

## What today's oil tells us about tomorrow's spill response

The Council has released a new analysis of Alaska North Slope crude oil. Every few years, the Prince William Sound tanker operators share a sample from the trans-Alaska pipeline with the Council. The sample is tested to determine the current mix of substances that make up the oil.

### Why does Alaska North Slope crude oil differ over time?

The oil that runs through the trans-Alaska pipeline comes from a mixture of oil fields across the North Slope. Over the years, new pockets of oil have been discovered, while production in some older fields has declined. This leads to changes in the oil moving through the pipeline.

### What are the differences?

Crude oils are generally categorized by weight: heavy, medium, or light. Heavy oils have mostly larger hydrocarbon molecules. In lighter oils, the molecules are smaller, having been further broken down by exposure to hotter temperatures and higher pressures in the earth's crust.

Light oil is less dense, meaning a given volume weighs less than heavier oils, and less viscous, meaning it flows easily. Heavy oil is denser and more viscous. Medium weight oils contain a mix of heavier and lighter molecules.

At the refinery, these light and heavy components are separated so they can be used for different purposes. The

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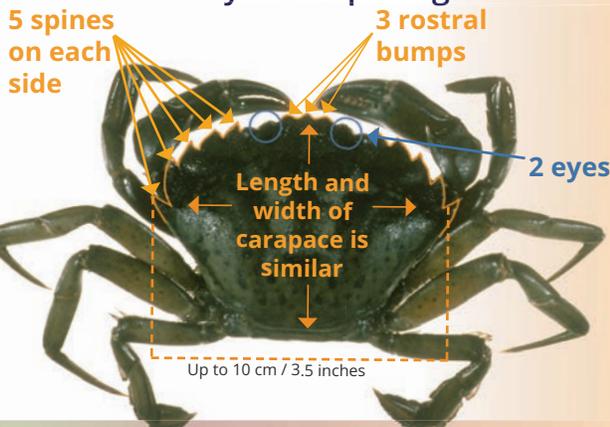
## European green crab spreading in southeast Alaska

In 2022, the Metlakatla Indian Community first spotted shells of European green crab, or *Carcinus maenus*, during regular monitoring at the Annette Islands Reserve. Subsequent monitoring turned up live crabs.

This summer, the group reported a large population growth in the surrounding area.

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### How to identify a European green crab



Green crabs are not always green! They can be brown or green, and the bottom may be red or orange during molting.

## From economics to ecosystems: Kevin Berry's calculations help evaluate risks

A first glance at Kevin Berry's work history looks a little random. His curriculum vitae is sprinkled with a wide variety of topics, from disease, species loss, fisheries, to weather.

"Typically, if you look at an engineer or physical scientist, they might specialize in a species, or a place, or a specific thing." Berry says that as an economist, there is a social science aspect to what he does. "I'm interested in a type of decision, and a type of human behavior, how people respond to looming catastrophic risks."

Berry says the common thread in what he studies is that there is something that can be done about the risk. He uses Lyme disease as an example.

"You can change your behavioral patterns and spend less time where there are ticks," he says. "You can wear different types of clothing or you can get medical treatment after getting sick."

Berry says this is a pattern of three broad strategies that are used in response to risk: prevention, adaptation, and mitigation.

"We can invest in prevention to keep the bad thing from occurring," says Berry. "We can invest in infrastructure and training practices, the things that make it less likely we'll have a problem."

"We can adapt to a problem," adds Berry.

"Basically, we can make it so that if it does occur, it's not as bad."

"And then we can mitigate things once they happen," Berry concludes. "We can clean up afterwards to avoid negative impacts."

Berry attended the University of Wyoming where he received a bachelor's and Ph.D. in resource economics. He's currently a Professor of Economics at the University of Alaska Anchorage, where he chairs their Economics Department.

He works with economic models that help analyze tradeoffs. These models can help make decisions when options aren't easy to compare. There are different models that can help adapt to random occurrences that affect a decision.

