



The Observer

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

Legislature passes resolution for tanker escorts

The Alaska Legislature in March unanimously passed a council-sponsored resolution calling for the preservation of dual escort tugs for loaded oil tankers in Prince William Sound.

Final action came March 27, three days after the 20th anniversary of the Exxon Valdez oil spill, when the state Senate approved the measure 17-0. The House approved it 37-0 on March 18.

Preserving the escort system is a major priority for the council, which fears the system may be cut back with the sunseting of a double-escort requirement in the Oil Pollution Act of 1990.

The Act requires double escorts for single-hulled tankers, but is silent on the subject of escorts for double-hulled tankers. The Act also requires a phase-out of single-hulled tankers by 2015.

Double-hulled tankers, which have several feet of protective space between their two hulls, can prevent or reduce some oil spills, but are not a cure-all. The Coast Guard estimated a double hull on the Exxon Valdez might have cut the oil outflow from its grounding on Bligh Reef in 1989 from 11 million gallons to as little as 4.4 million gallons, which would still have been a catastrophic spill.

At present, all loaded tankers in Prince William are escorted, regardless of hull configuration, but the oil industry has indicated its interest in reducing, if not eliminating, the escort system once all single-hulled tankers have left service and the requirement in the Oil Pollution Act ceases to apply.

The legislative resolution reads, in part, “double hulls are not a perfect prevention measure, and it would be imprudent to alter a proven oil spill prevention and response program based solely on improvements in oil tanker vessel engineering and design.”

“Alaskans owe a debt of gratitude to our legislators for putting our state strongly on record in support of preserving these escort tugs,” said Donna Schantz, acting executive director of the citizens’ council. She expressed the organization’s gratitude to Sen. Gary Stevens and Rep. Alan Austerman, both of Kodiak, who introduced the escorts resolution in their respective chambers of the legislature and worked hard to keep it moving toward passage.

On April 8, Gov. Sarah Palin also backed the



Escorts accompany a loaded tanker through Prince William Sound. Photo courtesy of Alyeska Pipeline.

See page 2, **LEGISLATURE**

Study shows new skimmers work better

By **DAN GILSON**
Project Manager

A new study by the citizens’ council shows that Alyeska’s Current Buster skimming system, adopted three years ago, can collect spilled oil up to five times better than the traditional U-boom configuration.

The council study examined encounter rates, meaning how much oil a skimming operation will encounter in a given period of time. The key to effective oil-spill response is getting lots of oil to the skimmer. That can be difficult in real-world conditions because oil spreads after it is spilled and because the slick is affected by wind and sea currents.

“Spilled oil is messy stuff, and it can get away from you real fast,” said Dan Gilson, the council’s

oil spill response project manager. “Obviously, the faster you can encounter oil, the better off you are.”

The Current Buster’s advantage is greater the farther the oil is spread out, Gilson said. The Current Buster can operate at about 4.5 mph, while the U-boom system’s top speed is just under 1 mph.

The report also shows that Alyeska’s Ship Escort/Response Vessel System, or SERV, can recover oil better from a spill that leaks over time than from a fast, catastrophic discharge.

“SERV could just park their skimming systems near a stricken tanker and collect the oil as it came out and was at its thickest. That’s what

See page 2, **SKIMMERS**

Vivid memories of Exxon spill captured in print

The council’s oral history of the Exxon Valdez oil spill was published in March, on the 20th anniversary of the 1989 grounding on Bligh Reef, and is now generally available from bookstores and from online retailers.

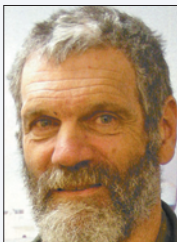
The 288-page volume includes interviews with some 62 people who had direct experience with the spill and its aftermath. The book also offers an insert of color photographs dating from the spill era, and introductory sections on the spill, the cleanup effort, and the effects on people, communities and the environment.

The introductory material was written by Stan

See page 3, **SPILL BOOK**

INSIDE THE OBSERVER

Volunteer: Scott is OSPRC’s boom-towing expert—and a lead gunner at Alyeska ski resort, p. 2



excuse for cutting back on safety, p. 3

Alyeska Viewpoint: Company believes in protecting the Sound’s people and environment, p.3

Schantz is named acting executive director while Devens on leave, p. 2

Schantz: Cost-cutting is no

Community Corner: Anniversary events connect communities in spread across the oil-spill region, p. 4

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Volunteer Profile

Scott is OSPRC’s resident expert on towing boom

Twenty years ago this spring, Gordon Scott was driving his fishing boat through heavy oil from the Exxon Valdez spill when he noticed the odd behavior of the oil-coated waves.

