



The Observer

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AK Chamber of Commerce - AK Wilderness Recreation & Tourism Assoc. - Chugach Alaska Corp. - Cordova District Fishermen United - OSREC - PWS Aquaculture Corp.

Council launches effort to protect tug escort system

Stan Stephens, president of the citizens' council, is heading a project team charged with devising a strategy to preserve the system of rescue and response tugs that escort loaded oil tankers through Prince William Sound.

The system, which employs a total of ten tugs, is an outgrowth of the Exxon Valdez spill and a series of council-sponsored technical studies in the mid-1990s.

At present, each outbound tanker is escorted by two tugs, as required by various state and federal rules.

However, one of the main requirements for escort tugs is ending as double-hull tankers come into service. The federal Oil Pollution Act of 1990,

passed in response to the Exxon spill, mandates two escort tugs for single-hull tankers, but imposes no escort requirement at all for double-hull tankers. It is anticipated the Valdez tanker fleet could be all double-hull as early as 2007.

With the single-hull era drawing to a close, industry and regulators have already begun discussions about the future of the escort system. One possibility that has repeatedly been mentioned is to reduce the requirement to a single escort tug for loaded tankers.

The council's official position is that the practice of escorting each tanker with two tugs should be preserved.

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Feds OK Alyeska plans to overhaul tanker terminal

Federal regulators in late March gave their approval, at least in general terms, for plans by Alyeska Pipeline Service Co. to overhaul its tanker terminal in Valdez.

The federal Bureau of Land Management issued both a final Environmental Assessment of the project, and a final Finding of No Significant Impact. Both documents were issued in draft form in November 2004, and revised after detailed comments from the citizens' council. (See article in March 2005 Observer, or visit this link on the council web site: www.pwsrca.org/observer305)

The documents reflect a conclusion



Alyeska's tanker terminal in Valdez will see a major overhaul during Strategic Reconfiguration. Photo by Stan Jones.

by the regulators that the overhaul, known as Strategic Reconfiguration, would not have a significant environmental impact and can go ahead as outlined by Alyeska. However, each

project during the overhaul would require a detailed review by the regulators, and a formal decision called a Notice to Proceed.

As the Observer went to press, the extent and nature of the revisions resulting from the council comments was still

being determined. The new documents were under review by a council contractor, with a report expected to

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Fishing Vessel Training



READY TO RESPOND – These boats are participating in an April 28 fishing-vessel training exercise in Nelson Bay, near Cordova. The exercise, organized by Alyeska Pipeline, was one of several the company conducts annually in Prince William Sound, the Gulf of Alaska, and Cook Inlet. Alyeska Pipeline has over 300 fishing vessels under contract for oil-spill response. They will play a crucial role in the event of a major oil spill. Story and additional photos, pages 4 and 5. Above photo by Stan Jones.

Citizen oil-spill oversight is approved for Washington state

Tankers carrying North Slope crude oil will soon have citizen oversight at both ends of the trip from Valdez to Puget Sound. Washington lawmakers late last month voted to set up a citizen-dominated council to advise the governor on oil-spill prevention and cleanup in the state's waters.

The measure passed despite opposition from, not just oil companies, but Washington's Department of Ecology as well.

Calls for a group modeled on the citizens councils in Alaska grew after a 1,500-gallon crude oil spill at the south end of Puget Sound last October. Federal officials have blamed a ConocoPhillips tanker for the spill, a charge denied by

the company.

Deputy Director Marilyn Leland testified on the makeup and work of the Prince William Sound Regional Citizens Advisory Council during hearings in the Washington legislature.

Washington's Oil Spill Advisory Council, as it will be called, may have been inspired by the councils for Prince William Sound and Cook Inlet, but it will differ in many respects. In Alaska, the member entities of the councils choose their own representatives. In Washington, all 16 members of the council will be chosen by the state's governor.

In Alaska, no representatives from

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Volunteer Profile

Committee head steps down after nine years as chair

When Jerry Brookman took over as chairman of the Oil Spill Prevention and Response Committee, the citizens' council was only seven years old, email was still a novelty, and Alyeska Pipeline had yet to bring its first Enhanced Tractor Tug into Valdez.

That was in 1996. This spring, Brookman, a Kenai retiree, decided to give up the chair to become just a regular member of the committee.

"I've never been a believer in term limits," Brookman said. "But I figured that, after nine years, it was about time to turn it over to somebody else. Every year, at the first meeting when we had a quorum, I'd ask for volunteers, and never got one, until this year."

The 'volunteer' was John French, who also serves on the council's board of directors, where he represents Seward. His accession to the slot of chairman may not have been entirely voluntary – Brookman admits to discussing it with him first.

Brookman puts improved tug escorts at the top of the list of the committee's big issue. Alyeska's current fleet of high-performance tugs began entering service in 1998 and is now regarded as one of the best in the world. The development of this fleet was partly due to a series of technical studies led by the council in the mid-1990s.

