

RESTORATION

August-October 1998

U P D A T E

Volume 5 Number 4

GAO audit gives Council clean bill of health

An audit released recently by the United States General Accounting Office has concluded that the Exxon Valdez Oil Spill Trustee Council is operating an effective program to restore the environment following the 1989 disaster in Prince William Sound.

While the audit, requested by Sen. Frank Murkowski, discussed the kinds of tough choices the Trustee Council must make in conducting its habitat protection and marine research programs, it did not recommend any changes in how those programs should be carried out. Auditors did, however, recommend that changes be made in federal law to allow a better return on investments from trust funds.

"This is as clean a bill of health as any billion-dollar program could ever get," said Molly McCammon, executive director of the Trustee Council. "We're very happy with the report, and I believe it shows that this restoration program is a model for other restoration efforts in the future."

The Trustee Council has been seeking Congressional action for more than a year to change federal law to allow trust funds to be invested outside the federal investment system. Under current requirements, trust funds are invested by the federal court system, earning a relatively low 5 percent return on investment with excessively high fees.

Auditors pointed out that the federal system charged \$439,000 in fees during fiscal year 1997, whereas a similar investment system through the state would have cost about 1/18th that amount or \$24,000. Initiating an electronic transfer system could save about another \$80,000 a year, it said.

"We fully support the GAO's one and only recommendation in this audit," McCammon said. "If we can change the investment system so that the Trustee Council can get a better return with lower fees, we estimate that our in-

See GAO Audit, Page 7

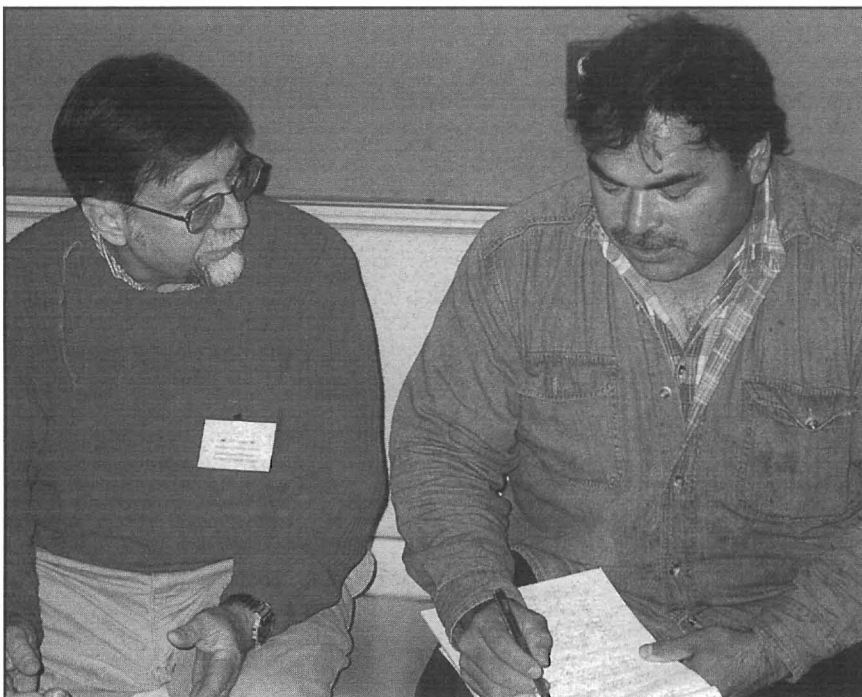


Photo by Hugh Short

Dr. Ted Cooney, principal investigator in charge of the Sound Ecosystem Assessment project, discusses ecosystem dynamics with Senafort Shugak of Ivanoff Bay during the Elders/Youth Conference held in Cordova.

Subsistence users, scientists gather to share ideas and information

By Hugh Short

Community Involvement Coordinator

Dan Rosenberg, a waterfowl biologist with the Alaska Department of Fish and Game, had passed by the village of Tatitlek numerous times in a boat while conducting field work in Prince William Sound. But he never stopped to visit. He wanted to, he explained, but he knew that dropping in unannounced could prove awkward for himself and be perceived as rude by local residents.

