Cook Inlet RCAC
Council Briefs
First Quarter 2006

"Promoting environmentally safe marine transportation and facility operations in Cook Inlet."

CIRCAC Hosts Panel on Tanker Mishap

Council Calls Again for Navigational Risk Assessment

On February 2, the tanker Seabulk Pride tore away from it mooring lines and ran aground just north of the Rig Tenders dock in Nikiski. With catastrophe narrowly averted and the vessel safely out to sea, Cook Inlet RCAC turned its attention toward the lessons that will lead to a better understanding of the Seabulk Pride incident and ultimately to changes that will improve vessel safety in Cook Inlet. The Council hosted a moderated panel discussion regarding the incident at its Board of Directors Annual Meeting February 24 in Kenai.

The grounded tanker* Seabulk Pride *seen just south of Rig Tenders dock in Nikiski.

Participants from Tesoro Maritime, Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation, U.S. Coast Guard, Southwest Alaska Pilots Association, Seabulk Tankers, and Cook Inlet Tug and Barge were on hand to discuss the incident.

In a related action, the Council passed a resolution calling for the immediate deployment of adequately equipped tug vessels to assist operations at the Nikiski docks. The same resolution also asked shippers and producers to agree to a funding formula to provide for such navigational safeguards. At the time of the February meeting, the USCG had also instituted "extreme ice rules" imposing tidal current and flood limits for docking and loading in Nikiski among other safeguards.

Cook Inlet RCAC expects to hold a Forum on Navigational Risk in the future that will include many of these same participants as well as a broad group of stakeholders from the area.

An ice flow struck the double-hulled/double-bottomed tanker tearing it away from its mooring at the KPL Dock where it had been loading fuel product and pushed it hard aground one-half mile north of the dock, approximately 200 yards north of the ASRC/Rig Tenders facility. The M/V Champion attached an emergency tow line to the tanker but was unable to pull the vessel free.

Unified Command had planned a second attempt to pull the tanker off the beach with the high tide the same evening but safety concerns regarding one of tugs and other considerations postponed the attempt to approximately 7:00 a.m. the next morning. The service vessel Seabulk Nevada, and two tugs requested from Anchorage, the Stellar Wind and Glacier Wind, were in the immediate vicinity preparing for the attempt before a fourth vessel, the tug Pacific Challenger, arrived at 6:00 a.m. the next day and assisted with the refloating effort.

Two large tugs had also been summoned from Prince William Sound but were not expected to arrive until later in the day on February 3 and 4. The 7200 hp Sea Voyager tug had been en route with an estimated arrival of Noon Friday while a sister vessel, the Bulwark and Barge 450-3, with a capacity of 149,700 bbl would not have arrived until late that Saturday approximately 36 hours after the grounding.

The tide was estimated to be at a +17 when the morning the vessel went aground and a -0.4 low tide occurred at 1:37 p.m. leaving the vessel high and dry with even its prop out of the water. The following morning's tide of +22.6, approximately a foot higher than the previous evening's tide proved adequate to re-float the vessel and allow tugs to pull the tanker into deeper waters.

The USCG approved the vessel's transit to

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CIRCAC Tours XTO Platform "C"

XTO Energy in Nikiski hosted a tour of Platform C for interested Cook Inlet RCAC board and committee members recently. The tour was aimed at educating the group on the history and improvements to one of the Inlet's oldest offshore facilities.

Following an XTO Platform / helicopter safety video, the group donned exposure suits, and traveled to the platform where they received another safety briefing about platform safety and protocol.

The visit began with a tour of the generator room and the power generation capabilities of the platform. XTO personnel discussed the diesel driven gas compressors, well head rooms, the production room, shipping pump room, waste water treatment system and answered questions for several hours. After lunch, the group visited the water treatment and water injection control room, chemical injection room, and the emergency escape capsule.

Visitors also saw the newer, electrically driven gas compressor room, mud pits and shaker room. XTO pointed out the installation of a new fire and gas detection system comprised of a network of fire eyes, gas detection monitors and system enunciators located around the platform.