Also on Brookman's list of top issues: dispersants, response readiness, and the development of Geographic Response Strategies.

The escort system is also on Brookman's list of the biggest issues still facing the committee. That's because, with the switchover to double-hull tankers, the main federal requirement for tanker escorts will end, and there is



COMMITTED – Jerry Brookman of Kenai has spent a decade on the council's Oil Spill Prevention/Response Committee, including nine years as chairman. Upper right: Brookman today. Lower right: On a 2001 hike in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. Lower left: At a meeting of the committee in 2002. Upper left: At a committee meeting in 1996, the year he became chairman. Also shown: Project Manager Joe Bant (rear) and council board member Marilyn Heddell (right).

already talk of scaling back the escort fleet. The council's position is that the present system of two tugs escorting each loaded tanker should continue.

Brookman joined the committee in 1995, the year before he became chair. What does he make of it all after a decade on the committee?

"Industry may not love us, but we have a mandate to look over their shoulders and let them know what we think," Brookman said. "While this process has a potential for chaos and hostility, I think it pretty much works. I respect the industry and regulators, and for the

most part the people who run them that I've come into contact with. Nevertheless, nobody's perfect."

Brookman has been in Alaska about five times as long as he's been with the citizens' council. He first came to the then-territory in 1957 as a radar technician in the private sector, later switching to similar work with the Federal Aviation Administration. He was stationed in the Anchorage area for 16 years before transferring to Kenai, where he worked until his retirement in 1990.

"I didn't really want to come to Alaska, but they sent me," Brookman

said. "But I liked it, and I guess I still must – I'm still here."

Jon Dahlman, a Seward resident who joined the committee the same week in 1995 that Brookman did, describes the former chairman as "one in a bunch."

"He is the individual who has held all our meetings together," Dahlman said. "I don't know that he's ever missed a meeting, except when he was deathly ill."

Like many council volunteers, Brookman has lots of other irons in the fire. At the Cook Inlet Regional Citizens' Advisory Council, he serves on a committee to the one he chaired at the Prince William Sound council. And, for the past couple of years, he has been a volunteer for the Veterans Administration, driving Kenai-area residents to the agency's clinic in Anchorage for exams and treatment once or twice a month.

He's also an avid hiker, having trekked not only the Kenai Peninsula, but the northeast corner of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge as well.

Brookman was born and raised in LaSalle County, Illinois. He joined the Marines on his 18th birthday and served in the Corps from 1952-55, including a tour in Korea.

His wife, Janet, is British. He met her while working in Canada, just before he came to Alaska. She went back to England, he went north and they were apart until she came to Alaska in 1971. They married in 1972.

After nearly five decades in Alaska, Brookman has no plans to move out any time soon.

"Where else could I go?" he says. "I don't think I'd really fit in anywhere else."

Council is recertified by Coast Guard

The citizens' council has been recertified by the U.S. Coast Guard under the Oil Pollution Act of 1990.

In a March 2 letter announcing the annual recertification, Rear Admiral James C. Olson, Commander of the Coast Guard's District 17 in Juneau, noted the many comments received in support of the council's application.

The commenters, Olson wrote, consistently cited the council's "broad representation of the respective community's interests, appropriate actions to keep the public informed, improvements to both spill response preparation and spill prevention and oil industry monitoring efforts that combat complacency – as intended by the Act."

Seattle newspaper series on problems at ConocoPhillips tanker unit is available online

The Seattle Post-Intelligencer marked the 16th anniversary of the Exxon Valdez oil spill with a four-part investigative series detailing safety problems at Polar Tankers, the oil shipping subsidiary of ConocoPhillips.



Times' winning of a Pulitzer Prize for its coverage of the Exxon Valdez spill. He is also the author of the book "Tankers Full of Trouble: The Perilous Journey of Alaskan Crude."

Polar Tankers' ships have been involved in several small spills and other incidents over the

past year and a half, and one of its vessels has been accused by federal officials of causing a 1,500-gallon spill in Puget Sound last October, a charge denied by the company.

The paper is making the entire series available on its web site. The Internet address is: <http://seattlepi.nwsourc.com/specials>.

The series was written by Eric Nalder, a veteran investigative reporter who was instrumental in the Seattle

Stephens returns to top board office

Stan Stephens of Valdez was elected president of the Prince William Sound Regional Citizens' Advisory Council on March 11 at the group's annual meeting in Anchorage. He represents the Alaska Wilderness Recreation and Tourism Association on the council board.



Stan Stephens

Other offices of the council's executive committee were also filled:

Vice president: Steve Lewis, representing Seldovia.

Secretary: Marilyn Heddell, representing the city of Whittier.

Treasurer: Jane Eisemann, representing the city of Kodiak.

Members at large: Connie Stephens, representing the city of Valdez; Blake Johnson, representing the Kenai Peninsula Borough; and Nancy Bird, representing the city of Cordova.

