



“The mission of the Council is to represent the citizens of Cook Inlet in promoting environmentally safe marine transportation and oil facility operations in Cook Inlet.”

June 14, 2024

Rear Admiral Megan M. Dean
Commander, 17th Coast Guard District
Attn: LT Case Kuikhoven
United States Coast Guard
P.O. Box 25517
Juneau, AK 99802

RE: Cook Inlet Regional Citizens Advisory Council
Recertification Application for September 1, 2024 to August 31, 2025

Admiral Dean:

The Cook Inlet Regional Citizens Advisory Council (CIRCAC or the Council) is providing its annual application for recertification as the alternative advisory group for Cook Inlet, Alaska, pursuant to the Oil Pollution Act of 1990 (OPA 90), Section 5002(o). Our recertification request observes the revised U.S. Coast Guard guidelines from 2002 that require a comprehensive application triennially, with a streamlined application process for each of the two years between; this is a year for that abbreviated process. The guidelines require a description of substantive changes since our triennial application submitted in 2023.

The information provided below highlights Council activities that have occurred since our last application was submitted in May 2023. In addition, documents have been enclosed to aid in your review and consideration of our recertification, including:

- 2022 Annual Report (released mid-2023)
- Update from the Board of Directors
- Recent E-Newsletters
- 2023-2024 Operating Budget

Membership and Stakeholder Engagement

The five Board of Director seats set to expire in April 2024 represented the Aquaculture Associations, Commercial Fishing Group, City of Kodiak, City of Homer, and City of Kenai. Each of the five incumbent Directors were either re-elected or re-appointed by their respective member groups. Following this year’s election process and recruitment efforts, CIRCAC received and certified one new applicant to join the Alaska Native stakeholder group. The new member is the Chugach Alaska Corporation.

Outreach efforts also yielded a new public member approved to serve a three-year term on the Prevention, Response, Operations and Safety (PROPS) Committee. Both the PROPS Committee and Environmental Monitoring Committee (EMC) retain the required 6-8 public members in addition to participating Directors. Several volunteers were recognized in April 2024 for their years of service to the organization, notably ranging from 10 to 30-year milestones.

CIRCAC continues to host Board and Committee meetings in a hybrid form, allowing for participation in-person and virtually. The Council's three Board meetings during this recertification period were held in Homer in August (our meeting that rotates between Seldovia, Homer, and Kodiak locations), Anchorage in December, and Kenai in April. Meeting announcements are made through our website, interested parties' notification list, e-newsletters, and local media outlets.

Community engagement and involvement with stakeholders by staff, committee members, and/or Board members took place at the following meetings, conferences, and events:

- Industry Appreciation Day in Kenai
- Bureau of Safety and Environmental Enforcement (BSEE) Concept of Operations stakeholder meeting in Anchorage for Offshore Facility Oil Spill Response
- Cook Inlet Water Quality Summit in Anchorage – keynote speaker, presentation: *Contaminant Monitoring in Cook Inlet's Physically Dynamic and Complex Environment*
- Alaska Research Consortium board meetings in Kodiak and remotely
- Oil Spill Recovery Institute board and workplan meetings
- Industry Pre-Winter Meeting and AVTEC's AMTC ship simulator training in Seward – presentation: overview and updates of CIRCAC
- Pacific Marine Expo in Seattle
- Alaska Marine Science Symposium in Anchorage – plenary session attendance and booth exhibitor
- Alaska Forum on the Environment in Anchorage – joint booth exhibitor and presentation with representatives from PWSRCAC and the Exxon Valdez Oil Spill Trustee Council
- Ocean Sciences Conference in New Orleans
- Alaska Mariculture Conference in Anchorage
- Alaska Seaweed Genetics Workshop in Juneau
- International Oil Spill Conference in New Orleans – joint booth exhibitor, poster: *Mapping logistical and other key support resources for a coastal response*, and presentation: *Social Media Applications and Limitations in Remote Oil Spill Response*
- National Harbor Safety Committee Conference in Chicago

In addition, CIRCAC met with and gave presentations to the following local governments and organizations:

- Kenai City Council
- Kenai Peninsula Borough Assembly
- City of Kenai Harbor Commission
- Homer City Council

Communication with Industry, Agency, and Partners

The Council understands the importance of and strives to maintain open and cooperative communication with industry operators, agency regulators, and research partners. This is accomplished over time and through a variety of settings – direct, formal and informal meetings; coordinated efforts at trainings, drills, and exercises; tours and visits to facilities and departments; and participation and overlap in planning events and conferences. CIRCAC regularly attends and sits on various, multi-agency and industry workgroups, committees, and teams as referenced throughout this application.