"They're cool math problems," Berry says. "Every time we change a little bit, we have to find a new strategy. You can turn a really complicated thing into a really neat problem, where we can talk about the returns to preventing disasters in the same way we'd talk about investing in the stock market."

He gives an example related to early childhood education. Berry serves as the current Board president for Thread, a local nonprofit that works to advance the quality of early education and child development, and on the board of the Anchorage Child Care and Early Education Fund. He started volunteering because he's a father of three kids, but the topic also piqued his professional interests.

"We can think of childcare and early education as prevention for a lot of other social ills," Berry says. "We know from various economic research at the University of Chicago and James Heckman's Institute that there is a massive

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Kevin Berry is a member of the Council's Terminal Operations and Environmental Monitoring Committee. The committee works to identify actual and potential sources of episodic and chronic pollution at the Valdez Marine Terminal.

# New testing protocols lead to change in dispersant products

The oil spill response industry is changing products used to disperse spilled oil. This change stemmed from new protocols put in place by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, or EPA, for testing dispersants.

The EPA maintains a list of products that have gone through a testing process and met the established thresholds for listing.

The manufacturer of Corexit 9500A, the product that made up the stockpile in Alaska and elsewhere, recently discontinued manufacture, sale, and regulatory support. Corexit 9500A will no longer be included on the EPA list after December 12, 2025.

The stockpile of dispersants in Alaska is maintained by the Marine Spill Response Corporation, or MSRC, a nationwide company that supports oil spill response incidents. They own and maintain stockpiles of equipment and trained response personnel that can be deployed across the U.S. Their warehouse in Anchorage

is now home to about 60,000 gallons of a new product, Dasic EcoSafe OSD.

## Makeup of new dispersant is unclear

According to its Safety Data Sheet, or SDS, Dasic EcoSafe contains four surfactants and two solvents.

Surfactants are substances that reduce the surface tension of a liquid, allowing it to spread more easily. For example, shampoo contains surfactants that remove oil from hair.

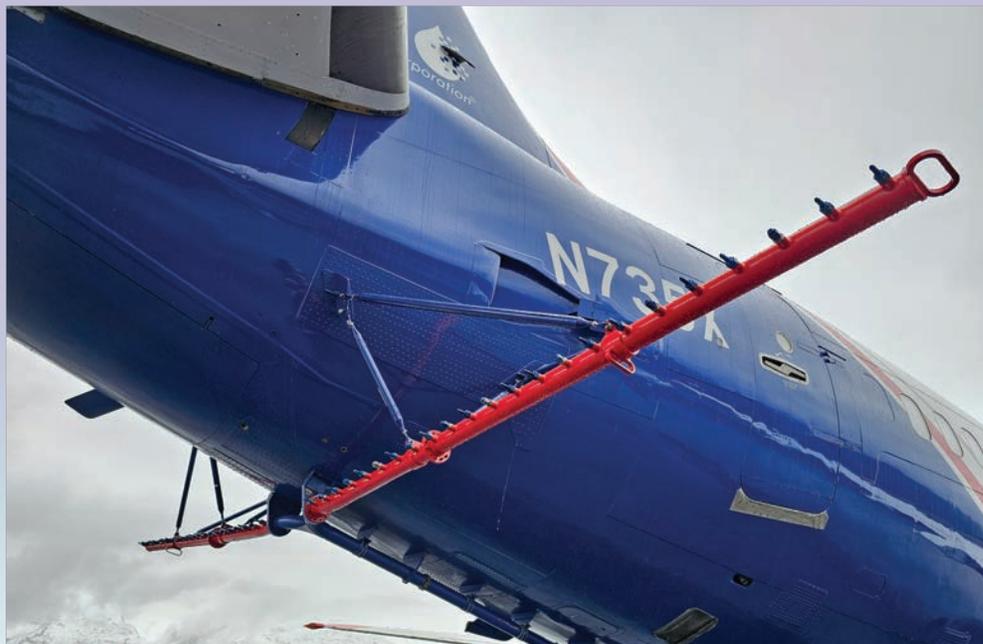
Solvents are substances, usually liquid, that can dissolve another substance. For example, water acts as a solvent in the digestive system, dissolving nutrients from food and delivering it into the bloodstream.