As they flew back to the heliport in Nikiski, the group also got a good relational view of the platforms and shoreside facilities as well as the aerial view of the current ice conditions in the Inlet and of the Seabulk Pride grounding site.

The Council appreciates XTO's efforts to improve the public's understanding of oil facility operations through tours such as these.

XTO Instrument Technician Russ Hoogland holds a "pig" used to clean the lines that carry oil to the shore. More photos are available at www.circac.org.

...Tanker Grounding / Risk Assessment *(continued)*

Kachemak Bay as a Place of Refuge after preliminary surveys in and around the vessel determined that it was sound to continue there. Once in the bay, divers surveyed the vessel for the American Bureau of Shipping. They observed a dimple and several cracks in the outer hull requiring repair before continuing south to offload its cargo. There was no indication of leaking product in or out of the vessel, according to authorities.

The cracks in the ship's bow, apparently the result of grinding against a boulder on the beach, allowed water to leak into the space between the hulls. Because the vessel was double-hulled, the cargo remained in tact and no oil leaked from the storage tanks. Following repairs in Kachemak Bay, crews also pressure tested valves and manifolds before gaining approval from the USCG to leave port for Anacortes, Washington.

Tesoro reported that approximately five barrels of product spilled when the ship broke away from the dock. Three barrels remained on the vessel deck and the other two were likely on the ground or in the water although responders have not seen sheen in the vicinity.

Carrying nearly 5,000,000 gallons of heavy fuel, the tanker threatened the Cook Inlet environment and economy on a scale to rival the 1989 Exxon Valdez oil spill, inexcusable with the prevention tools available in 2006.

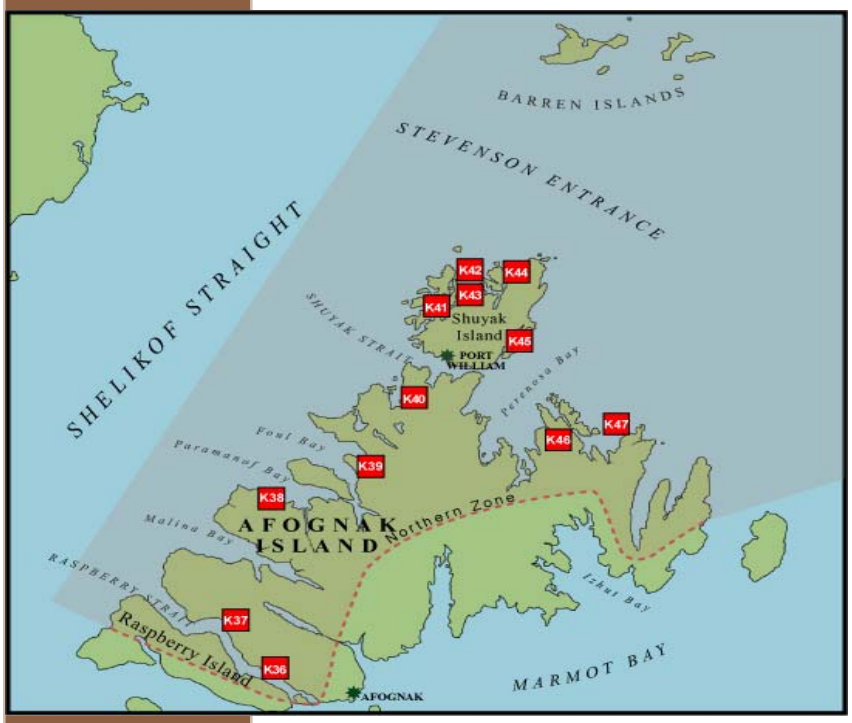
Because the USCG is the regulatory authority for navigational issues in U.S. waters, they are the appropriate agency to conduct the assessment for Cook Inlet. Cook Inlet RCAC strongly supports designating federal funds, $1.5 to $2 million, in the USCG budget to perform this important task.

While response capabilities have improved significantly over the years, gaps in prevention continue to threaten the environment and the economy that depends on it. An oil spill would be devastating to the commercial fishing fleet and salmon processors that are an integral part of the Kenai Peninsula and Kodiak Island economies. The 1986 Glacier Bay incident spilled 207,000 gallons of oil closing a fishery and costing that industry millions in revenue. The Seabulk Pride cargo presented an even greater challenge because of its viscosity and the presence of sea ice that would have severely limited any spill recovery efforts.