This has since changed. Last spring, Rosenberg met with Tatitlek residents to discuss his work on black ducks (scoters) and to learn from subsistence users traditional knowledge relating to the ducks. Bringing researchers together with the more remote

See Youth/Elders Conference, Page 5

Pigeon guillemot researcher hopes to start new colony in Resurrection Bay

By Jody Seitz
Alaska Coastal Currents

For years biologists have been trying to assess the impact of ecosystem changes on seabird populations. Biologists know that declines within pigeon guillemot colonies preceded the *Exxon Valdez* oil spill by several years and seem to coincide with a decrease — beginning in the late 1970s — in the amount of high fat fish species (sandlance, capelin, herring) fed to their chicks.

Dr. Dan Roby, with Oregon State University, has been trying to see if the change in their diets explains the declines in the guillemot colonies and their slow recovery from the spill.

This kind of research is hard to do in the field. Normally, to avoid predators pigeon guillemots nest in burrows in the cliffs and among rocks of remote headlands. The dedicated biologist more often than not must spend hours in the rain and wind of the North Pacific, hanging in front of a cliff face or perched on a rock, binoculars in hand, just to observe what the adults feed their young.

Factors other than food also affect chick survival: not all parents are good at bringing back food; some nests get flooded out; parents sometimes abandon their chicks; and predators always play a role. Crows, ravens, mink and peregrine falcons all feast on seabird eggs when they're available.



Alaska Coastal Currents

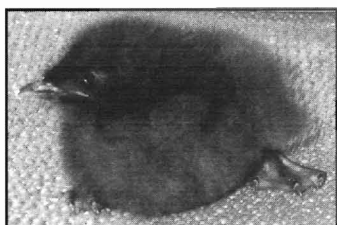
Restoration and recovery following the *Exxon Valdez* oil spill

To eliminate some of these threats to the chicks, Roby proposed raising them in captivity at the Alaska SeaLife Center and feeding them diets which reflected the changes in their prey in Prince William Sound.

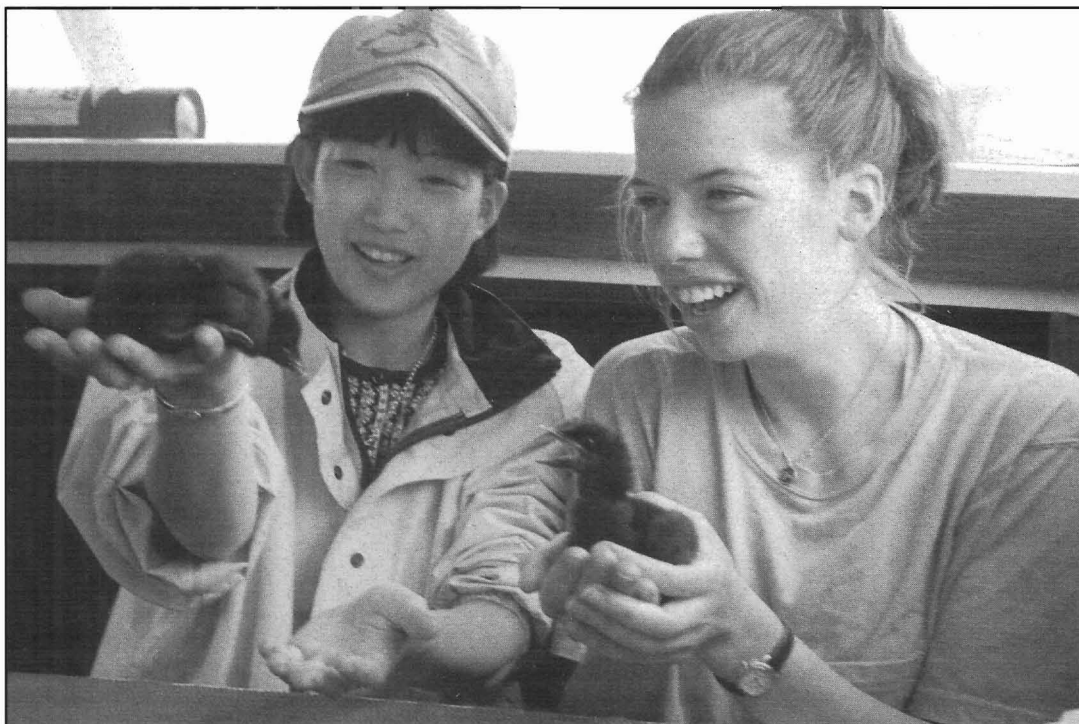
Researcher Dr. George Divoky saw an opportunity to use the studies of chicks to create a more accessible colony for research. "I thought that if a colony could be created, the captive-raised birds could return here," he said. "That way, known-age birds would come back and breed at the SeaLife Center, which would be creating a population of birds that could be used for research."