CIRCAC routinely partners and attends events and expos with Prince William Sound RCAC; highlights include a shared booth and presentation at the Alaska Forum on the Environment in February, joint expo space at the International Oil Spill Conference in May, and participating in their annual Science Night.

Council Presentations

CIRCAC's Board and Committee meetings typically feature one or more presentations by representatives of industry, agencies, research partners, or staff offering insights into ongoing research, best available technology, programs and projects, regulations, or developments that are of particular interest to our stakeholders. The following presentations were received at Council meetings:

- Captain Christopher Culpepper, Commander, Sector Anchorage – update on USCG operations
- Tiffany Larson, SPAR Division Director and Melinda Brunner, PPR Program Manager – update on ADEC staffing and operations
- Dr. Kris Holderied, Director of Kasitsna Bay Laboratory – update on NOAA National Centers for Coastal Ocean Science partnership projects
- Dr. Scott Pegau, OSRI Research Program Manager – Oil Spill Recovery Institute research program
- Captain John Cole, Chief of Staff, USCG D-17 – U.S. Coast Guard District 17 overview
- Captain Jeff Brue, Global Marine Operations Manager, Marathon Petroleum Corporation – update
- Commissioner Emma Pokon, ADEC – update
- Captain Marc Bayer, V.P. of Marine Operations, Marathon Petroleum Corporation – update
- Captain Paul Mehler, Port Captain, Marathon Petroleum Corporation – maritime ice guidelines
- Dan Marlowe and Maniksaq Baumgartner, Hilcorp – annual operational summary for Cook Inlet operations
- Updates from CIRCAC Ex Officios representing the following agencies: DNR, USCG, ADEC, and NOAA

Improved Outreach Tools

The new CIRCAC website launched in June 2023, making it easier for site visitors to navigate Council resources and historical reports. The redesign focused on streamlining a document

library to better archive projects and files, improve support for visual elements and video content, and create an overall more engaging and user-friendly site. Staff continue to test and make adjustments where necessary to the website's previously linked documents and new features.

Scientific Work and EMC Programs

EMC Field Equipment

The CIRCAC committee approved funds in August 2023 to purchase a rigid hull inflatable vessel for field work. Staff completed extensive research and consulted with many agency and research partners with similar boat outfits for recommendations on design, material, and functionality. Staff is involved in the decisions on specifics as the boat is being fabricated and assembled. Brief 'sea trials' will be conducted in Puget Sound near the boat building facility prior to delivery of the boat to Alaska this summer.

Biological and Chemical Monitoring Program

Online Data Access

Through a contract with BOEM and a study team of CIRCAC, Axiom Data Science, Inc., Kinnetic Environmental, Inc., and Payne Environmental Consultants, Inc., work continues on the project, *Synthesis of Contaminants Data for Cook Inlet – Evaluation of Existing Data as Baseline Conditions and Recommendations for Further Monitoring*. Recent developments include additional compilation and evaluation of historical data sets and reports, and forming a 'meta-data table of studies' that describes each study and easily identifies details about each report. Following project objectives, comparisons have been made to other contaminant data portals in order to best design and present data from this project to suit applications in the Cook Inlet areas. A request to BOEM for extension on final deliverables was submitted, with the start of the project having been delayed during the Covid-19 pandemic. CIRCAC staff presented the Science Plan of this project to the Steering Committee of the Cook Inlet Water Quality Summit, in addition to later presenting information on designing contaminant monitoring programs in Cook Inlet as one of the Summit's keynote speakers.

Coastal Habitat Mapping Program

Alaska ShoreZone Imaging, Mapping, and Website

In March 2024, CIRCAC submitted a Congressionally Directed Spending (CDS) request that included proposed monitoring of canopy kelp habitats, leveraging CIRCAC funds for ShoreZone mapping of Kodiak, specifically the areas surveyed in 2002 in need of higher-resolution imagery. The proposal also included a project to assess oil spill response capabilities amongst seaweed and invertebrate farms of the area's booming mariculture industry. CIRCAC continues to seek funds and partnerships to resurvey areas with outdated and lower quality imagery. In efforts to maximize data accessibility, compatibility, and integration, CIRCAC is working with contractors and agency partners on improvements to the Shore Station Database on multiple levels.

Environmental Sensitivity Index (ESI) Maps

Following an outside review of an ESI-related Oil Spill Recovery Institute (OSRI) report, CIRCAC is in discussions with SeaChange contractors to update ESI shoreline habitat data in the Cook Inlet area and compare ESI categories with earlier ShoreZone across-shore data. CIRCAC continues to support the integration of NOAA's ESI data and maps with imagery and data collected through ShoreZone methods – both data and mapping sources aid in oil spill planning and response.