Stephens is a long-time member of the council board, and has served several previous terms as president. He owns Stan Stephens Cruises and Wildlife Tours in Valdez.

He replaces Tom Jensen, who had served as board president since March 2004. Jensen, who remains on the board, represents the Alaska State Chamber of Commerce.

Stan Stephens and Connie Stephens are not related.

The board also appointed new members to two-year terms on the council's technical advisory committees, as follows: Leslie Morten, Scientific Advisory Committee; John LeClair, Oil Spill Prevention and Response Committee; and Robert Jaynes, Port Operations and Vessel Traffic Systems Committee.

From the Executive Director

Summer's coming – let's relax and enjoy the Sound!

Here at the citizens' council, we spend a lot of time worrying about Prince William Sound and trying to keep it safe from oil pollution.

That's our job, of course, but sometimes we get so caught up in it that we're at risk of forgetting we should also get out and enjoy this great gift nature has bestowed upon us.

That's the purpose of the Valdez Marine Expo, held every year over Memorial Day Weekend.

The central event is a boat show at the Valdez Convention Center. This year, it's anticipated more than 50 vendors will show up. Last year's show drew around 2,000 people, and this one looks to be even bigger.

Besides the boat show, the program includes survival

demonstrations by the Coast Guard, a ducky derby, a fish fry, an ice cream social and dance, ice carving, canoe jousting, and a water show by Alyeska's famous tanker escort tugs.

Local tour companies are offering discounts on excursions to nearby attractions like Shoup Bay and Columbia Glacier, and Valdez hotels are making rooms available for well under \$100 a night.

The council is one of several organizations that will have a display booth at the convention center, and I'm one of the co-chairs for planning



John Devens

the Expo. (The other is Connie Stephens, a member of both our board and the Valdez city council.)

Besides being just plain fun, the Expo is a chance for the major players in the crude oil transportation system to come together.

The Coast Guard and Alyeska are already supporting it, and the

tanker companies that operate in the Sound have been invited to join in as well.

Despite our group's relatively modest involvement, I regard events like this as a big part of getting out our message on the importance of

preventing spills and the other forms of pollution that can come with crude oil transportation.

Sure, it's important to review contingency plans and help plan oil-spill drills, but it's work. Fun is also important. And it's just plain fun to eyeball a gorgeous new boat, take a Columbia Glacier cruise, or watch people try to knock each other out of canoes.

So, come on down to Valdez, enjoy yourself, and be reminded of the stake we all have in keeping Prince William Sound safe. The dates are May 28-30. You can get more information on the Expo at www.valdezalaska.org on the Internet, or by contacting the Valdez Convention and Visitors Bureau at 907-835-4981 or marineexpo@valdezalaska.org.

ESCORTS: Future may hold changes

Continued from Page 1

(See the March 2005 Observer, page 3, "On Valdez anniversary, are escort tugs in peril?" or read the article on the council's web site at www.pwsrcaac.org/observer305.)

"Our goal is to maintain the safest escort system in the world," Stephens said. "We will fight any step backwards to reduce it. Most accidents are due to human error, and even a double-hull tanker can't prevent human error."

The project team has met several times, and a council delegation recently traveled to Washington, D.C., to discuss the escort system with Coast Guard officials and with the Alaska congressional delegation.

In addition, the council has retained Dr. Martha Grabowski as a consultant to analyze and report on the possibility of conducting a risk assessment of the Prince William Sound tanker escort system, including the role of human factors in accidents. Grabowski holds professorships at LeMoyne College and at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute in New York, and has a Ph.D. in Management/Expert Information Systems. She is already familiar with the oil trade in Prince William Sound, having served as a contractor to the council during a 1996 risk assessment that helped bring about the current escort system.

Her contract calls for a written report and a presentation to the council by the end of June 2005.

OVERSIGHT: Gets OK in Washington

Continued from Page 1

the oil or shipping industries sit on the councils. In Washington, the oil industry will have a seat and the marine industry will have two.

The Washington group's initial budget is being set at \$200,000 a year, enough for one full-time and one part-time staffer, plus travel and per diem for board members. In Alaska, the Prince William Sound council has a staff of

19, mostly full-timers, and a budget of about \$3 million a year. Much of the budget is spent on expert consultants to advise the council on the many complex technical questions raised by crude-oil transportation issues.

"It's an important first step, even if it is a modest one," said John Devens, executive director of the Prince William Sound council. "We'll help however we can to make citizen oversight work for our friends in Puget Sound."