Although the birds nest in remote rocky cliffs, their needs are really simple. Pigeon guillemots nest under docks from Monterey Bay, California, all the way to Dutch Harbor. "All they need," said Divoky, "is a dark place protected from predators."

See Pigeon Guillemots, Page 3



Pigeon guillemot chick



Dr. Hiromi Takanaga, left, and Sadie Wright hold pigeon guillemot chicks collected for research at the Alaska SeaLife Center. The chicks were raised at the SeaLife Center on different diets and were released in late August. It's hoped that they will return as adults to start a new colony in Resurrection Bay, visible from the SeaLife Center.

The Trustee Council in August approved its work plan for fiscal year 1999, providing \$10.3 million to fund more than 60 research, monitoring and general restoration projects for the Kodiak Island, Kenai Peninsula and Prince William Sound regions. The FY99 Work Plan is the document that sets the Trustee Council budget and identifies restoration projects and scientific studies for the fiscal year beginning October 1.

The majority of research projects funded by the Council will take place in Prince William Sound, the area most heavily impacted by the spill. The work plan includes \$506,300 for herring research, \$835,100 for research on pink salmon, and \$1.1 million for oceanographic and ecosystem work in the sound.

A 6-year project developing a new way to identify hatchery-raised salmon will receive another \$185,200 this year. The new method creates identifiable marks on the earbone (otolith) of salmon, allowing fisheries managers to better understand which stocks are returning and adjust commercial harvests accordingly. The plan also provides funding in Prince William Sound for the release of coho salmon in Boulder Bay to create a subsistence fishery near Tatitlek, the stocking of sockeye salmon in Solf Lake on Knight Island, and \$150,400 for the Chugach School District to maintain a program which gets students involved in restoration science.

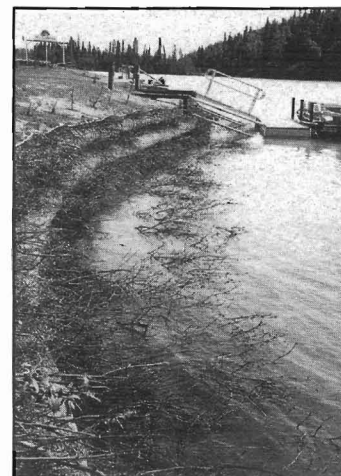
On the Kenai Peninsula, the plan provides

\$299,600 for Kenai River habitat improvements, \$99,500 to develop a plan for restoration of the intertidal habitat of Homer's Mariner Park, and \$75,600 to enhance the pink salmon return to Port Graham. The Council also provided \$85,800 to evaluate efforts to increase spawning habitat in Port Dick Creek and \$54,500 to create a waste management plan for Seldovia, Port Graham and Nanwalek in an effort to reduce marine pollution from common sources such as waste oil. A request is expected next year to fund facilities to implement the waste management plan. A project to establish a centralized database about the Cook Inlet watershed was funded with \$335,000 to assist in the long-term monitoring of the inlet's water quality.

Seven research projects funded under the work plan are to be conducted at the Alaska SeaLife Center in Seward. The SeaLife Center will provide facilities, equipment and support staff for research on pink salmon, rockfish, pigeon guillemots, harbor seals and river otters.

In the southern part of the spill area, the Council is funding enhancement of the coho run in the Kametolook River near Perryville on the Alaska Peninsula, training of village-based technicians to take biosamples from harbor seals for use by researchers, and local stewardship of archaeological resources on Kodiak and Shuyak islands.

Trustees set fiscal year 1999 Work Plan



Revegetation and bank stabilization on the Kenai River is accomplished using a variety of bioengineering techniques. The FY99 Work Plan provides \$299,600 for habitat improvements to the Kenai River riverbank.

