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## Research cards drifting onto area beaches

by Sepp Jannotta

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Shorebirds and tourists aren't the only migrations moving along the margins of Kachemak Bay.

Over 400 of little wooden calling cards from an oceanographic study have made their way onto Homer's beaches from Mariner Park to Diamond Creek.

The drift cards, as they're known, were dropped into the Bay by the **Cook Inlet Regional Citizens Advisory Council** and the University of Alaska last month. The cards, with the help of a call from those who pick them up, are used to study the movements of surface currents.

Two different sets of 1,000 drift cards each were deployed by the scientists and a group of lower Kenai Peninsula high school students. One set was spread along a line between Bluff Point and Barabara Point near Seldovia . And the other set was deployed off Port Graham on a line, or transect, heading west into lower **Cook Inlet**.

The return rate for the inexpensive drift card studies is usually around 4 percent, said Steve Howell, **Cook Inlet Regional Citizens Advisory Council's** public outreach director. To see 400 of the 1,000 Seldovia-to-Bluff Point cards turn up was a surprise, he added.

"That's an unusually high rate of return for a drift-card study," Howell said. "It's a function of the location of that transect close to a populated beach area. And with the shorebird festival going on there was a big increase in beach traffic."

The Port Graham set, on the other hand, has only seen 12 cards reported.

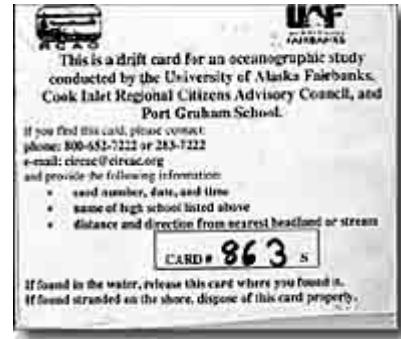
Those cards, Howell said, are expected to take a longer ride before they wash ashore. Because the prevailing currents are thought push to the west in the spring and summer, he said the cards will likely wash ashore in more remote areas on the western side of **Cook Inlet**.

That may not mean the Port Graham cards are any less illuminating than the Seldovia set, said Carl Schoch, the research director at the Kachemak Bay Research Reserve who conducted a drift card study in February.

"I would contend that you're not getting that much more information if all the cards are washing up in the same place," Schoch said.

Schoch's winter study has proved one thing conclusively when the thermometer is sitting in the teens and 20s, only the hardiest of beachcombers are out and about, meaning less drift cards will be found. So far, the study has yielded two cards, one picked up this winter near Diamond Creek and one reported this week from Kodiak.

"We can't really say too much based on two cards," Schoch said. "Particularly because they dispersed so widely."



◆ One of 400 drift cards found around area beaches. ◆

Schoch does expect a few more of his winter cards will appear as more people begin walking beaches along **Cook Inlet** and beyond. The length of time they've been rafting the **Inlet's** tides and currents, the more widely dispersed he expects them to be.

The most interesting thing about the winter study is where they haven't shown up, Schoch said.

Not one of the cards made land on the Homer Spit.