

Village coordinators named to help monitor PWS

The *Exxon Valdez* oil spill caused severe disruption of the lives of many people living in the spill impact area.

The spill also caused residents of the area to be concerned about the safety of their wild food resources, and the integrity of the

surrounding natural environment.

While scientific studies aimed at restoring the resources and services damaged by the oil spill have occurred throughout the spill area, many of the researchers work for agencies or institutions based in Anchorage, Fairbanks, or

outside Alaska. Residents have complained of an inadequate level of involvement by spill area communities in the restoration efforts, and incomplete communications to spill area inhabitants of study proposals and results.

At the same time, researchers

have recognized the local residents have traditional knowledge that could help them answer questions they have not been able to answer through conventional scientific means. People living in the spill area have detailed knowledge about the condition of resources, which can significantly add to data collected as part of scientific studies, and possibly enhance the success of restoration efforts. Local people have expressed a desire to be involved in all aspects of restoration projects, and a willingness to work with researchers.

Until now, there has not been any formal program in place to facilitate the communication between the Trustee Council, researchers working on oil spill restoration projects, and residents of

communities impacted by the spill.

The Exxon Valdez Oil Spill Trustee Council has funded a Community Involvement and Use of Traditional Knowledge project to fill this need.

The goal of the project is to increase the involvement of oil spill area communities in the restoration efforts of the Trustee Council, and to improve the communication of findings and results of restoration efforts to spill area residents and the appropriate regional organizations. The community outreach efforts of other restoration projects will be coordinated under this project, including information exchange and local hiring.

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One means being used to improve the involvement of the impacted communities in restoration activities is providing funding to allow local people to serve as facilitators. In 1995, this has taken the form of a pilot project designed to assess how effective such a program can be. Local facilitators are being funded in three communities, Chenega Bay and Tatitlek in Prince William Sound, the area most impacted by the oil spill, and Port Graham, as a representative community for the lower Kenai Peninsula. The coordinator of the pilot project is Rita Miraglia with the State Division of Subsistence.

Because the facilitators are expected to represent their community, it was decided that it would be more appropriate for them to be employees of the local village council, rather than government employees.

Under the terms of the program, each village council has agreed to provide local facilitation services to further community outreach, including the communication of traditional knowledge and local interests, as well as communication between the community and Trustee Council and agency staff. In addition the vil-

lage councils have agreed to coordinate local support and equipment for researchers working in or near their communities.

Each village council has designated a local facilitator. The local facilitators are Mike Eleshansky for Chenega Bay, Gary Kompkoff for Tatitlek, and Walter Maganack, Jr. for Port Graham. If residents of these communities have questions about or suggestions for the restoration process, these are the people they should go to.

The first task the local facilitators decided to work on was to coordinate their communities' response to the 1996 Restoration Work Plan. The public comment period for the Work Plan ended August 4, 1995.

A strong suggestion made by the local facilitators is that there should be a meeting of all the village council presidents in the oil spill impact area to discuss community priorities for restoration. It was agreed that it is not possible to organize such a meeting in time to review the 1996 Restoration Work Plan. However, the facilitators advised it is important that such a meeting be included in the planning for next year's Community Involvement project.