

Feds initiate pollution control system

Oil spills, automobile exhaust fumes, pesticides, and industrial and municipal wastes all spell one thing, pollution. Ten years ago if you were to ask Alaskans if pollution would ever be a problem in their State, they probably would have laughed at you. Today however, with the population growing rapidly, industrial development expanding, and the national energy focus on gas and oil development in this state, Alaska has an open door with pollution problems not bothering to knock. There are many groups and agencies involved in trying to maintain pace with the problems in order to assume adequate protection of Alaska's land, wild-

life, and human inhabitants from pollution, but one of the newest and perhaps having one of the most potentially important programs is the Environmental Contaminant Evaluation program (ECE) of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife

Service has had existing contaminant programs elsewhere since the early 1960's, but it wasn't until May 1977 that Alaska got involved with the ECE program by filling one position. That position was filled by Howard Metsker, a long-time Alaskan. (See FEDS, Page 9)

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(Continued from Page 4)

kan with many years of experience with both the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Alaska Department of Fish and Game.

In the fall of 1978 another ECE position was filled, this time by Dr. Pat Wennekens. Dr. Wennekens is the new Pollution Control Coordinator, Alaska Area, for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. He has been extensively involved in Coastal Zone Management Programs in the past and has worked for the Office of Naval Research, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Alaska Department of Fish and Game, and the University of Alaska. Wennekens, working for ECE, acts as a member of the Alaska Regional Response Team for oil and hazardous substance spills. The Regional Response Team is a newly developed concept which enlists key agencies and individuals for quick and efficient response to contaminant spills.

Metsker and Wennekens pre-

sently take the responsibility for trying to outline Alaska's environmental contaminant needs for the future while simultaneously attacking very real existing problems within their budget constraints. According to Metsker, "Major effort given thus far in the area has been planning cooperating, and initiating field effort for determining contaminant impacts on the fish and wildlife resource." Since ECE is a new program in Alaska and has limited funding, and since Metsker has no field staff himself, he depends a great deal on inter-agency cooperation to accomplish his objectives. The Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation, Environmental Protection Agency, and other State and Federal agencies' cooperation are essential to the ECE program's success.

Metsker and Wennekens hope to complete supplements to the Alaska U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service oil and hazardous substance spill contingency plan in fiscal year 1979.

ECE is involved in moni-

toring programs on two Alaskan rivers. The monitoring is done at sites that appear to have pollution problems in order to gather information on amounts of pesticides in fish populations in those areas.

Studies of contaminants in snow particles are proposed for future work in the ECE program. Such studies in Fairbanks on snow that had been removed from city streets and dumped in the Chena River revealed high levels of hydrocarbons and heavy metals from automobile exhausts. This contaminant level was found to be significant enough to impact overwintering fish populations and adversely affect water quality. The snow dumping site is now being changed to a closed basin area.

In November of 1978 a leadership oiled-bird rehabilitation workshop was held in Anchorage and was a success largely due to Metsker's efforts. The workshop provided experience to individuals from a variety of groups and agencies on the cleaning and care of oiled seabirds.

ECE will be surveying and conducting pre-assessment contaminant studies along with the proposed route of the Alaska Gas Line and will be analyzing fish and wildlife and their habitats for background information at proposed mineral development sites.

"ECE is not trying to hamper desirable economic development or hinder public activity," Metsker stated. "It is rather, trying to protect fish and wildlife po-

pulations and their habitat from pollution problems which arise with urban expansion and industrial development. Hopefully

we will accomplish that objective with support from other agencies and from concerned Alaskans."