Macrocystis Kelp

The CDS proposal submitted in March targeted the use of ShoreZone survey data and imagery to map canopy kelp habitats, specifically giant kelp (*Macrocystis pyrifera*), especially in comparison to bull kelp and dragon kelp species. CIRCAC remains involved and actively seeks funding and partnerships to better understand the expansion of *Macrocystis* kelp beds in our area of concern – identifying their preferred habitat, environmental conditions, and predicted patterns of spread has potential implications for oil spill prevention and response. As mentioned earlier, CIRCAC staff attended the Alaska Mariculture Conference in Anchorage and a seaweed genetics workshop in Juneau.

Physical Oceanography Program

Cook Inlet Ocean Observing and Modeling

This past year, CIRCAC has worked closely with numerous agencies and other organizations on multiple projects to improve our understanding of Cook Inlet's complex circulation – ultimately to improve the resolution and accuracy of 3-D trajectory modeling. The Cook Inlet Operational Forecast System (CIOFS) model hindcast that was funded by OSRI and BOEM was completed by contractor, Axiom Data Science, Inc. Using that information, a project team with participants from NOAA, UAF, OSRI, AOOS, and CIRCAC identified strengths and weaknesses in the model and are working to collect additional observational data, develop on-line modeling tools, and incorporate improved or additional forcing parameters (e.g. freshwater forcing). In a related project, CIRCAC continues to meet with the team on development of a particle trajectory 'open-drift' model to further the improvement and creation of tools for a web-based oil spill trajectory model.

CIRCAC continues to partner and co-fund deployments of satellite drifters, Acoustic Doppler Current Profiler, and hydrographic surveys, in addition to supporting UAF researchers with site identification and deployment of an HF Radar system. Deployments and data collections for these projects are scheduled for this summer and are being conducted through the combined efforts of CIRCAC, OSRI, BOEM, UAF, AOOS, and Hilcorp.

Oil Fate and Effects Program

Marine Oil Snow in Cook Inlet

The Council has been a long-time supporter of marine oil snow research and relevant studies conducted by graduate students. Its findings and study applications directly relate to the potential transportation of oil during a spill, adding to our understanding of the dynamic waters of Cook Inlet and how best to monitor and respond to incidents. While no new field studies were

conducted this year, the research team submitted a third paper from prior years' studies to the journal, Environmental Research Communications.

Oil Spill Monitoring, Prevention, and Response – PROPS Committee Programs

Incident Monitoring

CIRCAC actively monitors and reports on industry activities in the region, including significant events such as vessel groundings, discharges that may impact surface or ground waters, and other incidents that may be a potential pollution threat. In December 2023, after receiving notification from Hilcorp's Emergency Response Manager, CIRCAC shared report of an oily water mixture spill originating on the Granite Point Platform. Details of the spill discovery, response deployment, investigation of cause, current conditions, and findings were followed closely by staff and reported to our stakeholders.

Spill Drills and Exercises

CIRCAC participated in the planning process and day-of execution of Marathon Petroleum's annual drill, hosted at CISPRI last October. Prior to the drill, CIRCAC staff had the opportunity to train with Marathon and agency personnel using Incident Action Plan software. Regular planning meetings discussed scope, objectives, injects, and general order and collaboration of the drill with other agencies. During the drill, CIRCAC participated in the Joint Information Center, with members of the Council included as a part of the mock press conference.

Additionally, Council staff attended the tank truck rollover tabletop exercise (TTX) hosted by ADEC and the KPB Office of Emergency Management and Local Emergency Planning Committee. Unlike other TTX scenarios attended, this one focused on responders in the reactive phase and later cleanup and response activities. Priority was given to working with all agencies and responding teams in the scenario, refining communication skills and increasing response capabilities through clear and coordinated efforts. CIRCAC hopes to see similar exercise efforts in the future and found the exercise scenario to be atypical and therefore an eye-opener for attendees.

Most recently, CIRCAC staff participated in the planning process and Command Post-style exercise of Hilcorp's annual drill held in April. The two-day event consisted of a reactive phase exercising the facility well control process, followed by a functional exercise with an initial 24-hour operational period. CIRCAC provided access to the ice monitoring camera network and participated in the drill's operations section.

Harbor Safety Committee (HSC)

CIRCAC continues to participate and attend all meetings for the Cook Inlet Harbor Safety Committee. Staff serve on the management team, primary and alternate positions on the committee, and as Chair of the Harbor Safety Plan Workgroup. An annual task, staff presented updates and revisions to the Harbor Safety Plan at its fall meeting held in Homer; the plan was approved and has since been posted.