RECOGNITION



Dan Lawn, center, and Jerry Brookman, right, received awards from the council for their long service to the cause of environmental safety in crude oil transportation. Brookman has served on the council's Oil Spill Prevention/Response Committee for ten years, and was chairman for nine of those years (see story, page 2). Lawn retired in February from the Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation after almost 28 years on the job. He started a month after the first oil flowed through the trans-Alaska pipeline in 1977, was one of the first regulators on scene the night the Exxon Valdez hit Bligh Reef, and played a key role in oversight of the pipeline, the Valdez oil terminal, and the tankers that use it. Executive Director John Devens, left, presented the awards at the council's March board meeting in Anchorage. Photo by Stan Jones.



NEW HIRE – Susan Sommer, formerly an editor at Alaska Geographic, started work March 21 in the Anchorage office as content manager for the council's Internet site, www.pwsrcaac.org. Her writing has appeared in Alaska Geographic, the Anchorage Daily News, and many other publications. She lives in Eagle River and is from an old Alaska family, the Beemans. One of her first jobs was helping out at the family's commercial setnet site on Kalgin Island in Cook Inlet as a small girl. As she put it on her resume', "a sense of humor and positive outlook were essential." Photo by Stan Jones.

Spring exercises train fishing vessel crews to be ready

If there's another North Slope crude oil spill in Prince William Sound or the Gulf of Alaska, fishing vessels from Prince William Sound, the Kenai Peninsula, and Kodiak Island will play a key role in the cleanup effort.

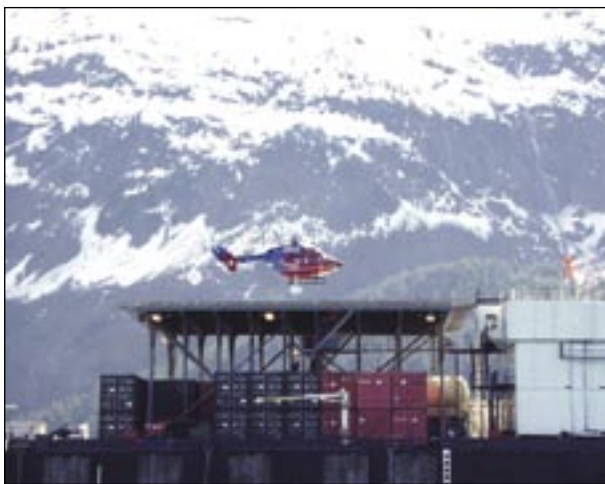
Alyeska keeps over 300 of the vessels under contract, and conducts periodic training exercises to make sure they're ready for action when needed.

This spring's exercises took place in Seward, Homer, and Kodiak, as well as Cordova, Valdez and other Prince William Sound locations. Most of the exercises were observed by council project managers Roy Robertson and Tony Parkin, and Observer editor Stan Jones. Observed the April 28 exercise in Nelson Bay, near Cordova. The photographs on these pages capture not only some of the things that go on during the exercises, but a little of the beauty of the environment they are designed to protect.



Various types of boom await deployment for training on a morning in late April.

A 'RESCUE' AT SEA



INJURY – The April 28 training exercises in Nelson Bay included a simulated medical emergency. Clockwise from top left: A fishing boat crew member – represented by a medical dummy – was injured in a fall. He was transferred to the Fishing Vessel *Rejoice*, which served as the medical boat for the exercise, and was taken alongside the response barge where the training was being managed. There, he was hoisted aboard for transport to Anchorage by helicopter. An actual helicopter came down from Anchorage for realism, but left the dummy behind when it returned to base.



Responses are managed from a floating command center on a barge called the 500-2, shown above near Cordova on April 28. Lower photo: Alyeska's Steve Johnson via computer screen on the 500-2.



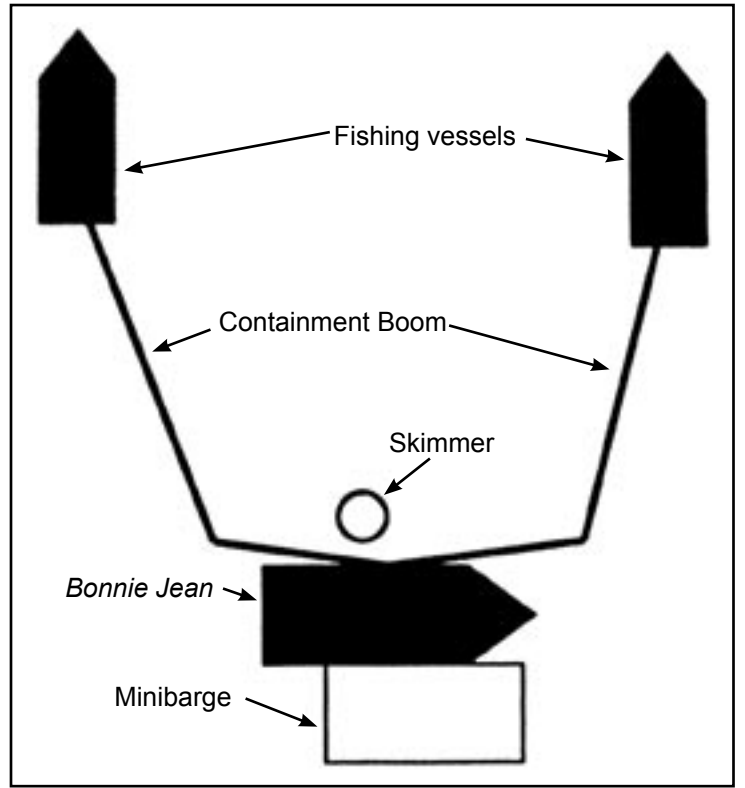
REMOVING SPILLED OIL FROM THE ENVIRONMENT



