

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

Discharge Permit Needs Work

Council Opposes Proposed Language to Increase Pollution

Cook Inlet RCAC responded recently to the Environmental Protection Agency's call for comments on the Proposed Cook Inlet General Oil and Gas National Pollution Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) Permit saying that the permit makes no effort to reduce concentrations or volumes of pollutants discharged into the rich marine waters of the Inlet.

"The proposed oil and gas discharge permit for Cook Inlet is a long way from adequate," commented Cook Inlet RCAC Executive Director Michael Munger. "EPA should be working with the producers to reduce discharges instead of allowing more pollution into Cook Inlet than is currently permitted."

The permit, which allows discharges associated with oil and gas exploration,

development, and production activities in Cook Inlet, applies to existing as well as new source discharges and is up for review. EPA's public comment period closed May 31.

"Some of our constituents raised concerns that these discharges could make it difficult to market Cook Inlet seafood as coming from pristine Alaskan waters," said Mr. Munger. "Under the draft permit, producers could increase the levels of contaminants discharged into the Inlet and there were concerns about how that might eventually affect subsistence foods."

Mr. Munger said that during their Board of Directors meeting on May 19, Cook Inlet RCAC passed a resolution stating that they oppose

(continued on back page)

Stakeholders to Review Kachemak Bay As Refuge for Stricken Vessels



The oil tanker Seabulk Pride enters Kachemak Bay for repairs following a grounding in Cook Inlet.

When a vessel in distress needs refuge from foul weather or a safe place to effect repairs, there may be many options or only a few depending on its size and the danger it presents. As we saw with the tanker Seabulk Pride grounding last winter in Cook Inlet, Kachemak Bay may be

the only realistic choice for a stricken vessel. The Potential Places of Refuge project addresses this need by identifying locations in advance of the incident and providing that information to mariners throughout the region.

Cook Inlet RCAC and others worked with the Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation following the Seabulk Pride incident

to designate funding for PPOR in Cook Inlet during the new budget cycle beginning July 1, 2006. Since Kachemak Bay figures prominently in most PPOR discussions, it will no doubt be addressed as part of this second phase of the project.

Cook Inlet RCAC has been a primary sponsor of the Potential Places of Refuge project in Kodiak this spring along with the Prince William Sound RCAC and the PWS Response Planning Group. Since it lies downstream of both Cook Inlet and Prince William Sound oil operations, Kodiak served as a starting point for the project.

Kachemak Bay is a National Estuarine Research Reserve with well-documented marine resources and several communities along its shores. The deepwater port is also one of the most attractive places for large vessel because of its size, sufficient depth, ice free waters, mooring

(continued on back page)

Inlet May Get Risk Assessment

A key to the process for identifying additional navigational safeguards in Cook Inlet is a U.S. Coast Guard-led comprehensive navigational risk assessment. The 1999 "Safety of Navigation" Forum, organized by Cook Inlet RCAC and held in Homer emphasized this need.

The Council has made repeated attempts to secure agency funding for such an assessment in the years since the forum with only limited success. The Seabulk Pride grounding reminded everyone that there is no time to waste on this important issue. We are optimistic that the funds will be appropriated to begin this long overdue study of the risks in Cook Inlet during this budget cycle.

Cook Inlet RCAC staff met with the ADEC Commissioner Kurt Fredrickson directly after the Seabulk Pride grounding and secured a commitment from the ADEC to request 250,000 in the fiscal 2007 proposed budget to conduct the assessment.

Council staff also met with the Commander of the 17th Coast Guard District, Admiral James Olson, to ensure that the Coast Guard viewed Cook Inlet as a

high priority.

Cook Inlet RCAC has also been working with Alaska's congressional delegation to identify the funding needed for the Coast Guard to conduct the assessment. Council staff continues to seek confirmation that the Coast Guard has the funding available in their operating budget. The delegation has been very supportive and we believe success lies just ahead.

Vessel traffic study

In the meantime, Cook Inlet RCAC is also conducting a vessel traffic study. The primary purpose of this project is to prepare a written narrative report and illustrated inventory of vessel traffic movements in Cook Inlet.

The written report may be used as a reference document to support discussions regarding the environmental risks associated with vessel traffic in the area, as well as any discussions regarding mishap prevention initiatives. This study, funded solely by Cook Inlet RCAC, will be used to augment the navigational risk assessment once it begins.

CIRCAC to Showcase Seaweed Web Site at Science Conference

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

Cook Inlet RCAC Director of Science and Research, Susan Saupe will present the website in conjunction with co-authors Mandy Lindeberg and Sandra Lindstrom at the annual meeting of the Phycological Society of America, a gathering of botanists who specialize in algae. The PSA meeting will be held in conjunction with the Northwest Algal Symposium in Juneau on July 7-12.

Ms. Lindeberg and Dr. Sandra Lindstrom compiled the images and information for over 120 different seaweeds. Depending on the images available for each species, the web page might show the seaweed at different spatial scales, what it looks like growing in different habitats, or what it looks like inter-mixed with other associated species. For some species there are digital scans of pressed voucher collections or microscopic images showing individual cells or other components.

The database also includes information and

images for common beach lichen, surfgrasses, seagrasses, 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. 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 can also be seen on the new web pages.

The web site, 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 adding information to fixed pages, the underlying database fields can be updated and a search will yield the new information on a page automatically.



