

PROPOSED VOLUNTEER MARINE TRANSPORTATION CORRIDOR KACHEMAK BAY, ALASKA

There has been considerable concern during the past few years over conflicts between vessel traffic and fishing gear in Kachemak Bay. Kachemak Bay contains one of the most concentrated stationary fishing gear areas in the state. It is also a convenient "hole up" location for vessels during bad weather, a pick up point for pilot for large vessels navigating the Upper Inlet and the location for large vessel traffic servicing the local area. The reported fishing gear loss from this traffic entangling and severing buoy lines is very high.

In an attempt to find a solution to this problem, representatives of the United States Coast Guard, the Army Corps of Engineers, the Alaska Department of Fish and Game, the Alaska Division of Lands and the Alaska Attorney General's Office met in Anchorage several months ago. From the discussions at this meeting, it was apparent that the best solution was for the users of the area, if possible, to agree on transportation corridors for the major vessel traffic within Kachemak Bay. Recreation use was not believed to be a problem. Volunteer programs have been highly successful in other areas and were felt to be preferable in this situation to the cumbersome regulation procedure that would be necessary for the Coast Guard and the Corps to impose corridors.

Thus a meeting between representatives of several of the major user groups was held in Homer on Oct. 9, 1975 to draft a proposal for submission to the public. User groups represented at the meeting included marine pilots, towboat operators, timber developers, helicopter services, tanker traffic and fishermen. It was apparent at the meeting that all users could not be completely accommodated without some adjustment of present operating practices of each group. The attached map represents the proposed solution that was generally agreed by the group to be acceptable.

The proposal calls for a one-mile corridor in the southern portion of the Bay south of the primary crab fishing areas. In the vicinity of Seldovia Point this corridor would begin to narrow. By Point Barbara the corridor would narrow to ½ mile where it crosses a shrimp and king crab fishing area at the mouth of Tutka Bay. Another one-mile wide corridor in the northern portion of the Bay is not as critical to commercial fishing since a large part of the area is in a crab sanctuary.

In order to coordinate the establishment of a volunteer corridor, the Alaska Division of Lands plans to hold a public hearing in Homer the latter part of November tentatively set for Nov. 25 at 7 p.m. in the Homer High School Library. The hearing will address only the question of the volunteer establishment of corridors to minimize conflicts between vessel traffic and stationary fishing gear. We urge that all users attend the November hearing and express their thoughts, realizing, of course, that some compromise, such as the proposal shown on the attached chart, will be necessary. The drafting committee has done its work. It is now up to the public to assure that a workable plan is developed.

A volunteer corridor plan will only work if the user public finds it acceptable and agrees to comply with it. We feel confident that if a plan can be developed which has good public support, the vessel traffic problem in Kachemak Bay can be resolved within a short time.

The exact time and place of the November meeting will be advertised well in advance of the meeting.

Michael C.T. Smith
Director