They weren’t very tall for the 70 mph wind that was blowing, and they “just slumped over,” Scott remembers, rather than exhibiting the classic curl and break of ocean waves. He got out his video camera and started taping.

Then, day became night.

“One of the waves slapped the bow, Scott says. “The spray came right over the top and suddenly my windows just went black.”

And that was during the first day that Scott and his boat—the *Early Times*—worked on the spill. In all, he spent 186 days in the spring, summer, and fall of 1989 on the Exxon cleanup.

One of his most vivid memories is of grappling with one of the main problems in the cleanup: not enough equipment to skim up and store the oil that Scott and other fishermen collected in the boom they towed behind their boats.

Each boom—typically 700

feet long—was towed by two fishing boats working in partnership. The result was a U-shaped configuration that corralled and contained the oil as the captains drove their boats through it.

Here calls the time his booming team captured 40,000 gallons of oil, then couldn’t get rid of it. “We collected the oil in 12 hours,” Scott says. “But there were no skimmers to take it off, so we towed it around for four days. We were inventing it all as we went along.”

Given his work on the spill and all it taught him about capturing and towing oil, it’s not surprising he joined the council’s Oil Spill Prevention and Response Committee—usually known as OSPRC—in 1992. He applied his expertise to, among other things, the oil industry’s first manual for towing boom in Prince William Sound.



Gordon Scott

The manual said boom could be towed at 2 knots, which Scott knew was four times the real half-knot top speed. It took years, he says, but the manual was finally revised to reflect reality.

That reality is also reflected in the title he plans to give his oil-spill book, if he ever writes it: “Life At Half A Knot.”

Scott came to Alaska in 1974 to look for work on construction of the trans-Alaska pipeline. Now, 35 years later, he’s still here, living in Girdwood with his wife, Elly, and three sons aged 14-18.

He makes his living fishing in Prince William Sound, and by working on the ski patrol at Alyeska. Among other things, he’s the lead gunner for the 105mm Howitzer artillery piece used to bring down avalanches at the resort under controlled conditions, rather than

when skiers are on the slopes.

These days, he long-lines for halibut and cod in the Sound. Before the spill, he also fished for spot shrimp, but that fishery never reopened after 1989. Now, however, he says there may be hope. The state board of fisheries adopted a commercial management plan for the species in March of this year, though it’s still uncertain if or when that will mean an opening. “Maybe next year, maybe never,” Scott says with a shrug.

Scott plans to stay on OSPRC, in hopes his expertise will help in dealing with the unthinkable if it happens again.

Oil-spill response capability has improved since 1989. For example, Alyeska Pipeline now uses the Current Buster booming system, which can be towed at about 4 knots, or 4.5 mph. That’s around eight times as fast as the boom Scott used after the Exxon spill.

“A lot of progress has been made,” he acknowledges. “But you can’t get rid of the fact that oil on water is not a good thing, especially when wind makes response ineffective.”

Escorts: Legislature supports system

Continued from Page 1

double-escort system, in a letter to Alaska’s delegation in Congress.

“We must remain vigilant in ensuring the safest possible oil transportation standards in Alaska,” Palin wrote. “Only in this way can we maintain the vibrancy of Alaskan communities and purity of our waters while providing Alaskans and the nation with needed energy.”

The council will work with members of Congress on a possible fix in federal legislation, and will explore whether the future of the double escorts could be guaranteed through other means.

Invasive species bill is left in committee

Another council-backed measure made less progress in the legislative session ended April 20. That measure will, if adopted, create the Alaska Council on Invasive Species to serve as a statewide clearing-house and coordinating body.

When lawmakers adjourned, the bill lay in the House Resources Committee. It will remain ‘alive’ through the end of the 2010 session.

Jeanne Ostnes, an aide to Rep. Craig Johnson of Anchorage, the bill’s sponsor, said the main obstacle to the measure has been the cost of staffing and operating the invasive species council. Ostnes said work

would be done between now and the start of the next session to identify ways to get the bill moving again, including reducing costs.

