

## Initial findings: ‘gross human error’ on Pathfinder



The Pathfinder was taken to a dock in Valdez after the grounding on Bligh Reef. Photo by Donna Schantz, citizens' council.

Shortly after 6 p.m. on December 23, the 136-foot tug Pathfinder ran aground on Bligh Reef, one of the most infamous maritime hazards in North America. The tug spilled a worst case estimate of 6,410 gallons of diesel fuel into Prince William Sound.

The Pathfinder, which was on ice scouting duty, is owned by Crowley Marine Services, an international marine transportation company, under contract with Alyeska Pipeline Service Company's Ship Escort/Response Vessel System, or SERVVS.

On December 30, the council's Port Operations and Vessel Traffic System committee met to gather information on the incident. Participants included Crowley Maritime, the Coast Guard, the Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation, SERVVS, Tesoro Alaska, SeaRiver Maritime, Alyeska Pipeline, Prince William Soundkeeper, council staff and volunteers, and residents of affected communities.

Charlie Nalen from Crowley Marine Services reported that the company's initial investigation

showed the cause of the accident to be gross human error.

"We have found no mechanical problems. The electrical equipment in the wheelhouse was fully functional, and I am embarrassed to say, it is human error," Nalen told the gathering. "We need to get to the bottom of the error chain."

He also noted that Crowley was partnering with Alyeska in the investigation.

The tug's captain and second mate were both in the pilothouse when the accident occurred, and both were relieved of duty pending the results of the investigation.

"We have some real concerns [about] the change of watch-keeping practices on the vessel and bridge team management," said Nalen.

See page 7, **PATHFINDER**

## New ballast water regs a step in right direction

Regulations proposed by the U.S. Coast Guard to combat the spread of invasive species are better than what's on the books now, but need to address the problem faster, according to comments submitted by the council.

Invasive species are organisms living in an environment or ecosystem to which they are not native. Invasive species can be transported in a variety of ways. A significant way aquatic invasive species are spread is by ships transporting cargo around the world.

Because empty cargo ships are too buoyant to balance safely during ocean voyages, they take sea water into holding tanks as "ballast water" for stability.

During this process, microorganisms, fish and shellfish are drawn into the tanks, then discharged with the ballast water when the ship reaches its destination and prepares to load cargo. Under current rules most ships are required to empty and refill their ballast tanks in the open

See page 6, **BALLAST**

## Federal legislation on tanker escorts passes U.S. House, now before Senate

• **Kodiak incident underscores need for escorts**

By **STAN JONES**  
Council staff

Efforts by the citizens' council to save the system of dual escort tugs for loaded oil tankers in Prince William Sound took a major step forward last fall when the U.S. House of Representatives approved a bill with language to preserve the escort system.

The measure was the Coast Guard Authorization Act of 2010, which passed the House on October 23.

Alaska Congressman Don Young, working with Chairman James Oberstar of the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, was instrumental in getting the language included in the bill.

"Congressman Young and Chairman Oberstar deserve great credit and appreciation by all of the communities of Prince William Sound and the entire Exxon Valdez oil spill region for their work on this issue," said Steve Lewis, president of

the citizens' council.

In a statement released after the bill's passage, Young emphasized the importance of the double-escort requirement.

"Twenty years ago, the state of Alaska suffered the worst tragedy of its history during the Exxon Valdez Oil Spill," Young said. "We are still learning from the mistakes of that disaster and this bill works toward a safer and better future for our waterways."

See page 7, **LEGISLATION**

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INSIDE THE OBSERVER

Council member organization profile: Cordova group's roots go deep in Sound's history, p. 2

Council applauds "real" unannounced drill, p. 2

Lewis: Tug grounding reinforces lessons of Exxon spill, p. 3

Alyeska Viewpoint: Alyeska meets new challenges, reinforces safety, p. 3

Citizens' council celebrates 20th birthday. Timeline, p. 4-5

Staff departures revise roster in Anchorage office, p. 6

Community Corner: Citizens worldwide are concerned about effects of oil development, p. 8

PRINCE WILLIAM SOUND

RCAC

Regional Citizens' Advisory Council



Council member entity profile

# Cordova group's roots go deep in Sound's history

The Cordova District Fishermen United, a non-profit organization based in Cordova, is dedicated to preserving, promoting, and perpetuating the commercial fishery in the district that includes the Copper River and Cordova areas.

The union's foundations were laid as early as 1918, when a group of Prince William Sound fishermen formed a union affiliated with the American Federation of Labor. Early meeting records indicate that the original organization was probably called Copper River and Prince William Sound Fishermen's Union.

Cordova District Fisheries Union was officially founded in 1935, and as a union held strikes to protest wages, working conditions and fish prices.

In February of 1971, Cordova fishermen came together to oppose the plan to build an Alaska oil pipeline and terminal in Prince William Sound. This meeting re-focused the group on involvement with public political policy. The organization fought a legal battle against the placement of the oil terminal in Prince William Sound.