He should know. Divoky spent 25 years on the North Slope using nest boxes to create the largest colony of black guillemots in Alaska - raising it from 10 breeding pairs to 225 breeding pairs.

Divoky plans to take advantage of the guillemots' affinity for man-made sites. He built nest boxes and attached them to platforms on the shores of Resurrection Bay in front of the SeaLife Center. Decoys sit atop the platforms to attract guillemots and speakers continuously play a chorus of guillemot calls. The idea is for guillemots to be drawn in, hear familiar sounds and start investigating the cavities in the nest boxes.

Young birds begin looking for nesting areas at about two years, even though they have another year or two to go before they are ready to breed. "Two year olds are very restless, and begin prospecting for new areas away from their natal colonies," said Divoky. "We could

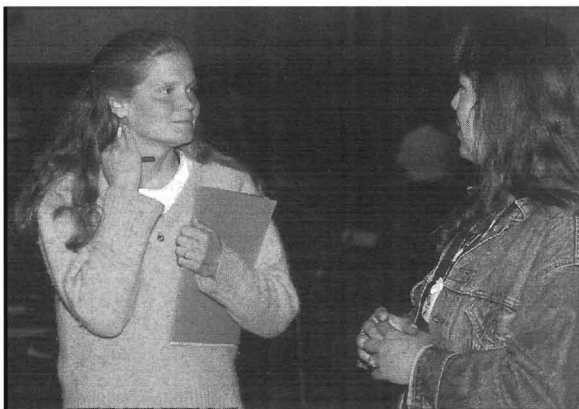
get birds from as far away as Prince William Sound and Bristol Bay."

After they reached fledging weight, about 35 days after hatching, Divoky began releasing the birds. The chicks were taken to the SeaLife Center balcony and allowed to jump into the bay to begin life on their own.

A couple of years from now Roby and Divoky will be watching for this year's chicks to return. One of the most exciting things they could find, according to Divoky, is that the three groups of birds have different survival rates. "If we see the chicks raised on sand lance do well, and the chicks raised on pollock and gunnels do poorly, we have an indication that the fledging weights and fledging success may well be lowered by the shift that has occurred in nearshore fish," Divoky said.

Jody Seitz lives in Cordova and also produces the Alaska Coastal Currents radio program, a series about restoration activities within the spill region.

Pigeon Guillemots continued from Page 2



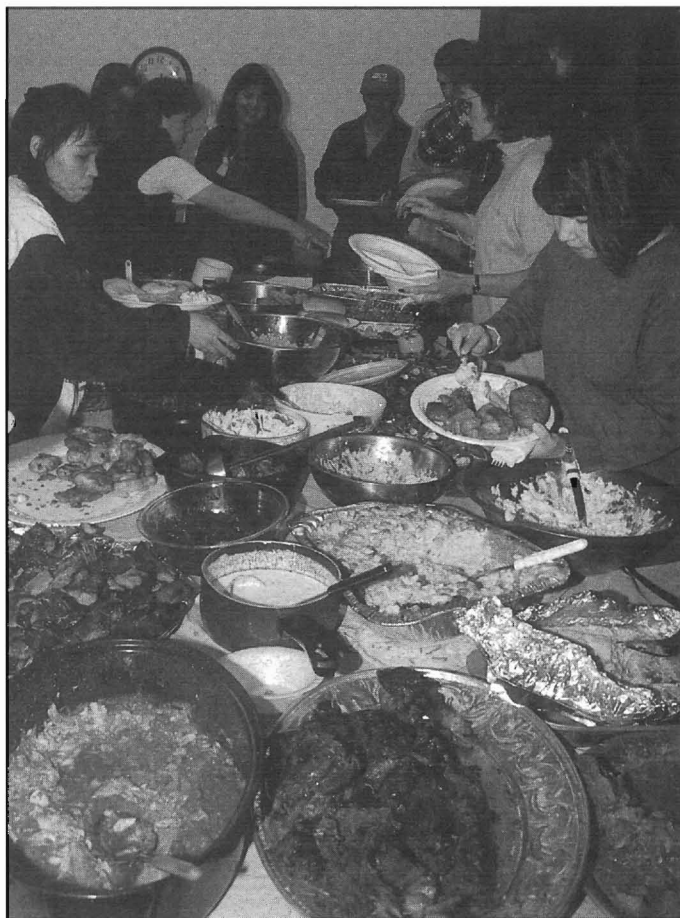
Eva Saulitis, a killer whale researcher, talks about orcas with Nancy Yeaton, subsistence representative on the Public Advisory Group and community facilitator from Nanwalek.