The need for an assessment has been known for years. A 1999 Cook Inlet RCAC-sponsored forum among environmental organizations, oil industry representatives, native leaders, state and federal elected officials, Coast Guard, and the Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation determined that an assessment was a critical first step in establishing additional spill prevention safeguards in Cook Inlet.

GRS Advances Across Shelikof Strait

The Kodiak Geographic Response Strategies workgroup added 12 new GRS sites along the northern part of the island at its most recent meeting in Kodiak and included language in the strategies to address the Endangered Species Act.



New GRS sites are depicted in this map of Kodiak and Afognak islands.

Selected Sites for Northern Kodiak and Afognak:

- **K-36 Selief/Yukuk**
- **K-37 Muskomee Bay**
- **K-38 Paramanof Bay**
- **K-39 Foul Bay**
- **K-40 Blue Fox Bay**
- **K-41 Big Bay**
- **K-42 Carry Inlet-North**
- **K-43 Carry Inlet-South**
- **K-44 Shangin Bay**
- **K-45 Andreon Bay/Big Fort Island**
- **K-46 Pauls Bay**
- **K-47 Seal Bay**

Several organizations have pledged funding and resources to continue the project across Shelikof Strait from Kodiak Island. Alaska State Parks and U.S. Fish and Wildlife manage much of the west side of Shelikof and agencies have begun looking at the site selection Matrix to nominate potential sites.

The next meeting has been tentatively scheduled for May 5 and a teleconference line will be open for those who cannot make the meeting in person.

Kodiak PPOR Begins

A sister initiative to GRS, the Potential Places of Refuge (PPOR) project got off to a good start thanks in part to the participation of area vessel operators and pilots familiar with the Kodiak region. As the name implies, PPOR identifies locations where a vessel in distress may be brought for safety or minimize environmental damage in an area.

With the aid of longtime commercial fisher Mary Jacobs, Southwest Alaska Pilots Association Capt. Ron Ward, and local tug operator Dennis MacMurray, the PPOR workgroup identified potential deep draft, light draft, shallow draft and grounding locations around Kodiak and adjacent islands and along the west side of Shelikof Strait.

These locations are part of a database that will contain information about the area, what size vessel the location can accommodate, and what resources may be found there to best aid a disabled vessel. Because the sites can be pre-identified, responders and regulators may have better options for dealing with a stricken vessel.

Upon completion this information will be available through the Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation and the U.S. Coast Guard.

More extensive information on the project can be found on the ADEC web site.

Calendar of Events

April 10	**Ports of Refuge Meeting, Homer**
April 14	**CIRCAC PROPS Committee Meeting, Kenai**
April 26-28	**Alaska Invasive Species Council Meeting, Anchorage**
May 4-5	**PWSRCAC Board Meeting, Valdez**
May 19	**CIRCAC Board Meeting, Kenai**
June 6-8	**AMOP Technical Seminar, Vancouver, B.C., Canada**

