



photos by Chris Cushman



Chenega Bay, which was rebuilt after being destroyed in the 1964 earthquake, is among the villages hardest hit by the Exxon oil spill. At top left, Eddie Levsharaff, Chenega Bay harbor master, talks about what has been happening to the village since the spill. At top right, oil cleanup craft wend their way through the devastated Prince William Sound. Other photos, moving clockwise include, Donia Wilson taking a break on a food distribution truck in the village; Paul Kompkoff Sr. talks to a reporter; and Lydia Turner, village health aide, distributes Exxon food.

## Spill leaves elder wondering about the future

by Jennifer Gordon  
Tundra Times reporter

**CHENEGA BAY** — Normally, Paul Kompkoff Sr. would look forward to sunny days such as May 10; he might go out and get a seal or two.

Instead, however, he sat in his home, looking out onto the water of Chenega Bay.

Since the oil spill from the Exxon Valdez, Kompkoff said he didn't know if he would be able to look forward to days like that again.

Kompkoff, who is 66, has spent all but a few months of his life in Prince William Sound. He moved to Chenega Bay five years ago, soon after the village was built. He moved from the original village site of Chenega in 1962, two years before a tidal wave

destroyed the village.

Together with his wife Minnie, Kompkoff brought up six children — three boys and three girls. Kompkoff and most of his children make their living from the commercial fishing industry.

Kompkoff said he usually fishes with two of his sons, but this year the oil spill has taken precedence over fishing. He said many members of his family are involved in the cleanup work, and that he and Minnie were about to leave for Green Island to work on beaches.

Even if they could go fishing, Kompkoff said he didn't know how the oil would affect the salmon, or whether there is a market for fish from Prince William Sound. He said he had

heard that Japan and other countries did not want products from the sound.

Kompkoff said that a 90-pound halibut caught recently didn't smell or look right. Like many other animals found in the oiled areas of the sound, it was sent to Alaska Department of Fish and Game for testing.

"I don't think I would eat salmon right now, unless it came from Bristol Bay or somewhere else," he said.

Salmon fry were released from the San Juan Fishery in Sawmill Bay more than a month ago. The tiny fish gathered in the shadows around the dock at Chenega Bay, getting ready for their trip to the ocean. Kompkoff said, however, that quite a few of the fry are dying.

About two weeks after the spill oc-

curred, Kompkoff went to help clean up oil. At that time, he said, there were very strong fumes in the air and his face felt as if it were burning.

Three deer on Knight Island were found lying together, Kompkoff said. People walked up to them, he said, thinking the deer were asleep, but they were dead and had oil; kelp in their mouths.

On Seal Island, he said, six or eight seals were lying on the beach between work crews. They were obviously too sick to move, but the people wouldn't put them out of their misery, Kompkoff said.

"I would have — right in front of Exxon," he said.

The deer and seal are not the only

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animals who have been affected by the oil. Kompkoff said that in years past he would see porpoises, whales and sea lions playing in the bay, but the only animals that seemed to have flourished this year are the seagulls.

"A lot of migratory birds will never make it back, back to where they come from," he said.

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*...what is going to happen in two or three months when this is all over?*

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"Maybe we'll be going along with them," he said of the dying animals.

Right now, he said, the village is doing fairly well. Food is being brought in by Exxon for free and most people are being compensated for financial losses. But Kompkoff asked, what is going to happen in two or three months when this is all over?

"I keep thinking of moving, but where would I move," he asked.

Kompkoff said Exxon officials don't understand why the oil spill is so detrimental to the Native way of life.

Now, he said Chugach Alaska Corp. has filed a lawsuit against Exxon for all the Native villages that have been affected by oil in the region.

"What good will that do?" he asked. "This has taken our lifestyle away, our livelihood."

Kompkoff said the damage is done and now the best anyone can do is to start cleaning.

"It will be here many, many years," he said.