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CIRCAC puts borough's grant dollars to work

by Hal Spence

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Over the past two years, the Kenai Peninsula Borough has funneled \$460,000 in grants toward Cook Inlet Regional Citizens Advisory Council projects, including environmental monitoring and shoreline mapping meant to build a broad database for future protection and spill response efforts.

Last Tuesday, **CIRCAC's** Director of Science and Research Susan Saupe explained to borough assembly members exactly how that money is being spent. In an interview Friday, Saupe said she was pleased the borough, which garners revenues from oil and gas exploration and production in the Cook Inlet region, had agreed to fund **CIRCAC** programs.

"We went to borough because the borough receives money from these oil activities," Saupe said. "We thought the environmental work we do was an appropriate way for some of those funds to come back to ensure that we are able to collect the best data we can to evaluate potential environmental effects and best prevent any potential spills."

The largest chunk of borough cash in fiscal year 2002 went to help fund intertidal habitat monitoring in Cook Inlet. Most of that money has been expended on reconnaissance surveys of and a field report on soft sediment habitats in lower Cook Inlet, including Kamishak Bay and Port Graham. The project also included archiving tissue and sediment samples for future analyses. The data collected will become part of a coastal mapping database.

CIRCAC conducted aerial mapping surveys of the shoreline in Kachemak and Kamishak bays, upper Cook Inlet and the outer Kenai Peninsula coastline with the help of a \$58,000 grant in 2002.

That money also helped pay for development of an image access Web site and helped leverage additional grants that allowed expansion of the surveying program.

A \$45,000 grant in 2002 was used for contingency planning with the Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation for nontank vessels in Alaska waters.

The regulations will enhance safety and response readiness for freight vessels, passenger ships and fishing vessels. The regulations went into effect in May and **CIRCAC** will participate in contingency plan review.

Also in 2002, the borough funded a pipeline integrity program (\$22,000), which resulted in a negotiated pipeline reporting agreement with inlet oil operators and paid for a contract with an independent engineering firm to evaluate pipeline data.

Another \$25,000 went to fund **CIRCAC's** public outreach program.

The following fiscal year, another \$140,000 went to the ShoreZone Mapping program, this time including aerial and on-ground shoreline mapping.

Among other things, that included surveys along Katmai National Park coastline, and a partnership with the Kachemak Bay Research Reserve for on-ground surveys in Kachemak Bay and lower Cook Inlet.

Again, the data produced will become part of the GIS database.

Some \$45,000 is being used to develop the scope of work for contract to develop Geographic Response Strategies for lower western Cook Inlet. A work group will select the initial set of GRS sites.

Finally, another \$25,000 is being used to analyze sediments and tissues archived from the borough 2002 intertidal monitoring project.

So far in the current fiscal year (2004), which began July 1, the borough budget contains \$190,000 for **CIRCAC**.

The money will be used to conduct a physical oceanographic study of the inlet. Among other things, that will help identify most sensitive shorelines and provide a better understanding of the inlets complex currents, Saupe said.

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