Today the group continues that involvement in the political arena by representing Cordova area fishermen before the Alaska Board of Fisheries, and employs a lobbyist to be their advocate in the state capital.

In 2007, the organization formed FishPAC, a political action committee which addresses a wide range of issues affecting the fisheries, including forest practices, water quality, and access to the fisheries for commercial fishermen.

Executive Director Rochelle van den Broeke said the group runs a number of projects designed to "give back to the community, create awareness of the importance of the fisheries, and demonstrate how fishing is intrinsically vital to Cordova's economy."

The organization holds several annual events to distribute free fish and reach out to the community.

Each June, Senior Salmon Day ensures that senior members of the community have access to Copper River salmon. Volunteers fillet, clean, bag and distribute salmon donated by the fishing fleet. Fishermen from the group also donate halibut which is given away to communities in the Copper River basin, such as Chitina, Glennallen, Mentasta, Tazlina, and Tonsina, to build good relations.

"Sharing the fishers' catch with those who may not have access to seafood is important to our members," van den Broeke said.

Fish Prom is an annual dinner sponsored by the group to raise money for scholarships and a range of activities, such as the Copper River Stewardship Program, and the Alaska Young Fishermen's Summit.

The fishing vessel training program run by Alyeska's Ship Escort/Response Vessel System, or SERVS, is a major source of revenue for the organization, which recruits the fishermen and manages the contract with them. Fishing vessel teams are trained by SERVS in the use of oil spill response equipment so they can act as first responders in case of a spill.

This past year, the group partnered with other local organizations to coordinate a fishing net recycling program. van den Broek noted this was highly successful, and the organization is planning to continue the program.

Recently, the group was contracted by the Prince William Sound Science Center to help with its herring restoration program. Local herring fishermen will be contracted to take



Cordova fishermen Mike Lytle (left) and Bill Hjort (right) volunteer to fillet Copper River sockeye in the annual "Senior Salmon Day" giveaway. Photo courtesy of Cordova District Fishermen United.

environmental samples each March for the next three years.

The Cordova fishermen are represented on the citizens' council board by Patience Anderson Faulkner, who is a voice for the fishing industry's concerns with keeping the environment in Prince William Sound healthy and protected from oil industry pollution.

Visit Cordova District Fishermen United on the web at [www.cdfu.org](http://www.cdfu.org). Keep up to date on the group's latest issues by following them on Twitter or becoming a fan on Facebook. Find links to both on the Observer web edition: [www.bit.ly/ObserverJan2010](http://www.bit.ly/ObserverJan2010)

*With this issue, we are introducing a new addition to the Observer. Alternating with the regular committee volunteer spotlight will be a spotlight on one of our member entities, a community, or an organization represented by our council. We hope you enjoy these features.*

## Council applauds 'real' unannounced drill in Sound

On December 10, the Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation surprised Alyeska Pipeline's Ship Escort/Response Vessel System with an unannounced oil spill drill.

The drill scenario was that an unknown amount of North Slope crude oil had spilled into Sheep Bay in Prince William Sound. The cause of the imaginary spill was not stated.

The council was pleased with the agency's efforts to step up unannounced inspections and drills, as the council has been advocating for true no-notice drills for a number of years. Usually, drills are scheduled far in advance to allow time to plan the event.

The council contends that pre-planning defeats the purpose of a drill, which is to determine how ready the system actually is to respond on a moment's notice.

The council is hoping responders take full advantage of lessons learned during the exercise to improve response readiness and effectiveness. Holding a drill in mid-December also tested response capabilities in darkness and in winter conditions.

Ten vessels participated, including the Columbia Spirit, a Valdez tour boat; the Invader, a tug from the Valdez oil terminal; seven fishing vessels; and a response barge equipped with a

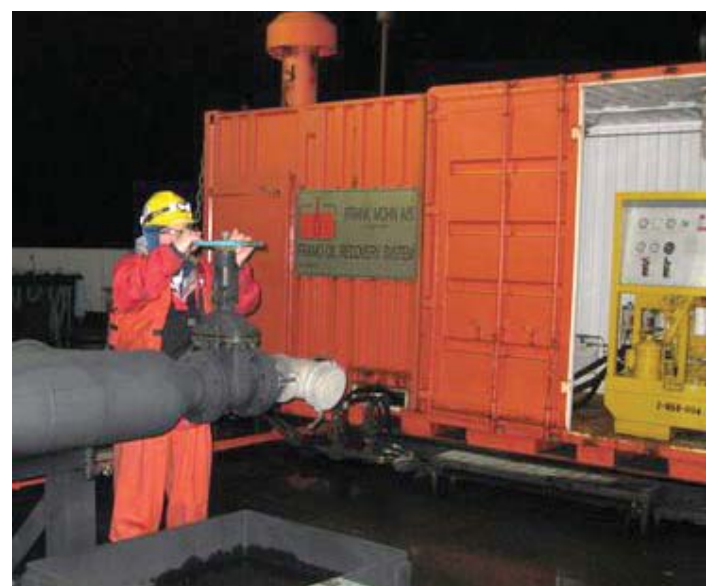
built-in oil skimmer. The barge is part of an open-water task force, consisting of personnel and equipment trained to respond to oil spills that occur away from shore. In a real spill, these vessels work in formation to corral spilled oil into containment booms so that it can be skimmed from the water.