“

The importance of understanding what is happening around you should never be underestimated. Traditional knowledge and western knowledge need to be used together to help understand nature.

Don Kompkoff
elder

”



A traditional feast of subsistence foods helped make this conference more enjoyable than the average banquet. Salmon, bear, moose, seal, and berries were just some of the foods served.



George Inga, Sr., of Old Harbor talked about subsistence traditions on Kodiak Island during an open mike session.

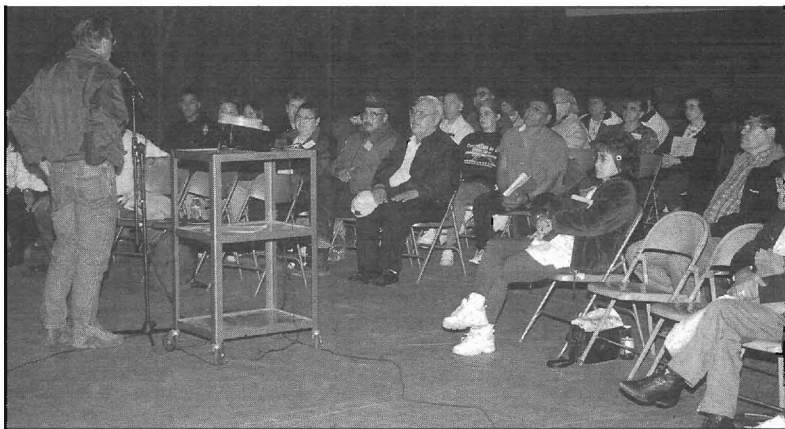


Michelle Vlasoff, of Tatitlek, discussed her experiences with the Youth Area Watch and credited the program with her interest in pursuing marine biology as a career.

Old and new mix at Elders/Youth Conference

Traditional knowledge & Modern science

Photos by Susan Harding



Chief Scientist Bob Spies brings conference attendants up to date with restoration goals, ecosystem research and results from various studies.

continued from Page 1

residents of the spill region was one of the main goals of the Elders/Youth Conference on Subsistence held in Cordova in August. There, Rosenberg was greeted by Gary Kompkoff, President of the Tatitlek I.R.A. Council, other Tatitlek residents, and subsistence users from Eyak to Akhiok.

Rosenberg and the conference attendees discussed next year's field work with black ducks and the cooperation that will take place between researchers and villagers. This is the interaction that the Conference on Subsistence focused on at the two and a half day Trustee Council-funded event organized by the Native Village of Eyak Traditional Council.

More than 70 youth, elders, and community leaders from throughout the spill region met with numerous oil spill researchers and Trustee Council staff. The agenda was complete with presentations, panel discussions, guest speakers, and Native dancing. Researchers from the multi-faceted Sound Ecosystem Assessment project and the Alaska Predator Experiment Project gave presentations, as well as scientists focusing on herring, clams, black ducks, and harbor seals. Additionally presentations were given on the Traditional Ecological Knowledge project, Community Involvement project, Whiskers!, and Project Jukebox.

An elders panel stressed the need for youth to be involved in traditional subsistence activities. They also discussed the decreased abundance of such species as harbor seal, sea lion, crab, and shrimp. "The importance of understanding what is happening around you should never be underestimated," said Don Kompkoff, an elder originally from Chenega Bay. "Traditional knowledge and western knowledge need to be used together to help understand nature."

During the Youth Panel, Michelle Vlasoff, a 12th grade student from Tatitlek, stressed the importance of Trustee Council funded projects such as the Youth Area Watch, which involves students in oil spill and marine research. "Before the Youth Area Watch, I had no idea what scientists did," she said.