GRS Sites Selected for Shelikof Strait

GRS site selection continued in the Kodiak region recently as the workgroup responsible for the project weighed the advantages and disadvantages of each location and whittled the number of potential sites in this round to 19. The primary objective for the

workgroup hopes to control costs for the vessel by restricting the number of sites and clustering them in smaller geographic areas. Tim Robertson of Nuka Research, the contractor for GRS, predicts that the survey team needs at least five days to survey and two days for travel to the sites. The workgroup also considered reducing alternatives to the traditional imagery used in the GRS which typically requires chartered air time. One such alternative is National Park Service aerial/satellite photography for that region.

Sites are selected using several criteria including environmental sensitivity, exposure to risk of being oiled, and ability to succeed in protecting the area with the current response technology.

Selected Sites for Mainland Zone:

- **K-48 Swikshak Lagoon**
- **K-49 Big River/Swikshak Bay**
- **K-50 Ninagiak River/Island**
- **K-51 Middle/Hallo Creek**
- **K-52 Devils Cove**
- **K-54 Kaffia Bay**
- **K-55 Kuliak Bay**
- **K-56 Missak Bay**
- **K-57 Kinak Bay**
- **K-58 Amalik Bay**
- **K-59 Takli Island**
- **K-14 Geographic Harbor**
- **K-60 Dakavak Bay**
- **K-61 Bear Bay**
- **K-62 Alinchak Bay - Southern**
- **K-63 Portage Bay**
- **K-64 East Wide Bay**
- **K-65 West Wide Bay**



New GRS sites are depicted in this map of Shelikof Strait.

most recent workgroup meeting was to review the site selection matrix and choose the high priority sites for GRS development along the Alaska Peninsula across Shelikof Strait from Kodiak Island. Funding and resources for this phase of the project has been drawn together from several parties including PWS Response Planning Group and both Prince William Sound and Cook Inlet RCAC.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife vessel URSA Major II will be used for the field surveys in July and the

Calendar of Events

July 4	Independence Day (CIRCAC Offices Closed)
July 7	TAPS Combined Resources Exercise
July 12	LEPC Meeting, 9 a.m. (Soldotna)
July 18	Valdez Marine Terminal Drill
July 20	Pacific States/BC Task Force Meeting (San Diego)
August 26	Industry Appreciation Day (Kenai)



CIRCAC Opposes NPDES Permit (continued)

the issuance of an NPDES Permit for Oil and Gas operations in Cook Inlet that would allow more pollution to be discharged than is currently permitted and that Cook Inlet RCAC supports the goal of zero discharge.

Representing local governments and interest groups in Cook Inlet and nearby areas who have the potential to be impacted by crude oil industry operations in Cook Inlet, the Council has the task under OPA 90 to provide “advice and recommendations on policies, permits, and site-specific regulations relating to the operation and maintenance of terminal facilities and crude oil tankers which affects or may affect the environment in the vicinity of the terminal facilities.”

Cook Inlet RCAC joined others in requesting an extension of the public comment period to allow enough time to review the many hundreds of pages associated with EPA’s draft permit (e.g. Fact Sheet, Mixing Zone Application, Ocean Discharge Criteria Evaluation, Environmental Assessment and Finding of No Significant Impact, Biological Evaluation, and Essential Fish Habitat Assessment). These documents and the increase in permitted pollutants have been the subject of public testimony in Homer, Kenai, and Anchorage over the past two months.

Although stopping short of requesting “zero discharge” for all facilities in this permit cycle, Cook Inlet RCAC believes that the proposed permit limits and mixing zones should be reevaluated and recalculated to ensure that the total concentrations and pollutant loadings do not

Potential Places of Refuge (continued)

locations, and readily available labor and equipment. The potential risk to the area requires additional scrutiny for any plans to use it as a place of refuge and that we maintain appropriate response capability locally.

PPOR locations become part of a database that contains 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.

The first phase in Kodiak got off to a good start thanks in part to the participation of area vessel operators and pilots familiar with the Kodiak region. With the aid of longtime commercial fisher Mary Jacobs, Southwest Alaska Pilots Association Capt. Ron Ward, and local tug operator Dennis MacMurray, the PPOR

increase from the current permit and that every effort be made to move toward zero discharge in the future. Recent successful efforts by some Cook Inlet operators to re-inject drill fluids and cuttings and produced water discharges have shown that re-injection is feasible.

“Forest Oil has been injecting produced water and drilling fluids and cuttings from its Osprey Platform since 2002,” said Mr. Munger. “Conoco/Phillips converted their Tyonek Platform to zero discharge for produced water and Chevron/Unocal converted the Anna (platform) to re-injection so we know it’s feasible for some of these facilities.”

Cook Inlet RCAC believes that these same efforts should be applied to some portion of the discharges identified in the draft permit to ensure that the total discharged pollutant loads do not increase. While the Council supports the increased mixing and dilution that will be provided by the addition of a multi-port diffuser at the Trading Bay Production Facility, the facility will still account for over 95% of the produced discharges to Cook Inlet and the total loadings of pollutants should not increase.

Mr. Munger said that the Council also strongly supports the inclusion of environmental monitoring associated with new exploration and existing large dischargers in Cook Inlet.

“We have provided general comments on recommendations for such monitoring efforts and will continue to work with EPA, ADEC, and industry to ensure that thoughtful, realistic, and useful final sampling plans are prepared.”

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. A similar workgroup of pilots, fisherman, industry, and agency personnel will begin meetings for Cook Inlet later this year.

The meetings are open to the public and Cook Inlet RCAC be announcing these dates for anyone interested in attending.

You can sign up for electronic delivery of the newsletter at our home page. Just go to www.circac.org and enter your name and email address in the fields. Your information will NOT be shared with others and you may unsubscribe at anytime.

910 Highland Ave
Kenai, AK 99611
Tel: 907.283.7222
or 800.652.7222