Several council staffers participated as observers and noted several lessons that would be useful during future spill response planning.

One of the most important problems observed was the lengthy shifts expected of those first on the scene. In the event of a spill, current response plans call on first responders to work for 18 hours, starting from the time they arrive at the spill location. This shift time would not take into consideration any travel time or whether the person had worked during the time just before the call to the spill.

During previous discussions with the industry and others, the council viewed this as unrealistic. Others had advised that crew would be able to rest on the trip to the spill site, and then start an 18-hour shift.

The drill showed that this transit time was filled with tasks such as preparing response



A spill response worker adjusts valves to mimic real preparations for loading spilled oil skimmed from the water onto the barge. Photo by John Engles, Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation.

equipment and setting up a decontamination area. According to the council report, the crew seemed exhausted by 8 hours into the 18 hour shift, and could not have safely worked another 10 hours before relief crews would appear on

See page 7, **DRILL**



From the Council President

# Tug grounding reinforces lessons of Exxon spill

The Coast Guard is still investigating the December 23 grounding of the Pathfinder ice scout tug in Prince William Sound, and few facts about the causes are known.

We have asked the Coast Guard to share its findings with us when its work is complete.

Some of the troubling questions we hope the Coast Guard will address in its investigation are already in evidence, and worthy of public consideration.

The first question is, how did the crew manage to hit Bligh Reef, the most famous navigational hazard in the Sound, 20 years after the Exxon Valdez did the same thing and spilled 11 million gallons of North Slope crude? What happened, or didn't happen, aboard the Pathfinder to cause this accident?

And could the Coast Guard's Vessel Traffic Center in Valdez, with its radar, its Automatic Identification System for ships, and its electronic charting, have spotted the danger and warned the tug's crew? If that is not currently part of the traffic center's mission, should the mission be expanded to help guard against such accidents in the future?

And what environmental harm will be caused by the diesel fuel that spilled into the water? While diesel is generally considered less harmful than crude oil, that doesn't mean it's harmless. This is the second diesel spill from the Pathfinder in the Sound in recent years, so it's clear that this type of spill is a significant hazard. Diesel's impacts on the marine eco-

system need to be understood so that effective countermeasures can be adopted.

Even as these questions are under study, they reinforce important lessons from the Exxon Valdez spill of 1989.

For one, constant vigilance is the price of safety. There is never a moment when we can assume the system in Prince William Sound is safe because there hasn't been a catastrophe lately.

For another, backup systems are indispensable, and they need to be in place and operating. One of those, as mentioned above, is the Coast Guard traffic center. Another is the iceberg detection radar system that was installed several years ago on Reef Island after much expenditure and effort by our council, Alyeska Pipeline Service Co., and the Coast Guard.

This system scans the tanker lanes for icebergs and transmits the information back to Valdez for use in sailing decisions for oil tankers—the same function performed by ice scouts like the Pathfinder. However, the Reef Island radar can detect icebergs in weather too dark or foggy for direct observation by vessel crews and thus can be a valuable adjunct to ice scout vessels.

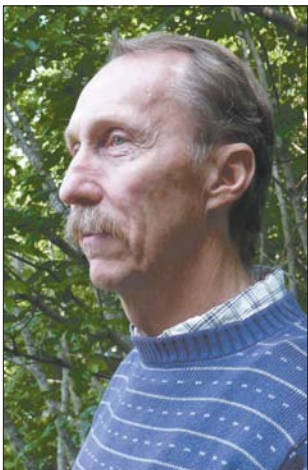
Unfortunately, this system has been inoperative since late summer, after a Coast Guard upgrade to its own system on Reef Island took the iceberg detection radar system offline. The council believes it is of paramount importance to

restore this system to service and has been working with Alyeska and the Coast Guard to that end.

Our council was set up to make sure the complacency that led to the Exxon Valdez disaster never returns. That is the main reason we are working so hard to preserve another crucial backup system in Prince William Sound: the system of double escort tugs for loaded oil tankers in the Sound. Our group is now lobbying Congress for federal legislation to preserve the double escorts so that, if another tanker should someday go astray and head for Bligh Reef, backup will be close at hand to prevent another catastrophe like the one in 1989.

Whatever the causes of the Pathfinder grounding are determined to have been, the incident should serve as a forceful reminder to the oil industry and its regulators that complacency never sleeps, so we humans can never let down our guard in Prince William Sound.

- Steve Lewis is board president of the Prince William Sound Regional Citizens' Advisory Council, where he represents the city of Selkovia.



Steve Lewis

Alyeska Viewpoint

# Alyeska meets new challenges, reinforces safety

Alyeska Pipeline Service Company is adapting and reshaping its business to manage the challenges connected to declining throughput, or the amount of oil that flows through the pipeline, while staying focused on safety and integrity.