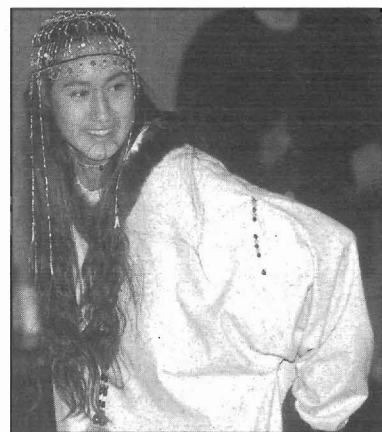
"Now after two years of working with oil spill scientists, I have decided that I will pursue a career in marine biology." Other youth discussed the traditional methods of subsistence gathering that their elders taught them. A recurring theme throughout both the youth and elder panel was the health of the animals injured by the oil spill and the importance of a full recovery from the disastrous accident.

It was not all work at

the conference. Participants were treated to traditional Native dancing by the Kodiak Alutiiq Dancers, the Nanwalek Seal Dancers, and the Tatitlek Alutiiq Dancers. On the evening before the conference began a large community potluck was held with several tables of food. On Friday evening a traditional feast was held with various subsistence foods such as salmon, bear, moose, deer, seal, berries, and much more. Following the feast the Athabaskan Fiddlers from interior Alaska treated everyone to an evening of fiddle dancing.

"This conference was an excellent opportunity for the Trustee Council to assist with integrating traditional knowledge into our science program, as well as inform the communities on the status of injured species," said Stan Senner, science coordinator for the Trustee Council. "It is a rare opportunity to talk with an audience representing so many communities in the oil spill region."

For more information on the conference, contact Hugh Short, Community Involvement Coordinator, at the Trustee Council office.



Traditional dance was an important part of the program. The Nanwalek Seal Dancers (above), Kodiak Alutiiq Dancers and Tatitlek Alutiiq Dancers each took part.

Youth Area Watch goes global

Each year 25 to 30 high school students in the Prince William Sound and Seward areas have had the rare opportunity to work with scientists as they conduct research in the field. The program, sponsored by the Trustee Council, is called the Youth Area Watch.

Students from remote settings get hands-on experience in some highly technical and specialized fields, such as oceanography, marine mammal ecology, physiology,

biochemistry, and marine ecology. The students have collected mussels for pristane analysis, tracked ocean temperatures and salinity near their communities, monitored the weather, and received training in the biological sampling of harbor seals taken for subsistence.

Now anyone who has access to the worldwide web can find out about the Youth Area Watch and follow the students' monitoring and stewardship efforts. This web homepage links to pages written by the students at all the sites where the Youth Area Watch exists: Valdez, Cordova, Whittier, Chenega Bay, Tatitlek, and Seward.

With the new road going into Whittier, students there became concerned about possible effects on a nearby kittiwake colony. They're monitoring the colony and posting their baseline data on the web. The students can now examine each other's weather data and oceanographic data

recorded what they found. Seward students also worked with the National Park Service to study murre carcasses collected after a large die-off there earlier this year. Valdez students worked on restoring an old cemetery.

Jennifer Childress and Joshua Hall lead the project for the Chugach School District.

"It doesn't seem like anything like this (Youth Area Watch) is happening anywhere that we've heard of. So it's really great to have this for people to see what is happening," Childress said. "Maybe this will give others ideas on what they can do with students. Any school could do a restoration project anywhere if they wanted to, or find scientists to work with."

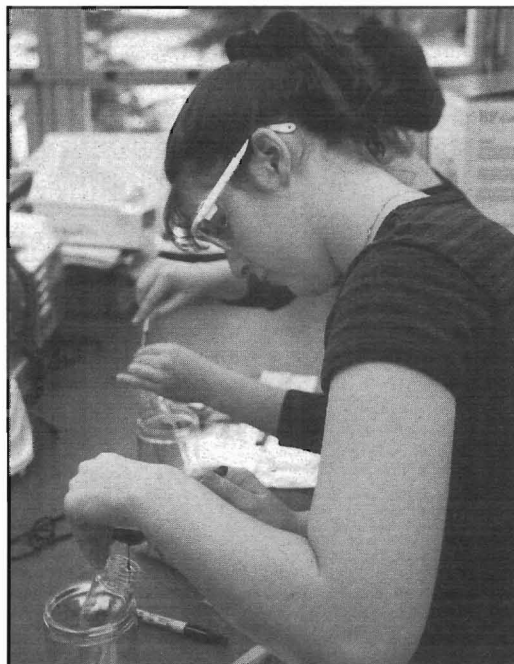
"It's neat to offer this as a way to give students the opportunity for technology training," Hall added. "We can bring the students in here and they can work on and publish a finished product. This is very real. People all over the world can look at it. They do some great things with the Youth Area Watch and it's a great opportunity to show the world what they do."

