



KACHEMAK BAY RESEARCH RESERVE

A Unit of the National Estuarine Research Reserve System

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June 20, 2014

Rear Admiral Daniel B. Abel
Commander, 17th Coast Guard District
United States Coast Guard
c/o Docket Management Facility (M-30)
U.S. Department of Transportation
West Building Ground Floor
Room W12-140
1200 New Jersey Avenue SE
Washington, D.C. 20590-0001

Re: USCG-2014-0414; Cook Inlet RCAC Recertification

Dear Admiral:

On behalf of the Research Program at the Kachemak Bay Research Reserve (Reserve), I would like to express our support for the recertification of the Cook Inlet Regional Citizens Advisory Council (Cook Inlet RCAC).

The Reserve provides a strong connection among research projects, education programs, and information needs in coastal communities across south-central Alaska. We partner with leading scientists, managers, regulators, local environmental groups, and tribal entities to provide the science necessary to support coastal decision-making. Recently we've expanded our long-term monitoring program to collect baseline ecological data, including community composition, species abundance, and species distributions, of salt marshes in Kachemak Bay with the intention of monitoring long-term trends as an indicator of sea and land-level changes on the ecosystem. Cook Inlet is also part of our research foot print and it is surrounded by wide salt marshes that can extend miles inland. If an oil spill in upper Cook Inlet reaches the shoreline during higher tides, some of these areas have a significant risk of being impacted because the marsh plant roots and sediments retain the oil. The Reserve partnered with the Cook Inlet RCAC to map salt

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marshes in upper Cook Inlet. Collaboratively, we mapped the different plant communities making up the larger salt marshes in Chickaloon, Redoubt, Trading, Iniskin, Iliamna, Oil and Chinitna bays. These detailed GIS maps are helping us understand the zonation of plants relative to general tidal elevations and give a measure of baseline information that can be referenced in oil spill planning and response efforts.

Since 1990, Cook Inlet RCAC has provided a valuable service to Cook Inlet's diverse stakeholder groups, citizens, and coastal decision-makers. With heightened interest in Cook Inlet exploration and development, it is important to have an effective and respected mechanism in place to represent Cook Inlet's citizens in monitoring and promoting environmentally safe marine transportation and oil facility operations. The Cook Inlet RCAC has been able to objectively represent the many stakeholder interests in the region and develop meaningful partnerships with industry, local, state and federal governments and Cook Inlet's citizens. Through Cook Inlet RCAC's efforts and leadership, there have been improvements in environmental monitoring, oil spill prevention, response, and preparedness for our region. The Cook Inlet RCAC has been extremely effective by networking with a wide variety of experts to provide additional information and tools to industry and stakeholders alike in the Cook Inlet region, such as the comprehensive Cook Inlet Navigational Risk Assessment, Ice Forecasting Network of Cameras, and the Alaska Coastal Mapping Program all of which have improved our ability to prevent, plan for and respond to oil spills. These are all very commendable accomplishments.

We look forward to collaborating with them on future projects and respectfully request the Coast Guard approve Cook Inlet RCAC's application for recertification.

Sincerely,



Angela Doroff
Research Coordinator
Kachemak Bay Research Reserve

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