

# Strategic Plan 2021-2026

## Biological and Chemical Environmental Monitoring Program

**Program Purpose:** Monitor the biological and chemical environment in Cook Inlet and nearby areas to detect impacts of oil industry operations.

### **Goals:**

1. Identify and evaluate risks and potential impacts of oil industry operations to ecosystem components of the Cook Inlet RCAC area of concern.
2. Assess and monitor status and trends of biological and chemical components in the Cook Inlet RCAC area of concern.
3. Make data accessible to stakeholders to improve the understanding of biological and chemical environments in the Cook Inlet RCAC area of concern.

### **Program Strategies:**

- Conduct field sampling and laboratory, statistical, and data analyses to characterize Cook Inlet's biological, chemical, oceanographic, habitat, and contaminant studies environments.
- • Conduct trajectory analyses for simulated Cook Inlet oil spills that includes shoreline impact, site oiling, threat zone, and resource analyses.
- • Provide periodic summaries detailing progress of the program.
- • Solicit periodic scientific peer review.
- • Collect, compile and disseminate chemical and biological monitoring compliance data.
- • Identify a subset of historical sampling sites in Cook Inlet and nearby areas for potential long-term status and trends monitoring program.
- • Support or lead efforts to incorporate lower Cook Inlet sampling sites into Gulf Watch Alaska Program or other partnership programs that provide long-term monitoring support.

**Program Outcome:** A Cook Inlet sediment and water quality assessment partnership that integrates local, regional, state, and national initiatives for monitoring ambient contaminants.

### **OPA 90 Language That Guides This Program**

5002 (e) (2) Duties-In fulfilling its responsibilities, the [EMC] shall-

(A) advise the Council on a monitoring strategy that will permit early detection of environmental impacts of terminal facility operations and crude oil tanker operations while in ...Cook Inlet;

(B) develop monitoring programs and make recommendations to the Council on the implementation of those programs;

(C) at its discretion, select and contract with universities and other scientific institutions to carry out specific monitoring projects authorized by the Council pursuant to an approved monitoring strategy;

## **Coastal Habitat Mapping Program**

***Program Purpose:*** Assess coastal habitats in the Cook Inlet RCAC area of concern. ***Program Goals:***

1. Inventory and characterize coastal habitat in the Cook Inlet RCAC area of concern.
2. Identify and characterize habitats that are unique, sensitive to impacts, good indicators of change, of high-value, or have historical records.
3. Make data accessible to resource and oil spill response agencies, industry, the public and other organizations.

***Program Strategies:***

- • Conduct biophysical mapping at broad and site-specific scales.
- • Conduct more detailed studies, mapping, and characterization of species or habitats identified as unique, sensitive to impacts, good indicators of change, of high-value, or that have historical records.
- • Identify a subset of habitat types in Cook Inlet and nearby areas for potential long-term status and trends monitoring program.
- • Integrate habitat data and imagery with other information important for oil spill response, including Environmental Sensitivity Index (ESI) data.
- • Develop tools for effective application of data in oil spill planning and response, ensuring access of information through on-line portals.
- • Participate in the coordination of Alaska and North Pacific-wide nearshore biophysical habitat mapping programs.

***Program Outcome:*** A coordinated and contiguous database for the entire Gulf of Alaska and an oil spill prevention and response tool that incorporates detailed coastal habitat data.

***OPA 90 Language That Guides This Program***

5002 (f) (2)

(C) study wind and water currents and other environmental factors in the vicinity of the terminal facilities which may affect the ability to prevent, respond to, contain, and clean up an oil spill;

(D) identify highly sensitive areas which may require specific protective measures in the event of a spill in Prince William Sound or Cook Inlet;

## **Physical Oceanography Program**

**Program Purpose:** Understand and model Cook Inlet's complex circulation to inform oil spill response decisions and better evaluate potential impacts of contaminants to Cook Inlet and to develop a comprehensive Cook Inlet ocean observing system.

Make data accessible to resource agencies, industry, the public, and other organizations.

### **Program Strategies:**

- Identify gaps in data and models; work with agencies to obtain and enhance data.
- Fill in data and modeling gaps as needed to improve real-time information.
- Support improved and accessible ocean circulation, atmospheric, and wave models.
- Collaborate with Alaska Ocean Observing System (AOOS) and other regional programs to develop a comprehensive Cook Inlet area data system.
- Compile and integrate Cook Inlet RCAC oceanographic data into on-line data portals at

Alaska Ocean Observing System.