The SDS lists the same surfactants and solvents in Dasic EcoSafe as Corexit, however the amounts and ratios cannot be determined from public data.

There is not much publicly available data about the new dispersant other than the SDS. In addition, testing methods to determine toxicity have changed in recent years so comparisons to previous products is difficult.

The tests conducted to gain the EPA's approval were done on oil from locations in the Lower 48. Crude oil varies according to where it came out of the earth. Properties such as viscosity (whether a liquid is thick and flows slowly, or thin and faster flowing) or density (how compact the substance is) affect how the oil

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Spill responders stockpile dispersants in strategic locations so that they can be loaded onto a plane like this one, which is fitted with special equipment for spraying dispersants onto an oil spill.

# Increased oil production must be matched with effective oversight

The Council's mandates were created after the Exxon Valdez oil spill: prevent the return of the complacency that led to that disaster; advocate for oil spill prevention and strong response capabilities in case prevention measures fail; minimize environmental impacts of terminal facilities and associated tankers; and promote partnerships that build trust between citizens, industry, and regulators. Our volunteers and staff log countless hours toward these goals. While the Council continues to carry out its work, we are facing escalating threats to many safety measures enacted in direct response to lessons learned. This includes a significant diminishment of staffing and resources at most of the regulatory agencies that oversee safety for the terminal.

We continue to follow up on issues covered by our 2023 report, "Assessment of Risks and Safety Culture at Alyeska's Valdez Marine Terminal," by Billie Pirner Garde. That report noted these reductions, among other safety concerns. The subsequent report from the Government Accountability Office, released in 2025, warrants additional scrutiny and advocacy. See our website for more on these reports:

[www.tinyurl.com/GAO-JPO](http://www.tinyurl.com/GAO-JPO)

Our concerns in these areas are only increasing as cuts to personnel, resources, and budgets have escalated at both the federal and state level. We are concerned whether critical safety oversight is adequate to prevent another catastrophic accident and devastating oil spill. We are concerned that the complacency that played a part in the spill is returning.

In addition, Alyeska has announced a reorganization that will reduce its workforce by 60 positions system-wide, or 8%, by January 2026. A reduction in staffing is concerning on many levels, including that Alyeska deferred development of a human factors program that was planned in response to our 2023 report noted earlier, citing a lack of staffing and resources.



**Robert Archibald**  
President



**Donna Schantz**  
Executive Director

Studies have shown that business reorganizations and staffing reductions have been directly linked to an increased risk of accidents and negative health outcomes for employees across all industries. This results from psychological strain on employees, loss of expertise, and operational changes that compromise safety protocols. It is unclear how Alyeska's reorganization will impact workloads including development of their pending human factors program during a time when the risk of human-caused accidents could rise.

After years of advocating for increased staffing and resources for the agencies that oversee safety for oil spill prevention and response systems, we are now faced with these agencies being asked to do more with even less.

This combination seems to be setting the stage for a dangerous path at a time when oil production is expanding in Alaska.

The Council is a voice for citizens – those who have the most to lose from a major oil spill. We provide those in our region with a platform to stand up for safety and push back on complacency at the highest levels. While we strive to understand the impacts of all these changes, we must remember why we were created: to hold the line to maintain the safest spill prevention and response system possible.



# 2025 Valdez Marine Terminal Projects Update

The summer of 2025 was a busy one on the Valdez Marine Terminal, or VMT, and much of the work was visible from across the bay as major structures were removed from the 1000-acre facility on the south shore of Port Valdez. Whether the projects made room for newer and more efficient equipment, supported the integrity of critical tanks and piping, or removed out-of-service structures, they all support another 50 years of safe and reliable operations.

## Tank 5

East Tank Farm Crude Tank 5 had its internal inspection during the summer of 2025. During this in-depth maintenance, the tank was emptied, cleaned, inspected, and coated. Patch repairs to the floor were made where needed to extend the life of the floor plates.