All employees in the Trans Alaska Pipeline System have been asked to look for inefficiencies in the company and to watch for ways we can simplify business. This includes analyzing operations at urban offices, along the pipeline, and in Prince William Sound.

Change can be difficult and we recognize that it can cause anxiety when it has the potential to impact our people. The point of this movement is that we want Alyeska and the pipeline to remain viable in our communities and to be around to serve Alaska's economy for many years to come."

Why does declining throughput affect the pipeline system? Throughput peaked in 1988 when 2.1 million barrels a day flowed from the North Slope. Then, the challenge was figuring out how to move all that Alaska crude through the line.

Times have changed. Throughput today is about 700,000 barrels a day and declining every

year. The lower the throughput, the slower the oil moves, the longer it takes to get to the terminal in Valdez, and the colder the crude is when it arrives. This collection of facts makes for challenges in operations, and for more expensive operating costs.

Throughput is projected to dip to 500,000 barrels within the next five years and to 300,000 barrels a day sometime around 2023.

We can't wait and react to these conditions later. The time to act is now, and as a company, that is what we are doing.

Our leaders are working within the company and with representatives from the owner companies, BP, ExxonMobil, ConocoPhillips, Unocal, and Koch Alaska, to strengthen the pipeline's future. One step included developing a 2010 budget that is lower than in 2009.

To meet this challenge, Alyeska cut sixty jobs and is spending less on contractors and businesses. This included adopting a new contracting strategy that bundles a number of contracts and saves tens of millions of dollars each year.

We are also assessing our facilities footprint in Anchorage, Fairbanks and Valdez. In some cases such as Fairbanks, we have significant excess capacity. With spare room at each site, We

will be consolidating and looking for efficiencies in delivery of support functions. We anticipate that some form of consolidation is anticipated, and some employees will be could likely have their positions reassigned to other job sites.

We are making all changes with the utmost care. Alyeska will become more efficient, but we won't compromise our relationships, or our commitment to safety, integrity and the environment. We are very proud of winning the 2008 API Distinguished Operator award and want to build on this foundation of excellence. We know that being a prudent operator of TAPS is our utmost responsibility.

- Greg Jones is Senior Vice President, Valdez Operations and Health, Safety, Environment, and Quality, Alyeska Pipeline Service Co.



Greg Jones



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Keep up with the news about oil tankers, oil spill prevention and response, activities of the citizens' council, and other issues related to oil transportation in Alaska waters.

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# Citizens' council is celebrating



**March 24, 1989:**  
Exxon Valdez runs aground on Bligh Reef

One of the most radical innovations to come out of the Exxon Valdez spill was born 20 years ago this winter: the establishment of permanent, industry-funded citizen oversight for both the oil transportation industry and its government regulators. The Prince William Sound Regional Citizens' Advisory Council was incorporated in December 1989. On this 20th anniversary of that event, the Observer begins a four-part series sketching the council's history over the past two decades. This first installment covers the council's first five years, from 1989 through 1994.

Efforts to form the Prince William Sound council began soon after the Exxon Valdez struck Bligh Reef on March 24, 1989, and spilled 11 million gallons of North Slope crude into the Sound. After incorporating in December 1989, the group in February 1990 signed the contract with Alyeska Pipeline Service Co. that specifies its rights, powers, duties and funding.

Four months later, the council was already deeply involved in what over the years would turn out to be one of its most important responsibilities: helping make sure that the next major oil spill — should there ever be another — would meet with a better cleanup effort. In June 1990, the council joined a working group on oil-spill contingency plans that also included representatives of government regulators and the oil industry.

In August 1990, President Bush signed the Oil Pollution Act of 1990, which gave the council the protection of federal law, as well as additional powers and responsibilities.

Here are some additional highlights of the first five years of the council's work to foster safer oil transportation in Prince William Sound.



**September 1991:**  
At a council board meeting, board member Stan Stephens questions Jim Hermiller, then-President of Alyeska.

March 24, 1989

December 29, 1989

February 9, 1990

April, 1991

September, 1991

December, 1991

May, 1992

August, 1992

September, 1992

March, 1993

**December 29, 1989:**  
Prince William Sound Regional Citizens' Advisory Council is incorporated.

**April 1991:**  
Council begins independent monitoring of effluent from ballast water treatment plant at Alyeska tanker terminal.

**February 9, 1990:**  
Citizens' Council signs contract with Alyeska.

**September 1991:**  
Council seeks proposals for assessing socioeconomic effects of oil spills.

**May 1992:**  
First Nearshore Response Plan is submitted to Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation. Council notes gaps but says there is much to be pleased about.

**August 1992:**  
In an early round of what will become a years-long battle over tanker vapors, scientists hired by council dispute Alyeska claims that the tanker terminal is not responsible for most of the benzene in Valdez air. Alyeska had claimed the terminal produced only 25 percent of the benzene in outdoor air; the council analysis puts the figure at 90 percent or more.

**December 1991:**  
Council board votes to co-sponsor independent jointly funded study of towing disabled tankers. Also, Coast Guard appoints council to federal committee helping draft regulations for oil tanker preparedness and safety under a process called "regulatory negotiation."