CIRCAC staff also attended the National Harbor Safety Committee Conference hosted this spring in Chicago. Presentations and panel discussions offered real-world examples of the

challenges and successes that HSCs face around the country, and highlighted management and communication best practices to improve the functions within and across multiple HSCs.

Arctic and Western Alaska Area Plan

Staff routinely participates in Area Committee subcommittees and workgroups for the Arctic and Western Alaska Area Plan, including the Regional Stakeholder Committee (RSC) workgroup. The RSC workgroup's focus has been the development of a Liaison Officer Guide and an RSC Member Guide. Staff also worked with various federal and state agency members, along with PWSRCAC, in collaborative effort to produce work guides for RSC management and function.

Geographic Response Strategies (GRS)

Council staff participates in the GRS subcommittee by attending meetings to discuss the quality assurance processes, review, and validation procedure for all GRS sites, and to stay up-to-date on project advancements and issues. CIRCAC funded and partnered with the USCG, ADEC, and UAF to ensure the quality assurance and quality control of the data conversion from PDF files to the state operated Geographic Information System (GIS) platform for all GRS site files were complete and accurate.

Additionally, staff met with the USCG and UAF project managers to discuss the validation and entry of data from Cook Inlet stream crossing GRS sites (another project previously designed and funded by CIRCAC) to beta test the data path process aspects of the project. Data path process objectives include developing a repeatable and reliable process that will be used after GRS site visits, training deployments, and real incidents in conjunction with the new Field App data collection technique. This data transfer process from Field App to GRS file will ensure continuity in GRS data and user interface.

Ice Monitoring Camera Network

CIRCAC continues to sponsor and oversee the network of ice cameras, with coordinated and collaborative efforts for placement, maintenance, and use of the cameras. Recent collaboration also included troubleshooting, as several of the ice cameras within Hilcorp-hosted areas were experiencing outages. After much discussion, system testing and circuit training, the issues were traced to disconnected wire connections between the camera network and router following an upgrade and service work performed by the local communications carrier. Although a simple fix, special note is placed on the joint efforts to discover and resolve the issue quickly while working with Hilcorp personnel, alongside technical and electrical expert contractors.

Staff continues to work with ice camera network partners and electrical contractors to relocate the Port of Alaska ice camera to the new Petroleum and Cement dock on the southern end of the port facility. To complete the move, data transfer equipment for both the Port of Alaska and Port MacKenzie cameras also needed to be relocated. Re-positioning of the camera and associated gear was due to the Port of Alaska's expansion and renovation work.

Comments and Contingency Plan Review

The Council's Protocol Control Committee is tasked with reviewing and providing comments where appropriate for State of Alaska required industry contingency plans, whether during

scheduled review periods or as revisions and amendments are submitted for review. In addition, comments are developed and provided for new or proposed changes to state and federal regulations where appropriate. Recent comments or letters provided by the committee include:

- 5.15.23 Letter of support regarding S.B. 137 relating to the refined fuels surcharge
- 6.27.23 Comments regarding a request for information on Coast Guard Vessel Response Plan and Maritime Oil-Spill Response Plan Advisory Group (MORPAG) Recommendations
- 6.27.23 Comments regarding proposed changes on oil spill financial responsibility in the regulations of the Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation
- 12.13.23 Approval of a letter to Gov. Dunleavy regarding the state of ADEC Division of Spill Prevention and Response
- 3.1.24 Comments regarding a request for information on the Coast Guard Implementation of a Western Alaska Oil Spill Planning Criteria Program

Other CIRCAC Business

Funding from the charter funding companies for 2024 is on schedule and up-to-date. A fifth funder was established, Crowley Alaska Tankers, LLC., and we entered into contract at the end of 2023.

The Council's FY2022 independent financial audit was completed, with the report and findings reviewed and accepted by our Executive and Audit Committees last September. Preparation for the FY2023 audit is underway, with auditor fieldwork scheduled this summer.

Lastly, and to ensure accessibility of this application, CIRCAC will inform the public of our application submittal via local newspaper and media postings, with copies available for review on our website and at our corporate office in Kenai.

Admiral Dean, we appreciate your thorough review of this recertification request and accompanying documents. To ensure a concise, streamlined application, further detail not included here can be found on our website at www.circac.org. Please don't hesitate to contact our office at 907-283-7222 should you or your staff require additional materials or information on any of our programs. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Michael Munger
Executive Director

Enclosures: [2022 Annual Report \(released mid-2023\)](#); [recent Update from the Board of Directors](#); [recent E-Newsletters](#); [2023-2024 Operating Budget](#)