## Tank 5 branch leg inspection

Piping around Tank 5 also got a closer look this summer, specifically a challenging run of pipe that carries crude oil into the tank. Much of the pipe can be externally inspected, but the pipe goes underground and has not been looked at since construction. After modifications were made to enable an in-line inspection tool launch, crews used the tool to inspect the segment.

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## Berth 1 Structure Removal

The VMT's Loading Berth 1, long out-of-service, got a facelift this summer as crews removed the Berth Operations Center and other structures on the floating berth. The changes will facilitate snow removal and make eventual removal of the berth easier.

## A-incinerator demolition

A-incinerator was one of three incinerators that featured prominently in the Power Vapor complex and on the VMT skyline, and the first to be disassembled this summer. Typically, one incinerator is out of service for maintenance each year, so working without one will not impact operations. A-incinerator's replacement, a safer and more reliable propane-fueled vapor combustor, will arrive in 2026. It will also require less fuel, reducing emissions from the facility.



# Council co-hosts community workshop with local partners

Since 1999, the Chugach Regional Resources Commission, or CRRC, has been hosting the Annual Subsistence Memorial Gathering. This event, held near the anniversary of the Exxon Valdez oil spill, honors the resilience and adaptation of the people of the Chugach region after the disaster.

This year, the Council partnered with CRRC and Alaska Sea Grant to host a workshop during the Gathering to share with community members about current environmental and social science research in the Chugach region. An important goal was to hear ideas from community members about current and future project needs based on their experiences and local knowledge. In addition to the co-hosts, researchers from Alaska Pacific University, Seldovia Village Tribe, Fjord & Fish Sciences, Prince William Sound Science Center, University of Alaska Fairbanks, Kodiak Area Native Association, CRRC, and Kachemak Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve shared brief updates about their work. During morning and afternoon sessions, participants gathered in roundtable discussions. They were encouraged to consider how the research presented could be integrated into communities; what environmental or social science was needed in communities; ways to promote better community well-being through resilience and adaptation; and to share stories of change in the region.

## Lessons from listening

One of the Council's goals was to learn about research needs from community members. Discussion questions were designed to encourage stories about changes in their local environment. The Council hopes to be able to develop future projects in collaboration with communities based

on this feedback and knowledge sharing.

A variety of key themes and lessons emerged from the conversations.

"Scientists need to be reminded (including me) to make their presentations understandable for the non-scientist."

- Scientist in attendance

## Communities encourage research that directly addresses local needs.

People want to know more about what is happening in their environment and why. Many attendees told stories of how shifting seasons and climate change are affecting harvests of land and marine plants and animals. The variety of species available for harvest is also declining in some areas. Locally important species such as clams, herring, and salmon were of particular interest, and people also wanted to know how the health of plankton populations affects the rest of the food web.

**Communication is key.** Researchers tend to talk about their work in technical language and present their work in complicated spreadsheets filled with specialized data. These are not easy for non-scientists to understand or apply to their lives.

The conversations during the workshop showed that people were interested in the research and wanted to know how to learn about these projects. Plain language and visual graphics can help improve communication.

**Local knowledge holds important insight.** Two-way communication also benefits researchers. People living in coastal communities notice changes before anyone else. They are the first to notice poor fishing, changes in harvestable species, and other factors that directly affect coastal communities and local ways of living. Listening to communities' questions and observations can help shape the development and execution of research projects.

**Keep showing up.** Consistency is important in building relationships. Community members stressed the value of researchers returning to share project results and engaging youth in outreach and education as projects unfold.

## More details in the report

The full report contains many more details, including ideas for projects and additional suggestions for building relationships with communities.

[www.tinyurl.com/Community-Science](http://www.tinyurl.com/Community-Science)



## Students learn to master an oil spill disaster

Each September, when the Council's holds a Board meeting in one of our stakeholder communities, we host a youth engagement event called "Become a Master of Disaster." Following a pause during the Covid pandemic, this event has been revitalized with two successful events, one in Kodiak in 2024 and another in Cordova this fall. The event educates and connects local children with topics related to our mission in an age-appropriate way.