**Program Outcome:** An ocean observing system and models for Cook Inlet that nests within a larger regional and state-wide Alaska Ocean Observing System to provide real-time data and forecasts.

### **OPA 90 Language That Guides This Program**

5002 (f) (2)

(C) study wind and water currents and other environmental factors in the vicinity of the terminal facilities which may affect the ability to prevent, respond to, contain, and clean up an oil spill;

## **Oil Transport, Fate and Effects Program**

### **Program Purpose:**

Understand and predict the potential transport, fate, and effects, including environmental, of oil discharged into Cook Inlet to guide oil spill planning and response activity.

### **Program Goals:**

1. Develop an understanding of the transport, fate, and effects of oils that have the potential to be spilled in the Cook Inlet area of concern.
2. Develop an understanding of transport, fate, and effects of oil treated by various response methods likely to be used on oil spills in the Cook Inlet RCAC area of concern.
3. Make data accessible and actively engage in efforts to improve oil spill planning and response decisions.

***Program Strategies:***

- • Gather and summarize existing information relating to oil transport, fate, and effects for the Cook Inlet RCAC area of concern.
- • Identify, prioritize, and fill data-gaps for transport and fate models, taking into consideration parameters such as emulsification, dispersal, biodegradation, aggregation with mineral and organic particles, deposition, photo-chemical oxidation, and food-web interactions.
- • Identify environmental parameters, such as salinity, temperature, energy, and suspended sediments that can influence efficacy, transport, fate, and effects of various oil spill response options, especially those that have the potential to most influence behavior of oils spilled in Cook Inlet.
- • Promote development and refinement of oil transport models to improve the ability to model Cook Inlet rip zones, freshwater buoyancy driven currents, seasonality, ice movement, and boundary forcing from the Gulf of Alaska.
- • Advocate for thorough evaluation of Cook Inlet hydrodynamic models through model hindcasts and comparison to observational data.
- • Advocate for research project funding by various agencies and institutions and build collaborations on approved research projects.

***Program Outcome:*** Large scale studies of oil transport, fate, and effects that include Cook Inlet conditions and scenarios.

***OPA 90 Language That Guides This Program***

5002 (f) (2)

(C) study wind and water currents and other environmental factors in the vicinity of the terminal facilities which may affect the ability to prevent, respond to, contain, and clean up an oil spill; (E) monitor developments in oil spill prevention, containment, response, and cleanup technology;

**Technical Review Program Program Purpose:**

Provide expert guidance to evaluate permits, regulations, findings, proposed legislation, and other information relating to Cook Inlet oil industry and regulatory agencies.

**Program Goals:**

1. Gather and summarize relevant information gaps and effectively evaluate issues.
2. Monitor compliance through permits, regulation, and legislation.

3. Provide advice to the Cook Inlet RCAC Board of Directors and appropriate committees and agencies.

### **Program Strategies:**

- • Develop and maintain a mechanism to initiate reviews and provide comments on legislation, regulation, and policies affecting the Cook Inlet RCAC area of concern.
- • Prioritize issues of concern to ensure efforts and funds are appropriately delegated.
- • Develop a tracking system for comments provided by each review process.
- • Evaluate discharge monitoring reports and develop recommendations and mechanisms to ensure compliance, including third party audits.

### **Program Outcome:**

Mechanisms to ensure a timely response on issues of concern to Cook Inlet RCAC and an integrated database that links reviews and comments to program goals and strategies.

### ***OPA 90 Language That Guides This Program***

5002 (f) (2)

(A) periodically review the respective oil spill prevention and contingency plans for the terminal facilities and for the crude oil tankers while in Prince William Sound or Cook Inlet, in light of new technological developments and changed circumstance

(E) monitor periodic drills and testing of oil spill contingency plans for the terminal facilities and crude oil tankers while in Cook Inlet

## **Geographic Response Strategies Program**

### **Purpose:**

Provide a guide for oil spill responders to minimize response times. The program also serves to enhance the effectiveness of response efforts at environmentally sensitive areas and to not only protect the marine and onshore environments but also the cultural, historical and archeological resources of the Cook Inlet Area.

### **Program Goals:**

1. Prioritize and develop specific protection tactics for environmentally sensitive areas in the Cook Inlet area of concern through a workgroup process.
2. Identify, catalog, and map cultural, historic, archeological, and other significant resources to be protected during oil spill response.

3. Identify and develop shore based GRS to address stream crossings, prioritizing anadromous streams, along highway routes supporting crude oil transport by truck.
4. Present Shore based GRS to Area Committee GRS workgroup for inclusion into catalog.