The citizens' council's original logo included an eye overseeing tanker traffic.



**September 1992:**  
Board members Gary Bader, the



# ing 20th birthday



**March 1993:**  
Council launches Long-Term Environmental Monitoring Program. Blue mussels and subtidal sediments are sampled twice a year from nine sites around Prince William Sound, the Kenai Peninsula and Kodiak Island.

**October 1993:**  
Part I of disabled tanker towing study completed. Main recommendations: Quick-deploy towing packages on all tankers, more drills and training, and closer escorts in Valdez Narrows.

**November 1993:**  
Alyeska announces plans to install vapor control system to reduce emissions at tanker terminal.



**June, 1993:**  
Gordon Scott, current member of the council's Oil Spill Prevention and Response committee, testifies at a U.S. Coast Guard hearing on escort requirements.

**September 1994:**  
ARCO conducts first nearshore response drill in Port Valdez.

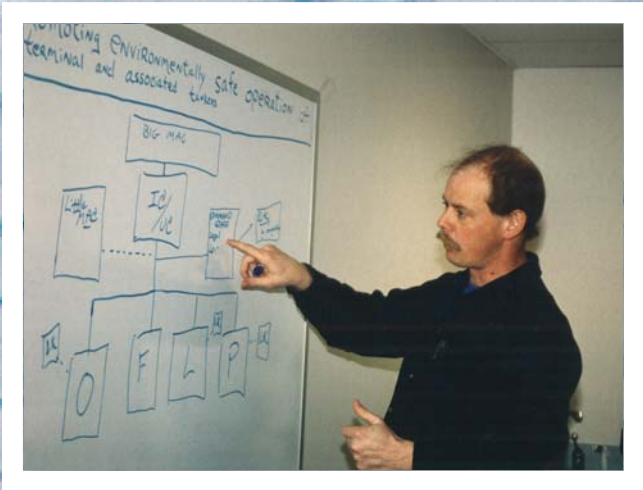
**November 1994:**  
New Coast Guard rules require additional escorts, tighter wind restrictions and changes in escort configuration for laden single-hull tankers. There are hints that new tugs, possibly the tractor tugs recommended by council, will eventually be used in Valdez Narrows. Council-supported disabled tanker towing study is used by Coast Guard in writing the rules.

**May 1993:**  
The council board adopts official position on chemical dispersants for oil-spill cleanup: They should be used only in non-sensitive areas and only after mechanical recovery methods, such as booms and skimmers, have been deemed inadequate.

**May 1994:**  
Tanker Eastern Lion leaks about 8,400 gallons of North Slope crude while moored-at Alyeska terminal. Afterward, council recommends more aggressive initial spill response in the future, even to spills thought to be small. First reports had put the Eastern Lion leak at 50 gallons.



**1994:**  
Ann Rothe and Bill Walker talk to Alyeska liaison to the council.



**1994:**  
Tim Robertson, then-member of the council's Oil Spill Prevention and Response Committee, demonstrates the council's role in the Incident Command System.



**1994:**  
The tanker Kenai is escorted out of Prince William Sound. (Date is approximate)



# BALLAST: New regs may not go far enough in addressing problem

Continued from Page 1

ocean where there are fewer organisms in the water. This exchange helps reduce the number of such creatures discharged in the ballast water at the arrival port.

The new rules continue a previous exemption from the ballast water exchange requirements for North Slope crude oil tankers. Referred to as the “coastwise exemption,” the law states that the oil tankers that travel from ports in Washington state or California to Prince William Sound do not have to change their ballast water at sea.

This exception dates back to the mid-1990s, and is at odds with a requirement by the Environmental Protection Agency that does order these tankers to exchange ballast water.

Currently, tankers do follow the EPA rules, but the council has long sought an end to this exemption and called for this inconsistency to be cleared up before the new regulations become permanent.

While ballast water exchange reduces hitchhiking invaders, research has shown that this procedure is not 100 percent effective. Organisms that remain can cause a real threat to the receiving environments.

Crude oil tankers can carry 150,000-400,000 barrels, or 6-17 million gallons, of ballast water per trip. An estimated 260 tankers visit the Valdez terminal each year. About 86 percent of the ballast water discharged in the Valdez area is transported from Puget Sound, San Francisco, and Long Beach. These ports have well documented

infestations of invasive species. These repeated, high-volume doses pose a serious risk for the waters of Prince William Sound, in the council’s view.

Green crabs, a species native to Europe, is a very real danger to Prince William Sound. While they have not been spotted in the Sound yet, they have been spreading farther north towards Alaskan waters every year. These tiny, voracious crabs have been known to spread through tanker ballast water and overrun native species.

The Coast Guard’s proposed regulations would require the installation of special devices inside the holds to kill living organisms present.

The Coast Guard has set forth a two-stage process for shippers to comply. The first step would put in place rules followed by the International Maritime Organization, which are stricter than current U.S. standards. All vessels must comply with this interim standard by 2014, except Prince William Sound’s coastwise tankers.

