Consent Item Briefing for PWSRCAC Board of Directors – January 2021

ACTION ITEM

Sponsor: Austin Love and SAC
Project number and name or topic: 9511 – Prince William Sound Forage Fish Survey

1. **Description of agenda item:** This agenda item is seeking Board approval for the Executive Director to negotiate and enter into a contract with the PWS Science Center to conduct aerial surveys of PWS for forage fish including pacific herring, sandlance, capelin, and candlefish, in June 2021. This FY2021 contract would result in forage fish surveys similar to the surveys PWS Science Center conducted in 2019 and 2020 for the Council. The 2019 and 2020 contracts provided $42,500 and $43,600 respectively in funding for the flight time used to conduct the surveys, as well as funding a report to the Council about the results of the surveys. 2019 was the first year the Council provided funding for this project and it was planned to be conducted for four consecutive years. 2021 would be the third year of this project. Beyond updating deliverable due dates, no substantial changes are anticipated to be made to the FY2021 contract with the Science Center, compared to the FY2019 and 2020 contracts. Funding the 2021 iteration of this project has already been approved in the Council's FY2021 budget for an amount of $45,100. The cost of the FY2021 contract with the PWS Science Center will be $43,600, the same as FY2020 – but below what was budgeted for FY2021.

2. **Why is this item important to PWSRCAC:** The data from this project will be used in a Prince William Sound herring population model, to better predict recruitment to the spawning stock. Data from this project will be made publicly available on the Alaska Ocean Observing System website. Data from this project could be used during an oil spill response to prioritize the protection of areas in which forage fish are known to congregate. It could also be used after an oil spill to assess the environmental consequences of such an accident. Finally, information from this project could be used by the Council to advocate that particular areas in Prince William Sound should be protected from chronic or acute sources of oil pollution.

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

Meeting	Date	Action
XCOM	4/22/2019	Approved a sole source contract with the Prince William Sound Science Center in an amount not to exceed $42,500 to conduct the FY2019 aerial herring fish surveys along the Prince William Sound coastline.
Board	1/23/2020	Accepted the report titled "2019 Prince William Sound Forage Fish Observations" by Dr. W. Scott Pegau of the Prince William Sound Science Center dated November 4, 2019, as meeting the terms and conditions of contract number 9511.19.01, and for distribution to the public.
XCOM	4/30/2020	Approved the FY2020 contract with the Prince William Sound Science Center to conduct the Prince William Sound Forage Fish Surveys Project 9511 at an amount not to exceed $43,600.

4. **Summary of policy, issues, support or opposition:** A modification to the FY 2021 budget will be needed to account for the total costs of this contract with the Prince William Sound Science Center. $2,300 will need to be added to this project's FY 2021 budget, and the Council's Executive Director has the authority to make that modification to the Council's budget.

5. **Committee Recommendation:** Through the Council's 2019/2020 long range planning process, the Scientific Advisory Committee recommended that the Council continue to fund this project in FY2021.

6. **Relationship to LRP and Budget:** Project 9511 – Prince William Sound Forage Fish Survey is in the approved FY2021 budget and annual work plan. Note that $3,800 from the FY2020 is being charged in FY2021 because the report was not received until FY2021.

9511--Herring/Forage Fish Survey
As of December 14, 2020

FY-2021 Budget	$45,100.00
Actual and Commitments	$3,800.00
Amount Remaining	$41,300.00

7. **Action Requested of the Board of Directors:** Authorize the Executive Director to negotiate and execute a contract with the Prince William Sound Science Center to conduct the FY2021 Prince William Sound Forage Fish Surveys Project at an amount not to exceed $43,600.

8. **Alternatives:** None.

9. **Attachments:** FY2021 Budget Briefing for project 9511 – Prince William Sound Forage Fish Survey.

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

Project Number: **9511** 34
Title:: **Prince William Sound Forage Fish Survey**
Lead Staff: Austin Love
Committee: SAC

Description:

This project provides funding to the Prince William Sound Science Center for aerial surveys of juvenile forage fish, including herring, sand lance, and capelin, along the entire coastline of Prince William Sound. The surveys are conducted by trained observers, by plane at an altitude of 300 meters (984 feet), and observers identify forage fish species, school size, location and for herring, their age (either Age 1 or Age 2+). As a bonus, whale observations including location, species, and count are also made. The aerial survey is conducted throughout June to avoid the misidentification of forage fish species, because Age 0 herring don't typically begin schooling until July and they can easily be mistaken for other types of forage fish. This project was planned for four years. Years one (2019) and two (2020) have already been approved in previous Council budgets (FY 2019 and FY 2020). Approval of the project in the May 2020 or FY 2021 Council budget will commit funding to the last two, planned, calendar years of this project, 2021 and 2022.

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

Forage fish are important for a variety of reasons. They are ecologically critical and directly and indirectly support commercial, subsistence, and sport fisheries. Despite their importance, little is known about changes in forage fish distribution and abundance over time. They are difficult and expensive to monitor because they are patchy in their distribution, comprised of species with widely divergent life histories and habitats, and predisposed to experience large fluctuations in abundance. Aerial surveys are useful for counting near-surface fish schools (i.e., schools that may be visible from just below the surface to depths of 10-20 m depending on water clarity) in nearshore areas where it is normally difficult to conduct hydro acoustic surveys. Aerial surveys of juvenile forage fish schools in Prince William Sound occurred in the late 1990's and more recently (2010-2018) surveys were conducted with funding from the Exxon Valdez Oil Spill Trustee Council. Building upon the results of those historic surveys, these aerial surveys will provide knowledge of the coastal areas in Prince William Sound where these important fish species tend to be found.

How will information or results be used?

The information about forage fish from this project could be used in a variety of ways. It can be used during an oil spill response to prioritize the protection of areas forage fish are known to congregate. It could also be used after an oil spill to assess the environmental consequences of such an accident. Additionally, the data from this project can be used in herring population modeling to better predict recruitment to the spawning stock. Data from this project will be made publicly available on the Alaska Ocean Observing System website. Information from this project could be used by the Council to advocate that particular areas in Prince William Sound should be protected from chronic or acute sources of oil pollution.

How will success be measured?

The success of this project will be measured by a report and presentation to the Board of Directors regarding the findings of these aerial forage fish surveys. The success of this project will also be measured by sharing the data from this project with Alyeska, tanker companies, state and federal regulators so they can use it to inform oil spill response methods (e.g. incorporating the data spill response geographic information systems (GIS), using it to inform geographic response strategy (GRS) development and review).

Objectives

1 Perform aerial forage fish surveys along the coast of Prince William Sound (June 2020)
2 Publish aerial survey data to the Alaska Ocean Observing System (July 2020)
3 Report findings of aerial forage fish surveys to the Board of Directors (January 2021)

How will the program/project be accomplished?

This project will be done by outside contractors, specifically through a sole source contract with the Prince William Sound Science Center, and Scott Pegau is the principal investigator. It is expected that the Prince William Sound RCAC Project Manager will spend an hour per week managing this project.

Does the program/project require Alyeska or shipper cooperation?

Neither Alyeska nor shipper cooperation is required for this project.

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

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

This is a multiyear project, envisioned for four years of Council funding. This project has been funded in FY 2019 and FY 2020. Therefore, it is planned to be included in the Council budget for FY 2021 and 2022. However, the contract with Prince William Sound Science Center is renewed each year so the Council could stop funding this project any time within the four years it has been planned for Council support.

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

This project does not include partnerships or cost sharing with other organizations.

Budget Details

59500--Contract Expense		
Contractor to conduct survey	$	45,100.00
Total Budget	$	45,100.00