Look up the youth area watch at www.micronet.net/users/~yaw.

www.micronet.net/users/~yaw



Molly Moore, a Youth Area Watch student from Tatitlek, prepares to take biosamples from a harbor seal taken for subsistence. The biosampling project helps researchers better understand the overall health of harbor seals in the spill region.



During a visit to the National Marine Fisheries Service laboratory at Auke Bay, students learned how to determine the pristane content of blue mussels. The amount of pristane, a naturally occurring hydrocarbon, provides a clue to the overall health of the plankton bloom and the feeding success of pink salmon fry.

Executive Director • Molly McCommon
Director of Operations • Eric Myers
Editor • Joe Hunt

Restoration Update is published six times each year by the Exxon Valdez Oil Spill Trustee Council.



Restoration Office
645 G Street, Anchorage, AK 99501
907/278-8012 FAX: 907/276-7178
Toll free: 800/478-7745 in Alaska
800/283-7745 outside Alaska.
e-mail: restoration@oilspill.state.ak.us
<http://www.oilspill.state.ak.us>

vestments could generate millions in additional funds by the Year 2002."

"We will continue to work with the Congressional delegation to achieve this in a way that will not compromise the public process or the Council's trust responsibilities," she said.

The GAO audit concluded that public participation is a major part of all Trustee Council programs and decisions.

Auditors pointed out the difficulties of appraising and purchasing large parcels as part of the habitat protection program, but they were not critical of the Council's process.

The GAO identified five parcels totaling about 360,000 acres in which the Council paid above the government-appraised value, but below the seller's appraisals. Auditors explained that government appraisers valued the lands low because they contained no marketable commodities such as timber and minerals. Parcels on southern and eastern Kodiak Island, for example, were appraised at \$129 to \$185 an acre, even though they contained a total of 385 miles of shoreline and 52 salmon streams.

"The sellers said that under no circumstances were they willing to accept the government's appraised value for the land," the audit said. The seller's appraisers took into account the "multiple resources on the land, such as rivers, lakes, world class salmon, as well as development potential," and valued the lands considerably higher, the GAO report explained.

After negotiations, the governments and the sellers settled on a price in between the two appraisals. "(T)he council believed it was appropriate to pay more than the government-appraised value for these particular parcels because the land provided exceptional habitat for promoting recovery of natural resources and because the council wanted to prevent any possible degradation of this habitat," the GAO report said.

The report noted that the Council paid at or below the government-appraised value for several other large parcel acquisitions which contained timber resources.

"It is completely unrealistic to think that the land has little value just because it does

not contain marketable timber or minerals," McCammon said. "The auditors did a good job of explaining a difficult situation. The audit did not say the price paid was too high or too low and it did not recommend the Council do anything differently."

Auditors also cautioned the Council to be careful in funding projects so as not to fund normal agency management duties or to conduct research that does not have a link to the oil spill. The GAO report points to three projects that auditors believe fell close to that line, including studies of sockeye salmon, pink salmon genetics, and killer whales.

The audit concludes, however, that the line is difficult to define and that each project should be analyzed on a case-by-case basis, which is the same conclusion the Trustee Council came to when it examined the issue three years ago.

It is Trustee Council policy to not fund projects that would otherwise be funded by state or federal agencies. The audit noted that sockeye salmon and killer whale projects were funded despite concerns that they should have fallen under normal agency management. In its published response to the audit, the Trustee Council defended its decision to fund these three projects.

"The Trustee Council's Work Plan funds approximately 100 projects each year," McCammon said. "After reviewing five years worth of projects, the auditors identified three that they considered questionable. Each one of those three was scrutinized at the time of funding and the Trustee Council made tough calls."

Again, McCammon pointed out, the audit did not recommend any changes in the process.