Youth and caregivers move through a series of hands-on oil spill and marine science activities, facilitated by adults including Council Board members, committee volunteers, staff, and staff from partner groups. Students learn how oil spills are cleaned up and how oiled wildlife are cleaned and cared for during a response. They compete in a running race the length of an oil tanker, and learn to identify marine invasive species. Students collect stamps in a passport-style book and complete a reflection activity as their final stop before collecting a prize.

We have been grateful to include local partner organizations in the event. In Kodiak, the Kodiak Ocean Science Discovery Program, or KOSDP, donated use of their lab classroom space and supplies, and some of their educators joined Council staff and volunteers to run activities. KOSDP taught students about oil molecules and where oil comes from. They hosted a station about ocean life, where students could examine plankton under microscopes.

In Cordova, staff from the Prince William Sound Science Center led a hands-on opportunity for students to drive mini-remotely operated

vehicles to collect ping pong balls (representing oil) floating in water. They also facilitated participants dressing up in oil spill personal protective equipment. Kate Morse, the Copper River Watershed Project's Executive Director and member of the Council's Information and Education Committee, worked with her staff to create an activity where youth learned about Geographic Response Strategies, or GRS, and then got to create one for Eyak Lake, a familiar local environmental resource. This tied in well with the Council's recent work to update the Copper River Delta GRS. The activity successfully scaled the complex topic in an understandable way for elementary-age children.

The 2024 and 2025 participating groups routinely partner with the Council to support projects to educate local students. Their staff also collaborate on other Council projects and areas of overlap. Including local partners in this event strengthens connections with youth, as these partner staff are familiar and known adults and educators within their community.

Become a Master of Disaster engages Exxon Valdez oil spill region kids in oil spill and marine science topics that align with the Council's mission in an age-appropriate educational



**Maia  
Draper-Reich**  
Outreach  
Coordinator

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Left: Kate Morse teaches Cordova students how Geographic Response Strategies, or GRS, are developed. GRS are specialized oil spill contingency plans that are tailored to protect specific environments.

## Council welcomes new staff member

In November, the Council welcomed its newest staff member. Peter Casey joined the Council in the position of Project Manager Assistant. He is based in the Anchorage office.

Casey was born and raised in St. Paul, Minnesota, and attended the University of Glasgow where he earned a bachelor's degree in history and politics.

Prior to working with the Council, he held various jobs in youth development, including as the program director of multiple summer camps



**Peter Casey**

and running a greenhouse and vocational training program in Anchorage.

He is replacing Jaina Willahan, who held the position since 2021. Willahan is staying on staff until early December to help train Casey.

## European green crab spreading in southeast Alaska

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Monitors reported trapping 2,133 in 2023, and 1,865 in 2024. That number jumped to over 40,000 this year.

This species is of particular concern because it is aggressive. It has destroyed habitats and outcompeted local species in other locations. Among its prey are juvenile king crab and juvenile salmon.

The Council has been studying these crab and other marine invasive species since 1996. Research on has shown that:

- The crab survives in environments like Prince William Sound. A warming climate makes an even more suitable habitat.
- Larvae of the crabs could survive a trip to Alaska in an oil tanker's ballast water.

Links to additional resources, and what to do if you see a suspected green crab, are available on our website:

[www.tinyurl.com/Invasive-Crab-SEAK](http://www.tinyurl.com/Invasive-Crab-SEAK)



## From Alyeska: 2025 Valdez Marine Terminal Projects Update

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### Tank 92 Demolition

Out of service since 2008, a contractor with special equipment "snipped" the ballast water settling tank into several pieces, which were then picked up via an excavator with a magnetic

attachment. The top of the tank, which was reinforced with extra steel to protect against the wind, proved challenging but the work was completed on schedule. All that remains is a gravel pad.



## Cordova youth learn to master an oil spill disaster

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format. Participants in both Kodiak and Cordova expanded their existing knowledge, learned more about oil spills, and drew connections to their local coastal environment and community. I am grateful to the local entities and partners, as well as Council volunteers and staff, for their contributions to make this event happen and for sharing their oil spill and marine science knowledge with the next generation of stewards.