The second step would require much stricter control over organisms in ballast water with a target date of 2016. By this date, tankers must have equipment installed which would effectively kill all organisms in ballast water. However, if the Coast Guard deems the more rigorous standards impractical to meet by the 2016 deadline, the agency could re-evaluate the second goal.

The council and other organizations believe that the process could,



European green crab found in Vancouver, B.C. waters during a 2008 citizens’ council monitoring trip. Photo by Dan Gilson, council project manager.

and should, be accelerated. The process for judging the standards as “practical” is seen as a loophole that could lead to protracted delays.

The council suggested the Coast Guard consider the use of existing shore-based facilities to help solve the problem. The council has proposed that facilities at the Valdez terminal could provide an opportunity to bring the Prince William Sound tankers into compliance ahead of a proposed 2016 deadline and at a reduced cost.

The oil terminal in Valdez is home to a facility designed to treat the oily ballast water that results when tankers carry it in empty crude oil tanks. The council believes the ballast water treatment facility could be modified to treat for invasive hitch-hikers.

The system already in place contains resources such as pipes to move ballast water from tanker

holds to onshore tanks. The council encouraged the Coast Guard to examine the Valdez terminal to determine whether the ballast water facility could be modified to address the invasive species issue, which would avoid the need to install special equipment on tankers. If so, this work could be completed well ahead of a 2016 deadline.

The council believes that improving ballast water treatment technology sooner would help stop the spread of creatures such as the green crab, and protect the native species of Prince William Sound. Untreated ballast water from oil tankers could soon have a profound adverse impact to our region’s economy, fisheries, wildlife and recreational resources.

*For more information on this regulation or on non-indigenous species affecting our waters, visit our website: [www.pwsrccac.org](http://www.pwsrccac.org).*

## Staff departures revise roster in Anchorage office

Recent weeks have seen two staff changes in the council’s Anchorage office.

In the first, Lisa Ka’aihue, who joined the council staff in 1993 and has served as director of administration since 2006, resigned effective Jan. 27.

In addition to serving in the

director position, Ka’aihue managed the council’s invasive species project. She had also held a seat since 2008 on the federal Invasive Species Advisory Committee, which supports the National Invasive Species Council.

“Lisa’s organizational skills, institutional knowledge and keen

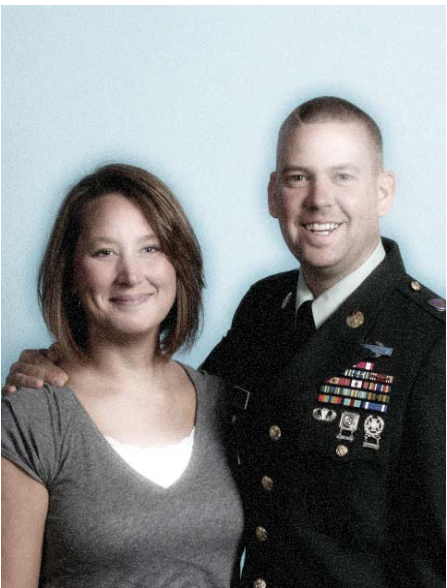


Lisa Ka’aihue shares a laugh with Peter Armato, volunteer with the council’s Information and Education committee. Photo by Linda Robinson, citizens’ council.

attention to detail have benefited the organization,” said Donna Schantz, the council’s acting executive director. “I know everyone in our organization joins me in wishing her success in future endeavors.”

“Lisa is the perfect role model for women in the field of science and administration,” said council board member Jane Eisemann. “She combines intelligence with class, protocol with thoughtfulness, seriousness with wit, archival knowledge with forward thinking.”

Also leaving the council staff is Telena McQuery, a project manager assistant. She joined the council as administrative assistant in August 2008, and was promoted to her present position a year later. Her husband, Mike, is a member of the U.S. Army and is being transferred to Kentucky after his return from Afghanistan. Her resignation is effective Feb. 26.



Telena and Mike McQuery

**THE OBSERVER** is a quarterly newsletter published by the Prince William Sound Regional Citizens’ Advisory Council. Except where credited to others, articles are written by Amanda Johnson, council project manager.



Legislation: Issues at state, federal levels

Continued from Page 1

The double-escorts effort gained additional urgency and intensified support after a January 17 incident in which the Exxon tanker Kodiak lost engine power at Hinchinbrook Entrance after problems with an electrical generator. The escort tugs Tanerliq and Aware hooked up to the tanker to keep it on track. It was towed to a safe anchorage at Knowles Head and was cleared by the Coast guard to depart Prince William Sound the next day.

Alaska’s U.S. senators, Mark Begich and Lisa Murkowski, both cited the Kodiak assist as further proof of the need for dual escorts. “The tug escort prevention system works, and even though it is rare for a tanker to lose power, this is not the first time it has happened and it won’t be the last,” Murkowski said. “We must maintain the present escort system indefinitely.”

Under a federal law passed after the spill, escorts are required for loaded single-hull tankers in Prince William Sound. The same law bans single-hulled tankers after 2015.

