

Oil Spill Accelerates Science Center

Scientists and others interested in the Prince William Sound and Copper River Delta region have long talked about establishing a research center in Cordova, the fishing community that provides easy access to both areas. The March 24, 1989 Exxon Valdez oil spill accelerated the need for basic and applied ecological research on both the effects of oil spills in subarctic regions and the rich ecosystems which form the basis of the region.

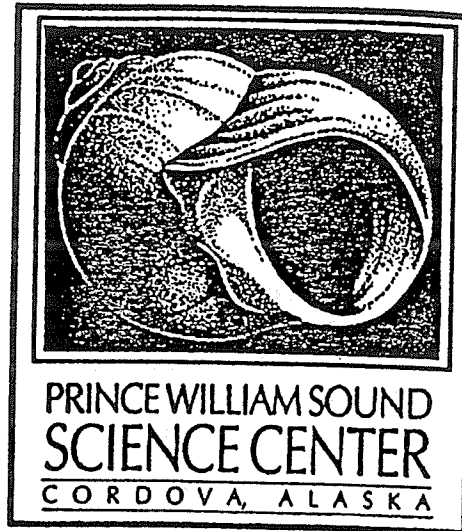
Since opening its doors in April, 1989, the Prince William Sound Science Center has renovated an old city building as its temporary home, defined its purpose in a mission statement, begun the process of grant and endowment funding applications, and lobbied for passage of a Senate bill which establishes a separate oil spill recovery institute. The Center currently provides office space for a research project studying the impact of the oil spill on bald eagles. Last summer, the Center provided bunkhouse space for volunteers working on an oil spill related wildlife observation project, and also assisted several other researchers working in the Delta and the Sound.

Incorporated as a non-profit, independent institute, the science center is dedicated to facilitating research toward more complete ecological understanding of Prince William Sound and the Copper River Delta. The Center's Board of Directors includes several scientists, a fisherman and the president of Prince William Sound Aquaculture Corporation. Advice on the Center's scientific study program will be given by a Scientific Committee whose members represent a broad spectrum of scientific disciplines and a wide geographical area.

Interim Director of the Center is John Harville, a renowned biologist and retired administrator who is a former executive director of the Pacific Marine Fisheries Commission and a former member of the North Pacific Fisheries Council.

The City of Cordova offered support to the Center with a \$100,000 loan to assist its first year of operation. The Center also recently received a \$50,000 grant from Conservation International, an organization which promotes ecosystem monitoring projects worldwide. The Center's staff is currently working to secure long-term funding for the research facility while continuing renovation of the building to provide additional office space and a laboratory in conjunction with the Cordova branch of Prince William Sound Community College.

The Science Center is also lobbying to be the host institute for an Oil Spill Recovery Institute, a research center included in pending federal legislation. The oil spill institute, as described in a Senate bill sponsored by Sen. Murkowski (and which passed the Senate 99-0), would identify and develop techniques for dealing with oil spills



in cold water. It would assess the long-term effects of the Exxon Valdez spill and would be funded by oil industry tax monies. The Senate bill and a more recently passed House oil spill liability bill will be reviewed in a joint conference committee later this winter.

According to Interim Director Harville, the Oil Spill Recovery Institute and the PWS Science Center will remain two distinctly separate entities. The original idea of Cordovans -- to promote basic research on the region and provide a facility for scientists and students of science to work -- is still the major focus for the Science Center.

Harville noted that Cordova is the perfect location for the Institute. Located on the eastern shore of Prince William Sound, it is accessible to both the Sound and the Copper River Delta, the largest contiguous wetland in the western United States. Cordova also has reliable daily air service to both Anchorage and Seattle.

One of the Science Center's purposes is to serve as a repository for scientific research conducted in the Prince William Sound and Copper River Delta region. This fall, the Center submitted a proposal to the Alaska Science and Technology Foundation requesting funds to set up a computer-accessible annotated bibliography of published and unpublished research reports on the region. The Foundation will review this proposal by February.

In November, the Science Center began two educational programs for Cordova residents: a weekly Science Club for elementary school children, and a monthly Science Lecture Series for adults. Both of these programs are being co-sponsored by the Copper River Delta Institute, a recently established institute associated with the U.S. Forest Service.

*Prince William Sound Science Center, 12/12/89
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