### **Program Strategies:**

- ♦ Work as a consensus team with industry, federal, state and local governments, oil spill co-ops, and communities to prioritize the sensitive areas.
- ♦ Identify equipment, protection strategies, and personnel needed to protect each designated site through a workgroup process.
- ♦ Use industry drills and other opportunities to verify Geographic Response Strategies effectiveness; re-evaluate and make changes as needed.
- ♦ Work to 'ground truth' GRS sites periodically to ensure changes in topography, bathymetry, or other factors considered in the GRS development have not affected the GRS.

### **Program Outcome:**

Geographic Response Strategies incorporated as part of the Area Plan, industry contingency plans, and oil spill response organization operations.

### **OPA 90 Language That Guides This Program**

5002 (f) (1) TECHNICAL OIL SPILL COMMITTEE...assess measures designed to prevent oil spills and the planning and preparedness for responding to, containing, cleaning up, and mitigating impacts of spills.

5002 (f) (2) Duties - In fulfilling its responsibilities...

(D) identify highly sensitive areas which may require specific protective measures in the event of a spill...

### **Prevention and Response Program Purpose:**

Develop oil spill and response projects and studies to minimize the risk of oil discharge into Cook Inlet. Provide a basis for recommendations to enhance prevention and response activities and facilitate communication among citizens, regulatory groups, special interest groups, and industry.

### **Program Goals:**

1. Provide guidance for oil spill prevention, response, and planning.
2. Monitor, evaluate, and make recommendations on marine firefighting procedures.
3. Decrease response time by streamlining permitting procedures.

4. Ensure the public is informed and represented during oil spill prevention activities and potential or actual oil discharges into Cook Inlet.
5. Emphasize oil spill prevention.

6. Develop and maintain a Geospatial Resource Inventory Database (GRID) for use by Area emergency responders.

7. Integrate GRID into web based Cook Inlet Response Tool.

## **Program Strategies:**

- ♦ Attend oil spill drills and evaluate effectiveness.
- ♦ Advocate for increased fire-fighting capabilities, including training, for on-water response to vessels, facilities and platforms.
  
- ♦ Share emerging technology with stakeholders.
- ♦ Streamline permitting procedures to decrease response time.
- ♦ Develop and maintain oil spill response forms and applications to follow contemporary user systems.
  
- ♦ Develop pre-permitting options.
- ♦ Advocate for strengthened oil spill prevention measures.

## **Program Outcome:**

Oil spill prevention is accepted as the first line of defense by Cook Inlet industries and its stakeholders and is supported by a solid foundation of response plans, training, and stakeholder involvement.

## **OPA 90 Language That Guides This Program**

5002 (f ) (1) TECHNICAL OIL SPILL COMMITTEE...assess measures designed to prevent oil spills and the planning and preparedness for responding to, containing, cleaning up, and mitigating impacts of spills.

5002 (f ) (2) Duties - In fulfilling its responsibilities...

(C) study wind and water and other environmental factors in the vicinity of the terminal

facilities which may affect the ability to prevent, respond to, contain and cleanup an oil spill;

## **Risk Assessment Program Purpose:**

Prioritize and focus Council efforts to identify and quantify Cook Inlet risk factors, and maximize the effectiveness of projects designed to address health, safety, and environmental impact throughout Cook Inlet.

## **Program Goals:**

1. Identify and assess vessel traffic, facility operations, and pipeline safety in the Cook Inlet RCAC area of concern.
  2. Evaluate response equipment, personnel, training, and other mechanisms to cope with potential or actual oil discharges into Cook Inlet.
  3. Seek out and assist state and federal efforts to conduct and administer risk assessments unique to current and future Cook Inlet conditions.
4. Expand Ice Monitoring capabilities and user groups.

## **Program Strategies:**

- ♦ Determine necessary changes in navigational procedures to decrease the risk of oil discharges in the Cook Inlet RCAC area of concern.
- ♦ Verify the continued structural integrity of pipelines in the Cook Inlet RCAC area of concern through maintenance program monitoring.
- ♦ Promote and support the continued use of a standby assist tug or tugs.
- ♦ Continue to promote safe marine transportation in the Cook Inlet RCAC area of concern.
- ♦ Work to implement Cook Inlet risk assessment recommendations. Advocate for facility and infrastructure risk assessment.
- ♦ Support Harbor Safety Committee activities through our membership, participation in Harbor Safety Committee projects, and development of Cook Inlet RCAC projects in support of the Harbor Safety Committee mission.
- ♦ Conduct Tri-annual Vessel traffic studies in order to track Vessel traffic trends.
- ♦ Provide limited access to ice monitoring cameras for user groups within project scope.