Above: Council Board member Mike Bender shows a Cordova student how fishing vessels can help respond after a spill.

Below: Students play with remote operating vehicles that simulate collecting spilled oil.



## From economics to ecosystems: Kevin Berry's calculations help evaluate risks

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return in reduced criminal activity, higher educational outcomes, and better career outcomes."

That curiosity and drive to use his talents to make a difference also brought him to the Council. One of the Council's main priorities is to reduce the risk of oil spills. It's important to understand all the options and tradeoffs.

"Obviously, every time we recommend an improvement or investment, for instance, in the response fleet, we're hoping to make a potential spill less severe," Berry says. "We want balance to make sure that we're getting the most risk reduction for the time and effort."

### Upcoming Council meetings

The next meeting of the Council's Board of Directors will be held on January 22 & 23, 2026, in Anchorage.

Board meetings are open to the public and an opportunity for public comments is provided at the beginning of each meeting.

Meetings are streamed online and available to the public. Details on our website: [www.pwsrcac.org](http://www.pwsrcac.org)

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## What today's oil tells us about tomorrow's spill response

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lighter ends are made into products such as jet fuel and gasoline, while the heavier ends are used to pave roads and coat pipes, among other uses.

Alaska North Slope oil has been trending lighter since around 2010. Its properties are consistent with a medium weight oil.

### Why do these differences matter to oil spill response?

Knowing the composition of oil tells emergency responders how the oil might behave if spilled. Responders can create better contingency plans and choose more appropriate cleanup techniques.

Lighter weight oils are easier to recover and clean up, and they tend to evaporate more readily. Heavier oils move slower, so they may not penetrate soils as quickly, but they are harder to skim and pump during cleanup.

### What do the current oil properties tell us?

After receiving the recent sample, the Council had it analyzed by a laboratory and worked with Dr. Merv Fingas, a spill response subject matter expert, to interpret the data. In the report just released, Dr. Fingas identified changes in the oil properties and described what those changes might mean for oil spill responders.

Dr. Fingas concluded that the oil is relatively

similar to the last sample he analyzed for the Council. However, he noted a few differences.

**Less prone to emulsify:** Dr. Fingas found that the current composition is less prone to form stable emulsions than older samples.

An emulsion forms when droplets of one liquid are dispersed into another liquid. When oil is spilt into seawater, wind and waves churn the two liquids together. Usually, oil and water separate, however sometimes the mixture stabilizes and forms "mousse," so named because it resembles chocolate mousse dessert. Mousse is difficult to recover and can greatly increase the volume of oil to clean up.

**Less dispersible as the oil weathers:** When fresh oil is spilled, it begins to change almost immediately. Lighter compounds start to evaporate when exposed to air and water, leaving behind the heavier components. Dr. Fingas notes that the current crude mix is less dispersible after weathering than previous samples.

**Flows more readily:** Dr. Fingas' report also says that since the recent sample is lighter, it is less viscous. This means that the oil would be easier to collect and pump, however it would spread farther and faster than oil of the past.

Dr. Fingas' report is available on our website:

[www.tinyurl.com/Fingas-Oil](http://www.tinyurl.com/Fingas-Oil)



## New testing protocols lead to change in dispersant products

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reacts with dispersants. Crude oil in the Lower 48 tends to be lighter and faster flowing than North Slope oil.

### Plan for Corexit stockpile yet to be determined

The MSRC is considering several options for disposal of the existing Anchorage stockpile and expects to have a plan sometime in 2026.

## Council's position on use of dispersants

The Council has done extensive research over the years on the effectiveness of dispersants, specifically Corexit products. In 2022, the Council reaffirmed its long-standing position that chemical dispersants should not be used on Alaska North Slope crude oil spills in the Exxon Valdez oil spill affected region. Supporting literature and additional reports are available on our website:

[www.tinyurl.com/Dispersants-PWSRCAC](http://www.tinyurl.com/Dispersants-PWSRCAC)





# PRINCE WILLIAM SOUND REGIONAL CITIZENS' ADVISORY COUNCIL

## Citizens promoting the environmentally safe operation of the Alyeska terminal and associated tankers

### Who we are

The Council is a federally mandated, independent nonprofit corporation formed after the 1989 Exxon Valdez oil spill to minimize the environmental impacts of the Trans Alaska Pipeline System's terminal and tanker fleet.

