions about it. The old agriculture definition was re-used. He will participate in the Farm Bureau meeting coming up. Mr. Paschall and Rep. Feige are trying to avoid unintentional impacts and have no problem accepting feedback and making tweaks if necessary. It was introduced at the end of the session simply to get it out there for discussion. Nothing is hard and fast and the more work that is done before committee hearings the product improves. Bernie sees more positives than negatives personally. Mr. Paschall pointed out that a committee substitute for the bill will probably be produced before the first committee hearings. Bernie pointed out that forestry is considered agriculture. Rep. Feige pointed out that forestry has its own set of statutes so it would be duplicative.

Carol pointed out that the bill does not address the conservation aspect of forestry and the Division of Forestry doesn't address that and the NRCDB does. Ed Fogels pointed out that the NRCDB does advise the Commissioner on a wider view of issues including forestry but with respect to ARLF would loans to timber operators become possible then. Those two issues need to be considered separately. Bernie pointed out that the future of energy in the state is biomass and it needs to be farmed – growing trees. Cheap natural gas for everybody is not realistic. Forestry should not be excluded; it is a viable energy source and can provide jobs too. George is not clear on how the Division of Forestry has it covered; there is much more going on than the Division of Forestry even has authority to do. Mr. Paschall pointed out that the issue may be the definition of agriculture for the purposes of ARLF as opposed to other views of agriculture. George pointed out that the source of federal assistance funds for forest thinning and other management practices is the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service implementing Farm Bill programs such as EQIP. The Board of Forestry deals primarily with the State Forest Practices Act and doesn't deal with federal lands. There are a lot of activities that the NRCDB has tried to get involved with to assist the forest industry that the Division and Board of Forestry don't cover or can't do. Forestry needs to be a part of agriculture. George pointed out that streamlining is a good idea overall as long as ground that's been made isn't lost.

Ina is interested in the aquaculture exclusion. A clearer definition is necessary to distinguish between the broader aquaculture (water) and shellfish mariculture (saltwater). Mariculture is saltwater oyster farming and farming kelp which is growing in her area. It's unclear if a definition of mariculture exists specifically in statute already. Ina read from a portion of the Alaska Constitution provided to her by a neighboring oyster farmer. The USDA regulations allow mariculture farmers to apply for crop insurance and federal financial assistance programs.

Ken Marsh asked if the bill would change the relationship between the NRCDB and the SWCDs and the AACD? AACD works in cooperation with the NRCDB. AACD is the employer of staff that work in the SWCDs. The new board would fill the same role.

Joni Scharfenberg, Fairbanks SWCD, pointed out that the BAC has historically dealt strictly with loans and it has been the NRCDB and the SWCDs working on broader conservation issues and not just with

agriculture. Her board is hesitant in support of the bill and would like more information about agriculture vs. conservation issues in general. Rep. Feige replied that agriculture, development, and conservation are integrated at one level or another. This bill will provide a single group to advise and act as an information conduit for industry. Communication should be much better between people doing agriculture, conservation & development and the state. Joni pointed out that the Farm Bureau deals strictly with agriculture while the SWCDs are involved in so much more and her board is trying to figure out how it can work and isn't convinced that duplicity exists to be streamlined in the first place. Rep. Feige feels the loan approval functions can better be done in the Dept. of Commerce and the functions of the NRCDB are moving into the new board. The functions should all be consolidated in one place.

Carol pointed out that conservation will get lost behind agriculture and the name of the new board might be made more reflective of the intent of the board so that natural resource conservation is clearly included and lost. Rep. Feige pointed out that the board might evolve into a board of everything and lose focus. It's important that the new board has a conservation focus as well. Streamlining is a good idea but the name of the board needs more work. Rep. Feige pointed to Section 3 of the bill and the powers of the new board. George and Bernie would like to see the forestry and aquaculture issues addressed.

Mr. Paschall pointed out that lawyers came up with the name for the new board. Is the focus on promoting natural resources or promoting agriculture? He feels that conservation is tied directly to agriculture and that 'agriculture' should be included in the name without it being too lengthy.

Joni appreciates their willingness to come and visit with the Fairbanks SWCD board. Darcy Etcheverry asked about the addition of 'regulate' the SWCDs to item #9 of section 3. Mr. Paschall pointed out that it gives the new board the authority to write and adopt regulations. Rep. Feige said that it is not a mandate but an option to do so. Mr. Paschall pointed out that currently there aren't consequences for annual work plans approval or a provision for the board to withhold money to enforce the District Operations Manual. Authorities are unclear but this is an opportunity for the board to be able to manage that.