## **Program Outcome:**

Continue to evaluate risks associated with Cook Inlet infrastructure and maritime operations; seek out and develop avenues to minimize those risks.



## OPA 90 Language That Guides This Program

5002 (f) (2) Duties - In fulfilling its responsibilities...

(G) periodically review the standards for tanker bound for, loading at, exiting from,

or otherwise using the terminals;

5002 (f) (2) Duties - In fulfilling its responsibilities...

(C) study wind and water currents and other environmental factors in the vicinity of the terminal facilities which may affect the ability to prevent, respond to, contain, and clean up an oil spill;

### Contingency Planning

**Program Purpose:** Review, evaluate, and comment on new and existing oil discharge, prevention and contingency plans and regulations for Cook Inlet exploration, production, crude oil facilities and tankers.

#### *Program Goals:*

1. Review, evaluate, and comment on the adequacy of the Regional, Area, and Industry contingency plans.
2. Review, evaluate, and comment on legislative and regulatory developments and amendments.
3. Include non-tank vessel and refined product facility operations and transportation as a routine part of contingency plan review, when alternate funding allows.

#### *Program Strategies:*

- Monitor, review and provide comments for all proposed changes to existing or new regulations affecting the Cook Inlet RCAC area of concern.
- Review all portions of contingency plans and provide comments that ensure regulatory compliance and improve industry readiness.
- Provide comments to ensure implementation of best available technologies. **Program**

**Outcome:** All Contingency plans and current regulatory intent and

requirements support CIRCAC's program purposes. OPA 90 Language That Guides This Program

5002 (f)(2)

(A) periodically review the respective oil spill prevention and contingency plans for the terminal facilities and for the crude oil tankers while in Prince William Sound or Cook Inlet, in light of new technological developments and changed circumstance;

(E) monitor periodic drills and testing of oil spill contingency plans for the terminal facilities and crude oil tankers while in Cook Inlet;”

## **Public Involvement Program Purpose:**

Raise awareness and increase participation by the public and stakeholders in Cook Inlet RCAC activities.

### **Program Goals:**

1. Keep the public and stakeholders informed of the Council’s activities. 2. Involve citizens in Cook Inlet RCAC activities.

### **Program Strategies:**

- • Provide regular correspondence and engagement through social media, traditional advertising, newsletters, and other promotional materials.
- • Perform presentations at regional meetings.
- • Attend conferences and tradeshows to promote the RCAC model.
- • Provide periodic “State of the Inlet” reports.
- • Communicate with remote communities in the Cook Inlet area through community visits and electronic correspondence.
- • Provide volunteer opportunities.
- • Provide opportunities to serve on council committees.
- • Provide continuing education to committee and council members through facility tours, guest speakers, and archived information posted on the Cook Inlet RCAC website.
- • Involve teachers/students in Cook Inlet RCAC projects and activities through lesson development and field experience opportunities.
- • Develop tools and provide training on access and use of web accessible data and results.

### **Program Outcome:**

Recognition and participation in Cook Inlet RCAC activities by stakeholders and program activities that are relevant nationally and internationally.

### **OPA 90 Language That Guides This Program**

5002 (e) (2) Duties - In fulfilling its responsibilities...

(E) provide written reports to the Council which interpret and assess the results of all monitoring programs.

5002 (f) (2) Duties - In fulfilling its responsibilities...

(I) provide written reports to the Council outlining its findings and recommendations.

# COUNCIL PRIORITIES

## **2021-2026 Council Priorities**

1. *Continue seeking additional funding from other sources for non-OPA 90 issues.*
2. *Develop a sustained program to collect and integrate biological and chemical environmental data in the Cook Inlet region, and ensure their use for appropriate governmental and private purposes.*
3. *Host OPA 90 and CIRCAC 30th Anniversary celebrations and activities focused on our accomplishments and lessons-learned (revised and/or moved to Public Outreach Program).*
4. *Partner with NOAA, AOOS, NPS, UAF, and others to provide an "open-access" oil spill trajectory model for Cook Inlet oil spill planning and response, ensuring complex oceanographic processes are captured in order to effectively model oil spill trajectories.*
5. *Provide leadership in the oversight and review of any actions potentially impacting State and Federal oil spill regulations and laws.*
6. *Develop an understanding of current and planned activities associated with OCS areas in lower Cook Inlet.*
7. *Compile a comprehensive library of Cook Inlet oil industry infrastructure and activities.*