

Consent Item Briefing for PWSRCAC Board of Directors – September 2020

ACTION ITEM

Sponsor: Austin Love and the Scientific Advisory Committee

Project number and name or topic: 9110 – Marine Winter Bird Survey

1. **Description of agenda item:** This agenda item requests Board approval of a contract with the Prince William Sound Science Center to complete the Marine Winter Bird Survey project scope of work as presented and approved by the Board in the FY2021 budget. Instead of using the preferred request for proposals process for this project, it is planned for this work to be conducted as a sole source contract with the Prince William Sound Science Center. Note that this is planned as a three year project with surveys taking place in fiscal years 2021, 2022, and 2023 pending budget approval by the Board in future years.

2. **Why is this item important to PWSRCAC:** These surveys of marine birds within Prince William Sound will help PWSRCAC fulfill two of its OPA 90 responsibilities. OPA 90 tasks the Council with monitoring “the environmental impacts of the operation of the terminal facilities and crude oil tankers” as well as “identifying highly sensitive areas which may require specific protective measures in the event of a spill in Prince William Sound.” The boat-based surveys will occur in February 2021 to identify marine bird species, location, and population size in Prince William Sound. The data from these surveys will be turned into maps that can be used in NOAA’s Arctic Environmental Response Management Application (aka ERMA) – a publically available, web-based geographic information system tool. Spill response managers will be able to readily use the data from this project, which is loaded into Arctic ERMA, to identify environmentally sensitive areas that may deserve special protection prior to a spill or to identify areas where marine birds or mammals are likely located during a winter spill from the Valdez Marine Terminal or associated tankers. Additionally, these surveys provide baseline monitoring information that can be used to understand the environmental impacts of the operation of the terminal and tankers on marine bird species.

3. **Previous actions taken by the Board on this item:**

<u>Meeting</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u>Action</u>
Board	5/2/19	Board adopted the FY2020 budget as presented. This project was approved as part of the FY2020 budget and was presented as a sole source contract with the Prince William Sound Science Center. However, the project did not take place in FY2020.
Board	5/21/2020	Board adopted the FY2021 budget as presented. This project was approved as a part of the FY2021 budget.

4. **Summary of policy, issues, support or opposition:** Relatively little environmental monitoring data is available in the winter compared to other seasons for Prince William Sound, yet the risk of an oil spill remains regardless of the season. This project will help fill the gap in environmental information that exists in the region for the winter.

5. **Committee Recommendation:** The Scientific Advisory Committee supports the approval of this contract with the Prince William Sound Science Center.

6. **Relationship to LRP and Budget:** Project 9110 – Spatial Variability of Marine Birds is in the approved FY2021 budget and annual work plan.

**9110--Spatial Variability of Marine Birds
As of August 17, 2020**

FY-2021 Budget	\$39,000.00
Actual and Commitments	\$0
Amount Remaining	<u>\$39,000.00</u>

7. **Action Requested of the Board of Directors:** Authorize contract negotiation with the Prince William Sound Science Center, to conduct the scope of work for project 9110 Marine Winter Bird Survey, at an amount not to exceed \$39,000.

8. **Alternatives:** None.

9. **Attachments:** FY2021 budget briefing report for project.

**Prince William Sound Regional Citizens' Advisory Council
FY-2021 Budget**

Project Number: **9110**

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Title: **Marine Bird Winter Surveys**

Lead Staff: Austin Love

Committee: SAC

Description:

This project would involve funding for a survey of marine birds, in the winter, in the vicinity of the Prince William Sound tanker escort zone and Port Valdez. This would be a three year project for the Council, approval of this project in 2020 would commit the Council to funding this work in FY 2021, 2022, and 2023.

Why is this program/project necessary or what information gap is being addressed:

In Alaska, most studies on marine birds have been conducted during the breeding season. However, the breeding season is not representative of the species and distribution of birds during winter. Moreover, winter is a critical period of survival for marine birds as food tends to be relatively scarce or inaccessible, the climate more extreme, day length reduced, and water temperatures colder. Many areas around the tanker escort zone have not been surveyed for wintering marine birds since 2010. Species composition and abundance can change across years, so multiple years of data are necessary to fully understand natural variation during the nonbreeding season. This survey project will provide up to date information on winter marine bird density and distribution in the vicinity of the tanker escort zone.

How will information or results be used?

The information from this project could be used in a variety of ways. It can be used to improve predictive models of species abundance and distribution in and around the tanker escort zone in relation to biological and physical environmental factors. It will also help determine marine bird vulnerability to environmental change and future perturbations, including oil spills. For example, this marine bird abundance and distribution information could be used to identify environmentally sensitive areas during an oil spill in the winter months. Information from this project will be shared with Alyeska, state and federal agencies, and the public to help promote the protection of marine birds from the risks associated with transporting oil in Prince William Sound.

How will success be measured?

The success of this project will be measured by a report to the Board summarizing the results of this project and making the data from this project publically available on an information sharing website such as the Alaska Ocean Observing System (AOOS). The final summary report to the Board and project data will be shared with Alyeska, shipping companies, state and federal agencies – with the goal that they could use it in their spill response planning efforts.

Objectives

- 1 Conduct winter bird surveys (February 2021, 2022, 2023).
- 2 Analyze survey data and make it publicly available (March 2021 – June 2021, same for 2022 and 2023).
- 3 Report results of the project to the Board of Directors (September 2021, same for 2022 and 2023).

How will the program/project be accomplished?

All the objectives of this project will be accomplished by an outside contractor. It is expected that the Council project manager will spend about an hour per week on this project.

Does the program/project require Alyeska or shipper cooperation?

Unless this project will involve surveys in the Valdez Marine Terminal Security Zone, this project will not require Alyeska or shipper cooperation. The Council conducts other projects involving entering the Valdez Marine Terminal Security Zone and has been successful working with Alyeska and the USCG to gain access to that restricted area.

Is this an ongoing program/project? If not, when will it start and when will it be finished?

This is planned to be a three year project, from FY 2021 through FY 2023.

Does the program/project involve partnership or cost sharing with other organizations?

This project does not involve partnership or cost sharing with other organizations.

Budget Details

9110--Programs and Projects--Marine Bird Winter Surveys

Prince William Sound Regional Citizens' Advisory Council
FY-2021 Budget

59500--Contract Expense

Contractor to conduct survey \$ 39,000.00

Total Budget \$ 39,000.00