Invasive species, long a major concern for the citizens’ council, refers to the problem of non-indigenous plants, animals, or micro-organisms reaching Alaska and establishing themselves here. Such invasions can harm native species, including commercially valuable ones like salmon. For the citizens’ council, the primary concern is non-indigenous organisms arriving via oil tankers—either attached to hulls or riding in the ballast water that the tankers discharge into Prince William Sound before loading North Slope crude at the Alyeska terminal in Valdez.

The bill would create a 14-member council. Five seats would held by commissioners of state departments. The rest would represent 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 seek to involve federal departments and agencies in the process.

Skimmers: New model is more effective

Continued from Page 1

those systems are really designed to do,” Gilson said. “The report shows that recovery of oil would be much less effective if the response system had to chase thin oil slicks. The report shows these shortfalls when applying actual environmental conditions to the planning standards, so the message is clear that prevention is the best solution to the problem of oil spills.”

The report also emphasizes the importance of maintaining fast response times and for advocating for recovery systems with high encounter speeds.

With state approval, Alyeska adopted the Current Buster system

Donna Schantz, the council’s director of programs, has been appointed acting executive director.

The council board made the appointment Feb. 21 after Executive Director John Devens requested a leave of absence.

Schantz, who has worked for the council in various roles since 1999, is a Valdez resident. She became director of programs in early 2006.

Devens has been the council’s executive director since 1997 and was mayor of Valdez at the time of the *Exxon Valdez* oil spill in 1989.

As the *Observer* went to press, the future of the executive direc-

in 2006. The change raised concerns for the council about whether the new equipment was really better than, or at least equal to, what it was replacing. The council hired a contractor to analyze the encounter-rate question, leading to the new report. Titled *Prince William Sound Recovery Rate Analysis*, the report by Censum Northwest, LLC, is available on the council website at www.pwsrca.org/docs/d0048600.pdf.

State regulations and the oil-spill contingency plans for Prince William Sound require Alyeska to have enough equipment and personnel to contain and clean up 300,000 barrels of oil in 72 hours.

Schantz named acting executive director

tor position was scheduled to be discussed by the council board at its May meeting in Valdez.

In another staffing development, Kyle Von Bose resigned as content writer for the council web site effective April 1. The future of the position has not yet been decided.

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 Stan Jones, the director of external affairs.

From the Acting Executive Director

Cost-cutting no excuse for cutting back on safety

Twenty years have passed since the Exxon Valdez grounded on Bligh Reef and spilled an estimated 11 million gallons of crude oil into Prince William Sound. Our organization has spent those two decades working with industry, government, and local communities to understand the lessons of the Exxon Valdez and to advocate for safeguards to make sure that nothing like it happens again.

Thanks to the foresight, vigilance and tireless efforts of elected officials, regulators, industry, and citizens, the oil-spill prevention and response system now in place in Prince William Sound is an example to the rest of the world.

Unfortunately, it may be in jeopardy. Based on comments we're hearing, the oil industry wants to reduce it to save money.

What's at stake?

The fleet of escort tugs that accompany loaded oil tankers in the Sound is a prevention measure unmatched anywhere else in the world. It began with an emergency order issued by the state of Alaska immediately after the grounding of the Exxon Valdez in March 1989. A two-tug escort system for loaded single hulled oil tank-

ers was later mandated by Congress in the Oil Pollution Act of 1990.

Since then, the escort system has improved significantly based on technical studies, on new state and federal regulations, and on the many lessons learned through years of operation and testing. The Alaska Legislature recently reaffirmed the importance of the two-tug escort system with the unanimous passage of House Joint Resolution 19 in recognition of the 20th anniversary of the spill, as did Gov. Sarah Palin in a letter to Alaska's delegation in Congress.

On the oil-spill response side, there is probably more clean-up equipment in the Sound than in any other U.S. port, and this oil handling system is widely regarded as the most effective on earth. State-of-the-art equipment and technology, coupled with vigorous training programs for operators and oil spill responders, represent vast improvements over what was in place in 1989.

The question that increasingly concerns us is, will these safety improvements remain in place? More and more often we hear arguments from the oil industry that this system is too costly

in light of declining oil flow through the trans-Alaska pipeline and the rising cost of finding and developing new oil fields.

We couldn't disagree more. For our council, which represents the people, communities, and businesses hardest hit by the Exxon spill, safety is not optional. It's mandatory, and a fixed cost of transporting crude oil.