Cheryl asked how the new board may advise the Commissioner of ADF&G. Rep. Feige pointed out that bison issues (plains or wood) are a prime example. Management of wild game resources may impact agriculture and that is one area the new board could advise on. Mr. Paschall points out that there isn't a single point of contact for producers to contact when they need help with ADF&G or DEC. Bernie appreciates the effort put into the bill.

Bernie moved to adjourn for lunch until 1:30 p.m. Ina seconded the motion. The motion passed.

The meeting reconvened at 1:37 p.m.

Old Business

Agenda items 11 and 12 were addressed above, out of order.

13. FY13 Cooperative Agreement Close-out

Shana reported to the board on this issue. She has been working with the soil and water conservation districts to ensure that all of the requirements are submitted to DNR/NRCDB by the districts. She gave an extension to the SWCDs on the due date for the annual work plans to June 30th in order to accommodate the budget process as it stands currently including the legislative appropriation, budget bill signing by the Governor's office, AACD budget decisions and finally creation of the individual district budgets which are part of the annual work plans.

New Business

14. Fairbanks SWCD Elodea Presentation

Darcy Etcheverry provided a briefing on the work the Fairbanks SWCD has done towards removal of Elodea (an aquatic invasive plant) within the district. Elodea is found in Chena Slough, Chena Lake, and the Chena River and is spreading each year. A field guide to terrestrial and aquatic invasive plants was published by ADF&G in 2009. Elodea was discovered in 2010 as USFS staff surveyed plants in the area and identified them utilizing the new guide. The UAF Herbarium records showed the plant as existing only in Chena Slough in 2009 and in a lake in Cordova. A distribution map of Elodea was provided to the board along with a Powerpoint presentation about Elodea and its potential impacts. This plant is a common aquarium plant and an educational plant used in public schools. The plant is very cold-hardy and propagates by fragmentation very easily. George remembers purchasing live bait many years ago and plant fragments similar to Elodea were included. The plant is high in calcium but isn't known to be edible.

Ina asked what the aquatic plants are in Beluga Lake in Homer. She pointed out that the lake managers mow the vegetation in that lake and is it Elodea. Brianne Blackburn, DNR Invasive Plant Coordinator, does not believe that Beluga Lake has Elodea. Other vegetation, such as native plants, can be a nuisance even if they are not Elodea. Dan Clark from USFWS visited the Fairbanks SWCD last year and recommended that the state consider the infestation an emergency situation. It is so important to act quickly because of invasive species' ability to populate new areas. Elodea is a global issue; it is native to most of North America. Bernie suggests finding a use for the plant – animal feed for instance.

Impacts to the environment from Elodea include decreasing dissolved oxygen, changing invertebrate communities, increasing sedimentation, restricting recreational use, and choking out native vegetation, decreased aesthetics, and can decrease spawning habitat for salmon. Ina asked about moving water and Elodea preference; this plant prefers slow moving or still waters. Even though Elodea may not be able to establish in swift water it can be carried downstream and establish in slower water spots.

Bernie asked about the potential for herbicide use. Darcy discussed the current known locations where Elodea has been found including 3 lakes in Anchorage, 2 lakes on the Kenai Peninsula, and in several locations in the Cordova area. The various districts and land managers are planning. The Fairbanks SWCD is looking at mechanic control methods and the state is looking at herbicide application for the Kenai Peninsula lakes. Herbicide is trickier for moving water in the Fairbanks situation. The mechanical efforts are complicated and expensive but they hope to knock back the population somewhat.

It is best to act quickly to eradicate an invasive plant when the population is small but with Elodea it may become too cost prohibitive to eradicate it if spreads even further. Elodea is not believed to be producing seeds in Alaska so re-sprouting from seeds in an area is not possible once the existing biomass and fragments are removed. Spreading it by boats and floatplanes is the biggest risk. Floatplane water-bodies should be a priority for action including Sand Lake in Anchorage.