**A voice for citizens:** The Council is a voice for the people, communities, and interest groups in the region oiled by the Exxon Valdez spill.

Those with the most to lose from oil pollution must have a voice in the decisions that can put their livelihoods and communities at risk.

### What we do

**Combatting complacency:** Investigations into the Exxon Valdez oil spill found that complacency on the part of industry and the government contributed to the accident. The Oil Pollution Act of 1990 mandated independent, nonprofit, citizen oversight councils for Prince William Sound and Cook Inlet.

We combat the complacency that led to the 1989 spill by fostering partnerships among the oil industry, government, and local communities in addressing environmental concerns.

More about the Council and its history at: [www.pwsrccac.org/about](http://www.pwsrccac.org/about)

### Photo credits:

Cover: David Janka's vessel, The Auklet, cruising to Nelson Bay on a calm September Saturday morning by Amanda Johnson.

Page 1, Top: Hawkins Island across Orca Inlet by Amanda Johnson. Bottom: European green crab courtesy of CSIRO.

Page 2: Kevin Berry courtesy of Kevin Berry.

Page 3: Dispersant plane by Jeremy Robida.

Page 5 and 8: Alyeska project update photos courtesy of Alyeska Corporate Communications.

Page 7 and 9: Education event by Amanda Johnson.

Page 8: Peter Casey courtesy of Peter Casey.

Page 11: The Council's Board of Directors at a meeting in Cordova last September by Amanda Johnson.

### Board of Directors

The Council's member entities are communities and interest groups affected by the Exxon Valdez oil spill:

- Alaska State Chamber of Commerce
- Community of Chenega • Chugach Alaska Corporation
- City of Cordova • City of Homer • City of Kodiak
- City of Seldovia • City of Seward • City of Valdez
- City of Whittier • Community of Tatitlek
- Cordova District Fishermen United
- Kenai Peninsula Borough • Kodiak Island Borough
- Kodiak Village Mayors Association
- Oil Spill Region Environmental Coalition
- Oil Spill Region Recreational Coalition
- Port Graham Corp. • Prince William Sound Aquaculture Corp.

### Advisory Committees

Much of the Council's work is done through permanent volunteer committees made up of Board members, technical experts, and local citizens with an interest in making oil transportation safer in Alaska.

Our committees provide an avenue for public participation in the Council's work.

**Terminal Operations and Environmental Monitoring (TOEM):** TOEM identifies actual and potential sources of episodic and chronic pollution at the Valdez Marine Terminal.

**Port Operations and Vessel Traffic Systems (POVTS):** POVTS monitors port and tanker operations in Prince William Sound. The committee identifies and recommends improvements in the vessel traffic navigation systems and monitors the vessel escort system.

**Scientific Advisory Committee (SAC):** SAC sponsors independent scientific research and provides scientific assistance and advice to the other council committees on technical reports, scientific methodology, data interpretation, and position papers.

**Oil Spill Prevention and Response (OSPR):** OSPR works to minimize the risk and impacts associated with oil transportation through research, advice, and recommendations for strong and effective spill prevention and response measures, contingency planning, and regulations.

**Information and Education Committee (IEC):** IEC supports the Council's mission by fostering public awareness, responsibility, and participation in the Council's activities through information and education.

## THE OBSERVER

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Cordova District Fishermen United - Homer - Kenai Peninsula Borough - Kodiak - Kodiak Island Borough - Kodiak Village Mayors  
Association - Oil Spill Region Environmental Coalition - Oil Spill Region Recreational Coalition - Port Graham Corp  
Prince William Sound Aquaculture Corp - Seldovia - Seward - Tatitlek - Valdez - Whittier