

To: Editors**Subj:** Guest opinion on need for preservation of Prince William Sound tanker escort system**From:** Stan Jones**Date:** Aug. 10, 2009

Dear editor:

The following is offered as a guest opinion from our board president, Steve Lewis. Please contact me via the phone numbers or email address below if you have any questions. We can email a high-quality digital image of Steve if required.

Thanks for considering our submission.

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Prince William Sound escort tugs protect our common treasure

By STEPHEN K. LEWIS, President

Prince William Sound Regional Citizens' Advisory Council

We Alaskans have always fared best when our state leaders have put politics aside and pulled together for the common good. Examples range from the campaign for statehood, to the settlement of our Native peoples' land claims, to the effort to open up Prudhoe Bay and build the trans-Alaska Pipeline.

The latest example of the spirit that has served Alaska so well is the effort by our state legislature and congressional delegation to preserve the system of escort tugs that help protect Prince William Sound from oil spills.

Ever since the devastating Exxon Valdez spill two decades ago, each loaded oil tanker passing through the Sound has been accompanied by two escort tugs, ready and able to assist the tanker in a crisis or to begin the cleanup if the worst should happen.

But, because a key provision in federal law is about to sunset, this state-of-the-art safety system could be cut back or even eliminated altogether unless Congress acts to save it. Luckily for our state, its elected leaders have joined together in the effort to make sure that happens.

In March—the month of the 20th anniversary of the Exxon spill—both chambers of the Alaska Legislature unanimously passed a resolution calling on Congress to preserve the escort system. Alaska's governor followed up with a strong letter supporting the call.

In May, Senators Lisa Murkowski and Mark Begich—a Republican and a Democrat—teamed up to introduce legislation that would require continuation of the double escorts. Rep. Don Young has been working through Democratic connections in the U.S. House to move similar legislation there.

This measure would not impose new financial burdens on industry; it would only make sure there is no relaxation of present standards and practices. It would only preserve what we have now in Prince William Sound: a world-class escort

system to protect a world-class natural treasure from a repeat of Exxon Valdez spill and the devastation it brought.

As an owner state, we have a duty to protect the extraordinary natural resources we hold in common. It is a duty that has been taken seriously by most of our state leaders over the years. All Alaskans should be proud latest example of our leaders once again pulling together when it counts the most.

I urge my fellow citizens of the 49th state to do as I will be doing: Supporting Sens. Murkowski and Begich, and Congressman Young, as they attempt to move this important legislation though Congress when it reconvenes at the end of this month.

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Stephen K. Lewis, a Seldovia resident, is president of the Prince William Sound Regional Citizens' Advisory Council, an independent non-profit corporation whose mission is to promote environmentally safe operation of the Valdez Marine Terminal and the oil tankers that use it. The council's work is guided by the Oil Pollution Act of 1990, and by its contract with Alyeska Pipeline Service Company. The council's 18 member organizations are communities in the region affected by the 1989 Exxon Valdez oil spill, as well as aquaculture, commercial fishing, environmental, Native, recreation, and tourism groups.