exercises in Port Valdez



How Skimming Works



Two fishing vessels tow the containment boom in a U or V shape to capture floating oil. They stop, and a third fishing vessel – here, the *Bonnie Jean*, photographed during the April 28 exercise near Cordova – moves to the apex of the boom with a minibarge tethered to its side. A skimmer is placed inside the boom and skimmed oil is pumped across the deck of the *Bonnie Jean* into the minibarge. When the oil inside the boom has been skimmed off, the skimmer is hoisted back aboard the *Bonnie Jean* and the process starts over.

Skimming is the mainstay of oil-spill response planning for Prince William Sound, because it truly cleans up spilled oil and removes it from the environment.



ns monitors progress 2 during the exercise.

Photos by Stan Jones, Roy Robertson, and Vince Kelly (ADEC).

BEAUTIFUL WORKPLACES

Left, several fishing vessels participate in exercises near Chenega in early May. Right, a fishing vessel called the *Polecat* pulls a CurrentBuster booming system away from the 500-2 barge in Port Valdez.



Alyeska Viewpoint

FONSI is first step in long process of terminal reconfiguration

For nearly two years Alyeska has been engaged in engineering studies to evaluate the possibility of simplifying facilities, operations and support functions at the Valdez Marine Terminal. We have referred to this project effort as “strategic reconfiguration”. This project has examined possible modifications to the terminal to accommodate changes in production and throughput that have provided the basis for pipeline reconfiguration. Alyeska has previously informed the council that terminal modifications could include such changes as reducing crude storage tankage to meet current and future storage needs or replacement of the current saltwater pumped fire system with a freshwater gravity system.

In February, the Bureau of Land Management, or BLM, issued its final decision record on its environmental assessment of the proposed terminal strategic reconfiguration project – a “finding of no significant impact,” or FONSI. It is important for readers to understand that the BLM decision was not an approval of the project to allow construction to go forward. Prior to building and operating new facilities associated with any of the project components, Alyeska would require permit approvals from a number of agencies. There would be a number of opportunities for additional public review associated with applications for these permits.

The FONSI represents a significant milestone for the project. With BLM’s

finding of no significant impact, no additional environmental impact statement will be required for the proposed project as set forth under National Environmental Protection Act, or NEPA. NEPA is a federal procedural statute designed to require an analysis of probable environmental impacts from proposed projects before federal agencies make binding decisions. NEPA does not dictate the federal decision. Instead, NEPA links the federal decision-making process to a written analysis of the probable environmental consequences of the proposed action and of a reasonable range of alternatives.

Whether a proposed project presents a “significant” effect on the environment requires consideration of two broad factors – context and intensity. Context refers to the setting and scope of the proposed action. The more the scale and nature of the proposed action is inconsistent with existing uses and activities and state of the environment, the greater the likelihood of significance. Intensity refers to the severity of the impact on the environment. Potential adverse impacts on sensitive species or resources (e.g., impacts on endangered species, subsistence resources, or wetlands) would be examples of intensity. Intensity also includes potential effects

of great magnitude such as aircraft noise from siting a new major airport. These would be types of impacts requiring a more detailed environmental impact statement.

The BLM based its finding of no significant impact on several factors. In broad terms, all components of the proposed project fall within an existing industrial site expressly set aside and operated as a crude oil storage and transportation terminal for the past 30 years, and with renewed authority to operate for another 30 years. Thus, proposed changes to terminal facilities and operations are consistent with existing terminal activities in both character and scale. In fact, one of the primary purposes and effects of the projects under review is to reduce the infrastructure and complexity of terminal operations.

In the decision record, BLM found that long-term environmental impacts from Alyeska’s proposed project “will not be significant, nor will they affect the safety, integrity, and security of TAPS.” In its finding, BLM also set forth several mitigation measures over and above current regulatory requirements to reduce potential consequences associated with the project. These mitigation measures include (but are not limited to)

protection of cultural, wetlands and fish resources; coordination of construction activities with work planned to improve Dayville Road; and revision of the terminal oil spill contingency plan to reflect any changes in the number and capacity of crude storage tanks and in the number of on-site employees. We anticipate that the mitigation measures identified in BLM’s decision record would be incorporated into permits issued for construction and operation of any new terminal facilities.