For now, the practice is to escort all tankers, regardless of hull configuration. The council is concerned this could change with the switch to all double-hulled vessels. This is what prompted the council’s effort to maintain the status quo by extending the requirement to double-hulled tankers.

While double hulls on a tanker can reduce the size of some spills and prevent others, the design feature is not a cure-all. A Coast Guard study after the single-hulled Exxon Valdez’s grounding on Bligh Reef concluded a double hull could have cut the 11-million-gallon spill by as much as 60 percent. But that would have left a still-catastrophic spill of 4.4 million gallons of North Slope crude.

The Senate has not yet passed its version of the Coast Guard bill. The council will be working to have the escorts language is included in

whatever version of the bill goes to final passage.

• New panel would coordinate efforts on invasive species

In the legislative session that started Jan. 19, the citizens’ council will continue supporting House Bill 12 to establish the Alaska Council on Invasive Species.

The council would coordinate efforts by state and federal agencies and non-governmental organizations to deal with invasions of Alaska’s lands and waters by non-indigenous species of plants, animals, and fish.

The issue has long been of concern to the citizens’ council because of the risk that non-indigenous species arriving in oil tanker ballast water could establish themselves in Prince William Sound and harm indigenous populations, including commercial fish species.

The bill, introduced last year and sponsored by Anchorage Rep. Craig Johnson, would create a 14-member council. Five seats would be held by the commissioners of various state departments with the remaining seats representing soil and water conservation districts, conservation organizations, farmers, landscapers, commercial fishermen, commercial shippers, the University of Alaska agricultural program, Native corporations, and the public at large.

The council, according to the bill, would “plan and coordinate efforts that address the threats posed to the state and its residents by invasive species.” It would involve federal departments and agencies in the process.

The citizens’ council’s efforts in Washington and Juneau are managed by the Legislative Affairs Committee, made up of council board members. John Velsko is chair, with Blake Johnson as vice chair. The other members are Patience Andersen Faulkner, Al Burch, Iver Malutin, Pat Duffy, John French, and Walt Parker.

PATHFINDER: Human error was factor

Continued from Page 1

(Bridge team management refers to communication among crew members on the bridge.)

Statements about their actions at the time of the grounding have not been released.

Crowley informed the council that the Pathfinder’s captain had 30 years of sailing experience, mostly in Prince William Sound waters, and over 20 years as Captain. The second mate had 1-1/2 years of experience. Both had proper licenses and were in good health.

Nalen also offered an apology on behalf of Crowley.

“We will do everything in our power, together with our partners, to ensure it never happens again,” Nalen said. “That is our utmost commitment.”

Crowley pledged to remain as open as possible to keep the council updated on findings during the investigation.

Separate investigations are still underway by Crowley and the Coast Guard. The council will closely review the results of both investigations.

“We will be pursuing the ‘why’ and the ‘how’ in order to come up with the ‘what’ to make sure it doesn’t happen again,” said Steve Lewis, president of the council board.

At the time of the grounding, the Pathfinder had just finished surveying the area for icebergs that would pose a threat to tankers leaving the Valdez terminal, and had begun the trip back to port.

The official time of the grounding was put at 6:14 p.m. By 6:30 p.m., the crew reported that the vessel had been freed from the

rock and was leaking diesel fuel. The tug managed to reach Busby Island Bay to drop anchor and await help to contain the still-leaking fuel. Response vessels reached the crippled tug within a few hours and had surrounded it with containment boom by eight o’clock the next morning. Divers determined that three of the tug’s tanks were breached, although one was a water tank, which was empty at the time of the grounding.

An overflight conducted by the Coast Guard at daybreak on Thursday reported a sheen 3 miles long.

Response crews ran into a problem just after midnight on Friday morning, while starting to pump remaining fuel from the Pathfinder, causing a smaller spill. An overflight at daybreak on Friday reported a new 1-mile sheen.

A total of 20 vessels aided the Pathfinder: Coast Guard cutters, vessels from O’Brien and Chadux salvage operations, and SERVVS oil spill response vessels. Six were fishing vessels trained by SERVVS to respond to oil spills.

Several questions were raised by the grounding, according to the council, including how the boat ended up on the reef, whether the Coast Guard’s Vessel Traffic Center in Valdez could have helped avert the grounding, and what effects diesel fuel will have on the environment in the Sound.

See council president Steve Lewis’s column in this issue of the Observer for more on the council’s unanswered questions.

More information, including detailed timelines, statements, and situation reports, are available on the council’s blog for this incident: [www.pwsrcac.blogspot.com](http://www.pwsrcac.blogspot.com).

DRILL: Nighttime drill beneficial

Continued from Page 2

scene.

“The amount of time the four man barge crew is expected to work is unrealistic, especially considering today’s safety environment,” said Roy Robertson, the council’s drill monitor. “We just don’t believe it’s safe to require these barge guys to work with dangerous equipment off the side of a barge in the middle of winter for 18 hours, especially considering they may have just worked a regular 12 hour shift.”