COOK INLET RCAC

New Seaweed Web Site Displays Research, Educates Citizens

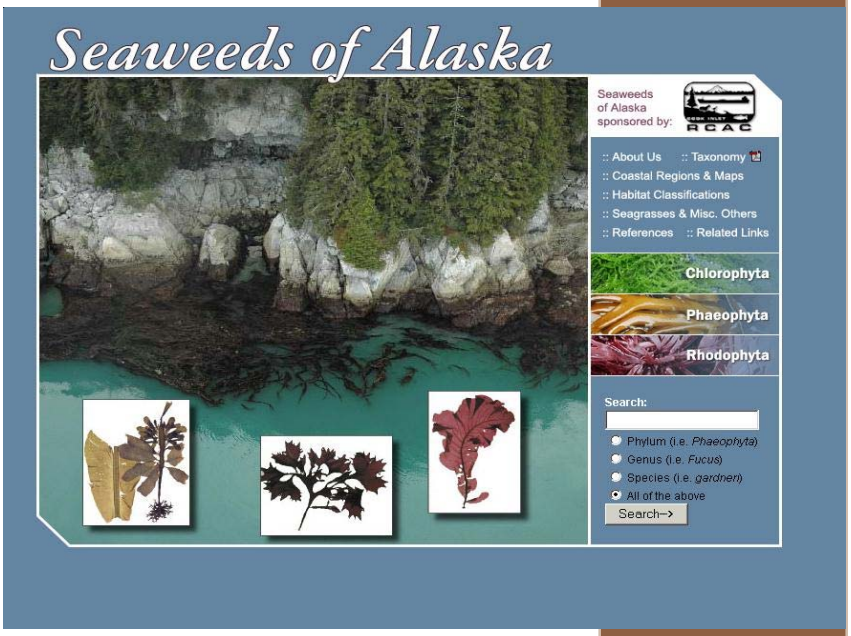
A new website providing information and images of seaweeds is now available for review at www.seaweedsofalaska.com. Sponsored by Cook Inlet RCAC, the website displays seaweeds occurring on beaches surveyed during many of our intertidal surveys. Users can view individual seaweed species organized within a searchable and browsable taxonomic structure.

The website evolved from the ideas of coastal ecologist Mandy Lindeberg who wanted to share some of the thousands of seaweed and coastal habitat photos that have been taken during our coastal surveys over the years. Taxonomist Dr. Sandra Lindstrom also envisioned a web site that would provide detailed species description for seaweeds found in Alaska. The two teamed to help bring the site into fruition. Both have participated on many of Cook Inlet RCAC's nearshore surveys in Cook Inlet, the Kenai Peninsula, and the Kodiak Island Archipelago.

The web site diplays information from over 120 species of algae, or seaweed. Depending on the images available, the dynamic web page for a given species might include a photo that shows what it looks like from a distance, what it looks like inter-mixed with other species, what an individual plant looks like, a close-up of its morphology, a digital scan of a pressed voucher specimen, and, in some cases, microscopic images showing individual cells or other components.

The database also includes information and images for common beach lichen, surfgrass, seagrass, as well as common beach, dune, and marsh plants. The home page of the website allows you to access seaweed information through a search for a specific phylum, genus or by looking at links to species organized under the categories for green, red, and brown algae. Ms. Lindeberg provides descriptions of different habitat types, the various regions of the Gulf of Alaska (such as Kachemak Bay, Prince William Sound, and others), and maps that show the locations of the sites from where intertidal photos have been collected.

Ms. Lindeberg has been conducting research throughout the Gulf of Alaska since 1990 and spearheaded efforts during our surveys to use digital imagery to document seaweeds in their natural environment. Cook Inlet RCAC Director of Science and Research, Susan Saupe, said that "Mandy has been a key member of our intertidal team for years, and is usually the one dragging the rest of us into the realm of new technology. In the past, we tried to capture a few representative photos of various beaches and intertidal communities, but Mandy stressed the importance of documenting the seaweeds at different spatial scales and in different environments."



The home page for Phase I of the new "seaweeds of alaska" web site. Cook Inlet RCAC is soliciting comments and suggestions from users for Phase II.

Ms. Saupe noted that Dr. Sandra Lindstrom has been working with the Council on most of its coastal habitat mapping shore-station surveys for the past four field seasons and has compiled an impressive voucher collection from the Gulf of Alaska.

During the beach surveys, she has been training other coastal ecologists on many seaweed species, some of which can only be confirmed through microscope or DNA work that is provided after laboratory analyses. She has provided digital scans of her seaweed voucher collections and is also leading efforts to provide detailed descriptions for each seaweed species on the web site. Ms. Saupe describes Dr. Lindstrom as "likely the world's most experienced phycologist for Gulf of Alaska seaweeds."

The web site itself, developed by Wayne Saucier of Octavient, Inc., uses a clever technique that draws information from a database to dynamic web page templates. This design has made it much easier for the researchers to update information. Instead of having to add information to fixed html pages, the underlying database fields can be updated and a search will yield the new information on a web page automatically.

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