The economic impacts can be significant in impacts to fish habitat, property values and navigability. Other aquatic invasive species could be found in Alaska next and the time is now to create programs and policies to prevent infestations and deal quickly with future introductions. Brianne Blackburn is heading a statewide working group to formulate a strategic plan. The SWCDs need some direction and guidance to coordinate efforts and messaging to deal with Elodea. Darcy encourages review of HB89, an invasive species bill, and comments from the board. Ina asked if the US Army Corps of Engineers (COE) could lend a hand with this issue. Darcy pointed out that the Chena Lakes recreation area is part of the Elodea issue and it is managed by

the COE for flood control. George asked if the congressional delegation has been contacted for help with COE cooperation. Brianne added that the federal partners are looking to the state to lead the efforts and set priorities and goals. George asked if herbicides are the best way to deal with Elodea. Darcy pointed out that herbicide is the most effective way to reduce the population overall and Brianne added that it is the best method for eradication. The lower 48 tends to use herbicide when eradication is the goal. Hand-pulling is effective on pretty small patches. Bernie pointed out that carp are a popular method in the lower 48 as well. Brianne pointed out that carp will eat all vegetation not just the invasive plant in question. The aquatic herbicides being looked at do not necessarily harm some native vegetation and the native vegetation will likely have a seed-bank in the soil allowing those native plants to come back from the seeds.

Carol thinks that eradication seems the best route but on a statewide basis rather than area by area. A coordinated statewide effort is needed. Bernie pointed out that floatplanes should be restricted. Stormy Lake has been closed to boating due to Elodea. Bernie asked if tarping would be effective over time. Darcy responded that tarping is very expensive, kills all the vegetation including native plants, and prohibits spawning in that area for a season or two. It might be effective at a boat launch or a small area. Carol asked if banning the plant could be done. Darcy responded that education about the issue is very important and it's not realistic to ban every species that could potentially become invasive in Alaska. Carol thinks that Alaska should be more proactive in preventing infestation of our pristine environment and protect it more vigorously. Is quarantining effective for aquatic plant species in the same fashion that Alaska restricts potato importation and Washington restricts apple importation? Pet stores and educational supply sources sell Elodea routinely. The Division of Agriculture should be able to stop sales of the plant once their new regulations are in place. Changing those regulations is in progress. It was noted that regulating everything isn't realistic but plants like Elodea should definitely be regulated.

Ina recommends working through Farm Bureau chapters, schools, and soil and water conservation districts to accelerate the public education process to prevent further introductions of it. A cost estimate for dealing with Chena is not known yet. Brianne is estimating \$750/acre for herbicide treatment for a 2-3 year treatment for still water. Moving water would likely be more. George pointed out that as much money is spent on monitoring and data collection as the treatment itself. Shana will follow up to this presentation with a draft resolution or letter of support to the Commissioner at the next meeting. Cheryl asked if dredging out the existing plant material reduced the amount of herbicide that would be needed. Brianne pointed out that catching all of the fragments from dredging is very difficult and so it isn't really recommended if herbicide is a valid option. Carol pointed out that eradicating the Elodea with herbicide might kill some native plants for a time but without any action Elodea will choke them out anyway.

15. FY14 Conservation Districts Annual Work Plans

The Salcha Delta SWCD annual work plan was provided to the board. The other SWCDs work plans are pending. **Bernie moved to approve the Salcha Delta SWCD work plan as presented. Carol seconded the motion. The motion passed.** Bernie proposed that Shana review them as usual and then send them to the board and canvass the board for approval votes by email. Shana will compile the other work plans and send a packet of them to the board members once they are all in for review.

16. FY14 Cooperative Agreement Review

Shana introduced a blank template cooperative agreement, between DNR and the SWCDs, for FY14. She would like to adjust the due date on the form for the annual work plans to June 15th from May 15th. That is the only change on the form from FY13. **Ina moved to approve the amended form as presented. Bernie seconded the motion. The motion passed.**

17. Public Comments

None were offered.

18. Board Comments

Bernie is happy to have a new board member that understands what it is to work hard and thinks that Ina will be a great addition. George agrees.

19. Next Meeting Date and Location

The next meeting is planned to occur in conjunction with the AACD fall conference in October. Specific dates are to be determined. It will be an in-person meeting.

Carol moved to adjourn. Cheryl seconded. The motion carried.

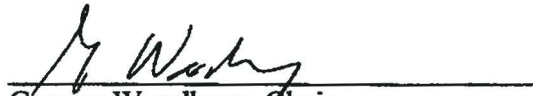
Meeting adjourned at 2:48 p.m.

Minutes taken by:

Minutes approved by:



Shana Joy, Executive Director
NRCDB



George Woodbury, Chair
NRCDB