It is unfortunate that it took a tragedy like the Exxon Valdez to create the world class prevention and response system we have today.

It would be even more tragic if we ignored the hard-won lessons of our own history and let it slip away because of a focus on cost-cutting.

• Donna Schantz is acting executive director of the Prince William Sound Regional Citizens' Advisory Council.



Donna Schantz

Alyeska Viewpoint

Protecting the Sound's people and environment

With the recent passing of the 20th anniversary of the Exxon Valdez oil spill, I would like to take this opportunity to tell readers what Alyeska Pipeline Service Co. now has in place to ensure another spill does not occur.

After the grounding of the Exxon Valdez, the federal government and state of Alaska passed oil spill laws changing tanker regulations and Alyeska operations in Prince William Sound. Alyeska formed the Ship Escort/Response Vessel System, known as SERVS. It is at the forefront of prevention and response for U.S. marine crude oil transportation and meets or exceeds both federal and state requirements.

Though SERVS' primary role is prevention, no other facility in the world has more cleanup experience or equipment should another oil spill occur. The inventory consists of 11 escort and response tugs, nine oil recovery barges, 108 skimming units, over 49 miles of various kinds of boom, five hatchery-protection sites with equipment pre-staged, and five Prince William Sound response centers. In addition to the over 300 professionally trained contractor personnel, more than 350 fishing vessels with over 1,000 crew members are contracted for

incident response.

Upon a tanker's arrival at the Valdez Marine Terminal, boom is placed around it to contain any oil should a leak occur. Each outbound laden tanker is then tethered to a 10,200 horsepower tug to ensure the tug can control the tanker should a problem arise. Speed limits are imposed on the tankers allowing for sufficient time for the tug to react to assist the tanker. Over 11,000 tankers have been safely escorted without an incident since the start up of SERVS. Tankers simulate simultaneous propulsion and steering failures so that tug crews can remain proficient at controlling a tanker to keep it out of danger.

Oil spill prevention and response tactics drills are held frequently in Prince William Sound. On average, more than 70 drills are held annually to test various aspects of our marine safety system. The drills are designed to keep personnel sharp and familiar with the use of equipment and to help improve the planning and implementation of our oil spill contingency plans. Many agencies such as the U.S. Coast Guard, Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation, and Prince William Sound Regional Citizens'

Advisory Council take part in our drills by partnering in drill design and ultimately evaluating the outcome of each drill.

Today we maintain a constant state of readiness to assist tankers in the safe navigation through Prince William Sound and to provide oil spill response services to the trans-Alaska pipeline, to the Valdez Marine Terminal, and to the tanker companies that ship North Slope crude in accordance with our oil spill response agreements and plans. Our core values continue to focus on the safety of our employees and contractors, the public, and our facilities. We will continue to respect the environment and do all we can to protect it for the future of our families and the public.

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



Greg Jones

Spill book: Closeup accounts from people who were there in person

Continued from Page 1

Jones, director of external affairs for the council, while the interviews were conducted and written by Sharon Bushell, an oral historian from Homer.

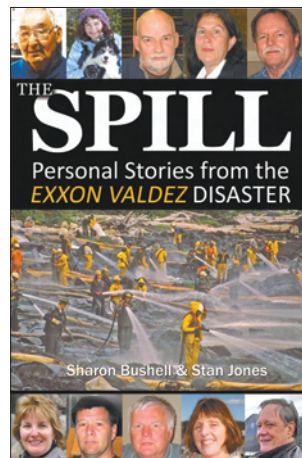
Reviews of the book, titled "The Spill: Personal Stories from the Exxon Valdez Disaster," have been highly favorable inside Alaska and out.

"The real stories live on with the people who experienced the spill in their neighborhoods and communities," wrote Cynthia Ritchie

in the Cordova Times. "Most of the stories are sad. Some are angry; others are bittersweet. All carry the weight of the grief that continues to alter lives 20 years later."

"These oral histories represent a valuable new addition to the oil-spill literature," wrote Hal Bernton in the Seattle Times.

The spill book came of a suggestion offered in 2003 at a council



lost with the passage of time, and the interviews in this book achieve

board meeting in Seldivia and thus was over five years in the making.

