

Disaster may even affect Copper River

by Jennifer Gordon

Tundra Times Reporter

Copper River may seem a long way from the devastation in Prince William Sound, but residents in the region worry it may have a spreading effect as immature salmon make their way down rivers into the oily mess.

"This is a major ecological and economic disaster," said Wilson Justin, president of Copper River

Native Association.

Justin said he did not know how the oil spill would affect the Copper River region, but that he was worried Exxon would not compensate salmon fishermen that far from the spill.

A large percentage of Alaska's salmon must travel through Prince William Sound to get to and from the rivers. Environmentalists said they are uncertain how the spill will affect the newly hatched salmon coming

downstream into the spill, and it may be years before the impact is realized.

Justin said the cleanup efforts of the sound brought to mind the image of children running down the street to a fire. He said so far they have only been jumping up and down yelling, "Fire! Fire!" but they haven't told him what is on fire or the amount of damage.

"They're throwing water on the fire, but they're throwing buckets."

Justin said he is concerned that when

the oil finally makes it out of the sound, it will make its way into the Copper River Delta. The delta is a haven for waterfowl, and if it is contaminated it could poison the birds, who feed on shellfish and nest in the region.

On Tuesday, eight village council presidents in the Copper River area will meet with the CRNA to discuss the oil spill and how to react.