To go forward, strategic reconfiguration at the Valdez Marine Terminal will require additional engineering analysis and approval for funding by the oil companies that own Alyeska and the pipeline and terminal assets Alyeska operates. This means a viable business case must be established for the substantial investment required. Preliminary engineering is targeted for completion in 2005 or early 2006. For the projects approved for funding, the remaining detailed engineering effort would be spread out over a longer period of time to allow resources to be devoted to the Pipeline Strategic Reconfiguration Project and to construction and installation work underway at the pump stations. Strategic reconfiguration at the terminal remains an opportunity, but not a certainty. We will do our best to keep the council informed as this project evolves.

• Greg Jones is Senior Vice President, Operations and Maintenance, Alyeska Pipeline Service Co.



Greg Jones

Governor looks back on Valdez spill

Statement by Gov. Frank Murkowski
March 24, 2005

It’s been 16 years since the *Exxon Valdez* spilled 11 million gallons of oil into Prince William Sound. Two years later the state and federal government entered into a settlement agreement to recover damages for injury to natural resources. Since that time, the Exxon Valdez Oil Spill Trustee Council has directed spending more than \$800 million in executing its plan to restore the affected environment.

Like the spill, the restoration efforts have been unprecedented and the largest effort of its kind ever undertaken. I am proud to have fought for legislation while in the U.S. Senate that established a system of local oversight and involvement that has improved our monitoring of oil transportation on our waters. The Prince William Sound and Cook Inlet regional advisory councils continue even today on that important work.

Lingering litigation continues to

frustrate many Alaskans impacted by the spill. Sixteen years is too long to resolve these claims and I call upon the parties to the litigation to renew their efforts to expeditiously resolve their differences.



Gov. Frank Murkowski

The *Exxon Valdez* oil spill has made us more vigilant and prepared to resolve similar tragedy by sustaining our world class spill prevention and response system. We have a new generation of world class double hull crude oil tankers and state of the art tug escort system. We employ detailed spill planning, state-of-the-art spill prevention technology, and constant response drills and exercises.

Thanks to improved state laws and oversight, extensive industry investment, and the dedicated efforts of concerned local citizens, Prince William Sound today has the best oil transportation system in the world. That is one good legacy of the Exxon Valdez spill.

Council participates in Cordova meeting of water resources group

By LINDA ROBINSON
Community Liaison

John Devens, Tom Kuckertz and I participated in the Alaska Section of the American Water Resources Association annual meeting in Cordova, April 5-6. The meeting was co-sponsored by the Copper River Watershed Project. Kristin Smith, former council board member, is the project’s executive director.

Kuckertz gave a presentation on microbial degradation in the biological treatment tanks at the Valdez Marine Terminal’s Ballast Water Treatment Facility. Other presentations included information on watershed monitoring, various fish habitat assessment issues, and issues specific to the Copper River and Prince William Sound regions. The council also participated in the poster session, displaying posters recently created by staff.

Board members Patience Andersen Faulkner and Nancy Bird attended parts of the meeting. All of the presentations elicited questions and comments, and concern was expressed by one participant that if the pipeline was damaged where it crosses the Gakona, the Copper River Delta would “be toast.” There was general agreement with his statement.

The Association has a secondary and primary education grant program available to purchase watershed monitoring equipment and to award science fair prizes to students doing work on watershed monitoring. Some of the equipment awarded in the past has included water calendars, aquatic collection sets, water quality testing supplies and sensors, and weather instruments. If anyone is interested in more information please contact Linda Robinson at 907-273-6235 or robinson@pwsrca.org.

SYMPOSIUM – As the Observer went to press in early May, a council-sponsored training symposium in ship-board fire-fighting was under way in Valdez. Here, firefighters practice aboard the *Polar Endeavour*, a tanker provided by ConocoPhillips for the symposium. Photo by Tom Kuckertz.



Ruling could limit ballast-water dumping

A judge in California has ordered the repeal of a federal regulation that allows oil tankers and other large vessels to dump ballast water into U.S. coastal waters without a permit.

The practice must stop, ruled U.S. District Judge Susan Illston in San Francisco, because ballast water from distant ports may carry non-native species, a form of water pollution.

Non-native species are a problem because they may establish themselves in the waters where they are dumped and threaten native species, potentially including commercially valuable fish stocks such as Alaska salmon. The threat has long been of great concern to the citizens' council, which has spent hundreds of thousands of dollars on research into the problem, and on a search for solutions.

Illston's March 31 ruling held that the federal Clean Water Act of 1972 means the federal Environmental Protection Agency must require vessel operators to get a permit under the National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System, or NPDES, before they can dump ballast water. Ships carry ballast water for stability when they travel without cargo.



During exchanges, ballast water from port is discharged and replaced on the high seas. Here, ballast water is being pumped onto the deck and is running over the side. On other vessels, ballast water is discharged directly from the side of the ship. Photos courtesy of Smithsonian Environmental Research Center.