"It was a long road, but we at the council believe it was worthwhile," said Acting Executive Director Donna Schantz. "We thought it was important to capture these lessons from the Exxon spill before they were

that in an unforgettable way. They underscore the importance of the council's mission of preventing oil spills where possible, and promoting the most effective cleanup when they occur."

The book, a paperback, has a cover price of \$17.95, though it is sometimes available at a discount. It can be ordered from Amazon.Com at www.tinyurl.com/evosoh-amz or from the publisher, Epicenter Press, at www.tinyurl.com/evosoh-ep.

More information on the book is available on the council website at www.tinyurl.com/evosoh.

Community Corner

20th anniversary events connect communities in the oil-spill region

I wish to thank everyone involved in the events marking the 20th anniversary of the Exxon Valdez oil spill on March 24. We successfully video-conferenced among five communities.

In Anchorage, there were presentations on the original Alaska Sea Grant Legal Research Team, and the Partners in Prevention and Response panel discussion. Presentations on herring restoration and the Alaska Ocean Observing System took place in Cordova. Valdez events included a presentation on Alyeska's Ship Escort/Response Vessel System. Seward featured a presentation on animal rehabilitation and a message from a former city manager. Kenai was the site of a presentation from the Cook Inlet Regional Citizens' Advisory Council. Council staff assisted in each community.

On March 23 in Anchorage, a panel organized by board member Walt Parker discussed oil spills in the North Pacific and the Arctic from 1989 to 2008. It was followed by an Alaska Sea Grant reception at the Anchorage Sheraton Hotel.

Following the multi-community videoconferencing on the 24th, Walt Parker and board President Patience Andersen Faulkner accompanied council staff to the University of Alaska where the council's video, "Then and Now," was shown, followed by a discussion on current and future safety measures in oil transportation.

"Spill", an art show co-sponsored by the council, opened in Homer on March 6 with a second reception on March 24. The show traveled from there to Kodiak's Baranov Museum. From Kodiak it will go to Cordova, then Anchorage. The council will sponsor a reception for the Anchorage opening in July or August.

Other anniversary-related events took place in Kodiak a few days before March 24. On March 20, an exhibition of photographs and videos of the Exxon Valdez spill taken by the people of Kodiak Island in the summer of 1989 went on display at Kodiak College.

On March 21 at the Kodiak National Wildlife Refuge Visitor Center, council staffer Stan Jones made a presentation on changes in oil transportation safety in Prince William Sound since 1989, followed by a presentation from author Sharon Bushell on the council's new book, "The Spill: Personal Stories from the Exxon Valdez Disaster."

The Alaska Wilderness Recreation and Tourism Association,

whose seat on the board is held by Cathy Hart, held its 16th Annual Ecotourism Conference March 4-6 at Girdwood. Lisa Ka'aihue's presentation "20 years of Protecting Prince William Sound: What Needs to be Done in the Future to Keep it Safe," and her presentation on invasive species were very well received.

In April, Lisa presented on invasive species to the 16th International Conference on Aquatic Invasive Species in Montreal. Her presentation was "Aquatic Nuisance Species Monitoring in Alaska," and it was on behalf of the Prince William Sound citizens' council, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, the Alaska Department of Fish and Game, and the Kachemak Bay Research Reserve.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration co-sponsored a reception at the Russell Senate Office Building in Washington DC on March 13th to mark the 20th anniversary of the Exxon spill. Board President Patience Andersen Faulkner and three council staff attended the reception. This provided opportunities to meet with legislators, agencies, the U.S. Coast Guard and other staff to discuss the future of the Prince William Sound tug escort system, among other things.

Some of the speeches made at the reception are available at www.tinyurl.com/evos20-obs

Michael Crouse, director of the Executive Seminar Program at Portland State University is leading a group of mid-career managers and staff to Alaska for a retrospective look at the Exxon Valdez oil spill. They planned to visit Anchorage and Valdez, where they were to meet with council and community members and attend a council reception at the Valdez Museum. The group is studying a number of topics, such as incident response and clean up efforts, damage claims settlement, origin of the Exxon Valdez Oil Spill Trustee Council, socio-economic impacts of the spill, the role of citizens' advisory councils, lingering ecological and social impacts, and progress towards community sustainability.

In June the council information booth will go to the Arctic Marine Oilspill Program Technical Seminar in Vancouver BC. The seminar is an international forum on preventing, assessing, containing, and cleaning up spills of hazardous materials in every type of environment.



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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