Among the council’s other suggestions were adding lights to the barge and oil spill containment boom to help the fishing crews judge whether the equipment and boats are aligned in the right formation. Council noted, however, that it

appeared this response drill was managed fairly well even without lights, much to the credit of participants.

Redistribution of some tasks was also advisable, as the task force’s manager on the barge seemed overwhelmed with duties.

Also, more safety officers would be needed during a real spill.

Council staff commended the crew and fishing vessels on the job given the limitations in crew size and the fact that this was the first nighttime drill on the open water for Cordova fishing vessels.


The council expressed appreciation for the opportunity to observe and saw this unannounced drill as a chance to collaborate and improve spill response in Prince William Sound.

Upcoming citizens’ council meeting

Join the citizens’ council board of directors in Valdez on May 6-7, 2010. Board meetings are open to public. Agendas and other meeting-related materials are available on the council web site at [www.pwsrcac.org/about/boardintro.html](http://www.pwsrcac.org/about/boardintro.html).

FIND OUT FASTER.

Twitter

**PWSRCAC**

Crowley estimates up to 6,410 gallons spilled from tug Pathfinder on [#blighreefspill](#).

6:05 PM Jan 4th from Tweetie

RT @Ch2KTUU: 2 in tug's crew - capt. & 2nd mate - grounded after running aground, boat's operator says <http://bit.ly/6LGZxY> [#blighreefspill](#)

1:44 PM Dec 31st, 2009 from HootSuite

Homer Tribune: Tug's accident raises questions <http://bit.ly/525R0V>

Twitter: @pwsrcac  
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Community Corner

Citizens worldwide are concerned about effects of oil development

This fall, I was invited to make two presentations at the “Fisheries in the Context of Hydrocarbon Resource Development on the Continental Shelf” conference in Murmansk, Russia. My first presentation was on the Exxon Valdez oil spill and the second was on the effectiveness of citizen oversight.

An Arctic sea shelf in the Murmansk region is home to valuable marine resources. Exploration is increasing in this area as oil and gas fields on land become depleted. The city of Murmansk must satisfy the need for fuel and food provided by the fisheries and encourage economic development. Organizers of the conference were looking for successful examples of citizens, government, and industry working together. Attendees expressed a lot of interest in the council and the after-effects of the Exxon Valdez oil spill. Others requested information on such topics as the Oil Pollution Act of 1990, ocean observing and modeling systems, oil spill dispersants, and settlements from the Exxon Valdez oil spill. As a “model” organization, our council is paving the way for others to continue the sustainable production of seafood while developing environmentally friendly ways to generate energy.

Thank you to Jane Eisemann and Blake Johnson for helping out with the booth during November’s Pacific Marine Expo in Seattle. Once again, this well attended event provided the opportunity to speak with many fishers from Alaska and the west coast. Many attendees were particularly interested in information about the dual escort system in Prince William Sound.

The council sponsored our annual Science Night on December 3. Science Night is an evening of public presentations on various topics of interest to the council. This year, we heard presentations from:

Scott Pegau, from the Oil Spill Recovery Institute in Cordova, discussed a joint experiment conducted along with the Alaska Ocean Observing System to test the accuracy of their sea current predictions in Prince William Sound.

Stanley “Jeep” Rice, from the National Oceanic & Atmospheric Administration, talked about the long-term environmental effects of lingering Exxon Valdez oil.

Tad Pfeffer, glaciologist and professor of civil engineering at the University of Colorado, spoke about Alaska glaciers, Columbia

Glacier in particular.

Tom Kuckertz and Joel Kennedy, council project managers, discussed the status of the ice radar system, which was implemented by the council several years ago to monitor icebergs flowing from Columbia Glacier.

Jim Payne and Bill Driskell, researchers for the council, talked about their work monitoring oil pollution from the Exxon Valdez in Prince William Sound.

During the volunteer workshop held on December 4, staff, board, and committee volunteers held an annual review and evaluation of council projects—both ongoing project and ideas for new projects in the upcoming budget year. The annual volunteer appreciation party followed the workshop at Anchorage’s downtown Hilton Hotel. We are grateful to all of the volunteers who put in so much time toward the protection of our waters.

Upcoming 2010 conferences of interest include the Alaska Marine Science Symposium and the Alaska Forum on the Environment. The Science Symposium will be held January 18-22 at the Hotel Captain Cook in Anchorage. Regional themes include the Bering Sea, the Arctic Ocean, and the Gulf of Alaska.

The Alaska Forum on the Environment will be held February 8-12, 2010 at the Dena’ina Convention Center, also in Anchorage. Youth sessions will be held February 9-10. During these sessions, according to the forum’s agenda, “youth and young adult participants will be able to interact with potential mentors and peers, sharing experiences, asking questions and learning more.”

For more information on any of these topics or conferences, visit The Observer online: [www.bit.ly/ObserverJan2010](http://www.bit.ly/ObserverJan2010)



Linda Robinson speaks about the council and the Exxon Valdez spill during the Murmansk conference.



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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