The oil industry in Prince William Sound is already must get an NPDES permit for the Ballast Water Treatment Facility at Alyeska's tanker terminal in Valdez. That facility treats oily ballast water, which becomes contaminated because it is carried in empty crude oil tanks. It is free of invasive organisms because the oil is toxic to marine life.

Some ballast water is oil-free because it is carried in segregated tanks dedicated to that purpose. That water is dumped as the tankers approach Valdez and thus would fall under Illston's ruling,

port. The theory behind this practice is, coastal species are unlikely to survive if dumped in deep offshore water during the exchange, and deep-water species are unlikely to survive if dumped near shore. In addition, water taken into ballast tanks on the high seas contains fewer organisms than water taken on in port.

The current NPDES permit for the Alyeska ballast water facility allows for low levels of hydrocarbon contamination in the treated water it discharges, resulting in about half a barrel of oil per day entering Port Valdez.

if it is upheld.

The ballast-water suit was filed against EPA in 2003 by six environmental groups. As the Observer went to press, the agency had not indicated if it would appeal.

If the ruling does take effect, that wouldn't necessarily mean a total ban on dumping ballast water, or that the water would have to be completely sterilized before it could be dumped. One current tactic for combating invasive species involves high-seas exchange of the ballast water taken on in

RECONFIGURE: Feds give the OK

Continued from Page 1

be presented at the council board's May meeting in Valdez.

According to the BLM documents, the overhaul will include the following elements:

- Installation of internal floating roofs on at least 12 crude oil storage tanks;
- Decommissioning of the existing power plant, which runs on hydrocarbon vapors released during the passage of crude oil through the terminal;
- Replacement of tanker vapor control system with new vapor combustors;
- Replacement of pumped seawater firewater supply system by a gravity-fed freshwater system;
- Provision of electrical power by connection to commercial power grid, with on-site diesel backup, or by installation of on-site primary diesel plant and backup.

The BLM findings are available online at this link: www.jpo.doi.gov/Reconfig/stratereconfig.htm.

In addition, the council maintains a Strategic Reconfiguration site on the Internet: www.pwsrca.net/SR

Council, regulators, want answers on snow removal problems

The citizens' council and state regulators are calling on the oil industry to explain and correct its apparent failure to keep the snow cleared away from a storage depot for oil-spill-response equipment in Prince William Sound.

The depot in question is at Main Bay, site of a salmon hatchery in the western part of the Sound. According to photographs from a confidential source, the shipping containers – or conexes – were blocked by snow as of March 14.

The council checked with Alyeska Pipeline, which said it canceled the contract with a private party for snow removal at Main Bay for financial reasons and because the site gets less snow than Valdez. Alyeska said it was maintaining the site, bringing in crews with a vessel called the *Krystal Sea*, or by other means when available.

However, the council learned the *Krystal Sea* had visited Main Bay only three times since October 2004. The last time was on Jan. 30.

"The lack of snow removal could seriously impair spill protection at the Main Bay Hatchery," council Executive Director John Devens wrote in an April 14 letter to Alyeska and the industry group charged with planning oil-spill response. The letter said the failure to maintain the Main Bay site could be a violation of the oil-spill contingency plan for Prince William Sound, which has this requirement for hatcheries and response areas: "Year-round full-time maintenance and security programs are in place so that the equipment is ready and available for rapid deployment. The equipment caretakers will conduct periodic inspections of the oil spill response equipment, while SERVUS (Alyeska's Ship Escort/Response Vessel System) will perform scheduled maintenance and training."

The council called on the industry to use an independent entity to check on response equipment stored around Prince William Sound. With independent inspections, Devens wrote, "it would be less likely that routine maintenance

would be missed at these storage depots."

A month after the problem at Main Bay was discovered, Alyeska still had not addressed it. An April 16 photograph showed the conexes surrounded by snow, though the drifts appeared to have shrunk with the onset of warmer weather. Alyeska told the Observer it had reviewed the photos and believes the snow would not have prevented use of the equipment.

The council letter also raised concerns that the snow-removal problem will be exacerbated by the planned replacement of the *Krystal Sea* is being replaced. The new vessel will be available to Alyeska only on a part-time basis and so will not be conducting routine maintenance trips.

On April 29, the Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation demanded the industry document its contracts for maintaining the remote sites, and, for those sites where contracts were canceled, how contingency plan requirements are being met. The agency also demanded records of maintenance and inspections at the sites for the previous six months. The industry was given until May 20 to comply.

As the Observer went to press in early May, there had been no response to the agency's request. But an Alyeska spokesman told the Observer the company was developing a plan for visits to Main Bay for snow removal and for periodic maintenance on the equipment there.

For Devens, the problem was reminiscent of the night 16 years ago when the *Exxon Valdez* hit Bligh Reef. Alyeska was slow to respond in part because some of its equipment was buried under snowdrifts at the tanker terminal in Valdez. Devens was the city's mayor at the time.