"This is a billion-dollar program attempting to accomplish something never done before," she said. "If there were no mistakes and no tough decisions, then we would be working miracles. That is not the case, but the GAO audit shows we have done a pretty good job."

The GAO also conducted an audit in 1993 that made several recommendations on improving the system. The 1998 audit noted that the Trustee Council had addressed all of those recommendations.

GAO Audit

continued from Page 1

"It is completely unrealistic to think that the land has little value just because it does not contain marketable timber or minerals. The auditors did a good job of explaining a difficult situation."

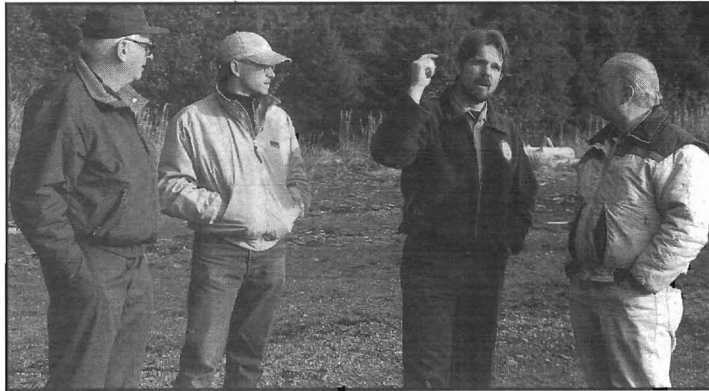
Molly McCammon

Advisory Group gets closeup view of Kenai Peninsula projects

The Public Advisory Group last month toured the Alaska SeaLife Center and the Qutekcak Mariculture facility in Seward, studied restoration activities along the Kenai River, and struggled with questions about the control of dipnetters who descend by the thousands each year on the City of Kenai.

During its annual field trip last month, members of the PAG got a first-hand view of the impact of Exxon Valdez settlement funds on the Seward and Kenai regions.

Researchers conducting studies at the SeaLife Center each made short presentations to the group. Dr. Merav Ben-David stood next to the outdoor pens as river otters swam in a nearby pool and caught live fish for dinner. River otters in Prince William Sound are showing signs of stress, possibly due to



PAG member Jim King, Operations Director Eric Myers, and Gary Cadd, representing Rep. Mark Hodgins' office listen as State Park Ranger Jack Sinclair discusses plans for the new recreation site at Lowell Beach in Seward. The Trustee Council funded purchase of the site in 1996.

ongoing exposure to pollutants, she told the PAG. It's her goal to determine whether oil in the environment could be the source of this stress, she said.

The PAG learned about the delicate work of raising clams from seedlings while touring the new mariculture facility in Seward. The Trustee Council is funding research to re-establish littleneck clam populations in Prince William Sound and lower Cook Inlet to restore subsistence clamming resources.

The group saw several small parcels

acquired on the Kenai River and learned the various methods for restoring riverbank trampled by bank fishermen.

State Representative Mark Hodgins asked for the PAG's support in funding a City of Kenai proposal to build a gravel parking lot near the mouth of the Kenai River. Dipnetters swarm to the area for a few weeks each July and park anywhere they can, he said. This has resulted in the degradation of wetlands and a management nightmare for the city, he said.

Exxon Valdez Oil Spill Trustee Council



Bruce Botelho
Attorney General
State of Alaska

Michele Brown
Commissioner
Alaska Dept. of
Environmental Conservation

Deborah L. Williams
Special Assistant to the Secretary
U.S. Dept. of the Interior

Jim Wolfe
U.S. Forest Service Representative
Alaska Region
U.S. Dept. of Agriculture

Steve Pennoyer
Director, Alaska Region
National Marine
Fisheries Service

Frank Rue
Commissioner
Alaska Dept. of Fish & Game

Public comment on possible uses of the Restoration Reserve is still being accepted.

Via Mail
Restoration Office
645 G Street, #401
Anchorage, AK 99501

Via Fax
907-276-7178

Via E-mail
restoration@oilspill.state.ak.us

Restoration Office
645 G Street, Room 401
Anchorage, AK 99501-3451

Bulk Rate
U.S. Postage
PAID
Permit #1013
Anchorage, AK