"Our group was set up to combat the type of complacency that produced the *Exxon Valdez* disaster," Devens said. "The situation at Main Bay seems like a pretty clear signal that the lessons of 1989 are being forgotten and complacency is trying to make a comeback."



SNOWED IN: As this photo shows, conexes at the Main Bay response depot were blocked by snowdrifts as of March 14. Alyeska had last cleared the site in December 2004. Photo source confidential.



STILL SNOWED IN: A month later, on April 16, the berms were still present, though reduced in size by warm spring weather. The council has called for an independent entity to verify that response depots like Main Bay are regularly inspected and properly maintained. Photo source confidential.

Community Corner

Youth Area Watch lets Valdez students work with scientists

On Monday, March 28, Valdez high school students piled out of a school van, and carried crab traps onto the beach in three different locations near Valdez. They were accompanied by Jenny Heckathorn, environmental sciences teacher, Michelle Cullen, parent chaperone, Dan Gilson, of the council staff, and me. Herring were prepared and placed in the traps, which were then tied to steel bars. The traps were left out for two tides, and then on Tuesday morning we returned to check and collect the 24 traps. The catch: some native sculpin but no crabs.

The Youth Area Watch program is run by the Chugach School District and funded by the Exxon Valdez Oil Spill Trustee Council. The program goals are to give students "hands on" experience with scientists, to allow them to make contributions to community-based research occurring in areas affected by the Exxon Valdez oil spill, increase communication between scientists and communities, undertake long-term monitoring projects and increase awareness.

This particular project, European Green Crab Watch, was established by the Smithsonian Environmental Research Center and the council, and was being introduced to Valdez students by council staff to monitor the nearby beaches for green crabs. This species has been introduced to the West Coast from Europe and is working its way north. It is feared that they may be introduced by the pumping of ballast water into Port Valdez. They kill or compete with many native species and may threaten our native Dungeness crabs, clams, and other important subsistence species. Fortunately, no green crabs have been found yet in Alaska, and the sculpin we captured in the traps were returned to the port. For more

information on the green crab, go to www.pwsrcac.org/NISfiles/F1_GreenCrab.pdf.

Other communities that have participated in Youth Area Watch are Chenega Bay, Cordova, Port Graham, Nanwalek, Seward, Tatitlek and Whittier. Some of the projects they have been involved in are restoration projects, water quality, mussel sampling, harbor seal biosampling and killer whale identification. For more information on this program go to http://www.chugachschools.com/youth_area_watch/.

Kodiak Whale Fest

The council sponsored a coloring contest in conjunction with Kodiak's Whale Fest, April 15-24.

The winners were Maddy Metzler, grade 2, Gaby Serrano, grade 5, and Kory Blount grade 1. The prizes were "adopted" Alaskan whales and included T-shirts and a diary of sightings.

Lisa Ka'aihue, of the council staff, Blythe Brown, Kodiak's Invasive Plants Coordinator, and I gave presentations to the science classes at Kodiak High School. Lisa and I talked about the council, and about state invasive species issues. Blythe informed the students about local invasive species issues. If anyone would like a presentation on invasive species, please let me know. More information is on the council's website.

On the Road Again

Donna Schantz, of the council staff, and I will represent the council at a children's table at Homer's Shorebird Festival, the booth will be set up at the International Oil Spill Conference in Miami, and Valdez staff will have a booth at the Valdez Marine Expo, all in May. In June the booth will be set up at the Arctic and Marine Oilspill Program in Calgary.



Linda Robinson



NO NEWS – Most people hope to catch something when they go trapping, but not so for the Green Crab Watch. The green crab is a pesky alien species that has already invaded several West Coast ports, so not finding them in Valdez was good news for council Project Manager Dan Gilson, lower photo, and Valdez high school students Sherstin Cullen and Sheila Spader (left to right in upper photo). The council partners in the watch program with the Smithsonian Environmental Research Center. Photos by Linda Robinson.

Prince William Sound Regional Citizens' Advisory Council

The Prince William Sound Regional Citizens' Advisory Council is an independent, non-profit corporation formed after the 1989 Exxon Valdez oil spill to minimize the environmental impacts of the trans-Alaska pipeline terminal and tanker fleet.

The council has 18 member organizations, including communities affected by the Exxon Valdez oil spill and groups representing Alaska Native, aquaculture, environmental, commercial fishing, recreation and tourism interests in the spill region.

The council is certified under the federal Oil Pollution Act of 1990 as the citizen advisory group for Prince William Sound, and operates under a contract with Alyeska Pipeline Service Co. The contract, which is in effect as long as oil flows through the pipeline, guarantees the council's independence, provides annual funding, and ensures the council the same access to terminal facilities as state and federal regulatory agencies.

The council's mission: Citizens promoting environmentally safe operation of the Alyeska terminal and associated tankers.

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