



# Council Briefs

## Cook Inlet Regional Citizens Advisory Council

Newsletter • Fall 2012



*Carla Stanley, Walt Sonen, and Curtis Pennington at Drift River oil terminal*

**P2/In the Field, by Susan Saupe**  
Dragging the ocean bottom to enhance our knowledge of Cook Inlet's rich ecosystem

**P3/Meet Merritt Mitchell**  
Merritt Mitchell has devoted years to making Alaska's waters clean and sharing his expertise with us

**P4/Drift River Update**  
Council members and staff get their feet dirty touring Drift River's massive berms

**P5/Welcome to Kenai, Admiral**  
Rear Admiral Thomas Ostebo pays us a visit, and spends the rest of the day getting acquainted with Kenai

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"Smooth sailing, Captain"

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Dr. Richard Prentki devoted more than 20 years of service to the EMC

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**P8/Visiting the jack-up rig at Homer's Deep Water Harbor**  
Council members, staff, local officials and media tour the rig to learn more about it

**P8/Transitions**



*Black Oystercatcher*

## In the Field

By Susan Saupe, Director of Science and Research

In April, we conducted trawl surveys in Cook Inlet as part of Cook Inlet RCAC's Kenai Peninsula Borough-funded project "Oil-related contamination and prey availability in winter habitat of Cook Inlet beluga whales (*Delphinapterus leucas*).” Our plan was to sample in late fall and early spring, to replicate “winter conditions” as much as possible, since trawl operations in the study area are not possible in winter ice.

Working with fisheries scientists from Alaska's Department of Fish and Game on board their research vessel *Pandalus*, we set out in April to conduct benthic (sea bottom) trawls at stations throughout central and upper Cook Inlet. We conducted successful trawl deployments throughout the study area south of the Forelands, although the catches were small. North of the Forelands, the lack of detailed depth measurements resulted

in the trawl hanging up on uncharted bottom debris and shredded a net. We were able to successfully trawl in one location near Beluga Shoal and the mouth of the Susitna River where belugas are known to feed.

The project's overall goals are to (1) collect data on biomass (the mass of living organisms within a particular environment) and abundance of potential beluga prey species in Cook Inlet; and (2) analyze fish tissue samples for contaminants. We originally planned to sample in late November 2011, as well as the April sampling. However, the team's plans were derailed when the early winter storms blew through last November. Fall sampling is planned for October 2012.

### Near Shore Surveys

Cook Inlet RCAC continued to part-

ner with the National Park Service for their near shore surveys of the Katmai National Park coast. This study area is part of a larger western Gulf of Alaska program sponsored by the National Park Service, the Exxon Valdez Oil Spill Trustees Council, and the U.S. Geological Survey's Biological Research Division.

The surveys took place during a low tide series in late June/early July. Elements of the study include long-term background and trends of intertidal rocky habitat and mussel beds (including contaminants), black oystercatcher nest surveys to determine successful chick rearing and their diet (based on shell debris near the nests), eelgrass bed monitoring, bird and marine mammal counts, and otter carcass beach walk surveys. We have worked with the Park Service for 3 past surveys and hope to continue working with them, especially on the intertidal contaminants component. The weather was great for the surveys – lots of sun and bears. ❁

### Industry Readiness

In keeping with our Mission to insure industry compliance and emergency response readiness, Cook Inlet RCAC staff regularly participates in drill exercises. Most recent ones include:

➤ **Hilcorp:** In August, staff attended Hilcorp's equipment deployment drill exercise. This encompassed several task forces (on and offshore) responding to a spill scenario at the Christy Lee Platform, associated with the Cook Inlet Pipeline (CIPL) Drift River facility. Objectives included safely mobilizing and deploying spill response personnel and equipment in accordance with CIPL's response strategy, and equipment mobilization in

*Drills continued on page 3*

Cook Inlet RCAC volunteer Merritt Mitchell loves the water. He built his first boat in 1938, as a high school student in his home state of Minnesota. Now 90 years young, he and his wife, Liz, are still building boats, waiting to put the finishing touches on their latest project, which they displayed at the Wooden Boat Festival in September.

Merritt's love of the water led him to a lifelong career of protecting it. But what initially drew Merritt to Alaska in 1947 was his desire to learn how to fly. As often happens, he got productively sidetracked. His first detour led him to degrees in civil engineering and environmental health. Once in Alaska, Merritt landed a job in the Territorial Department of Health, specializing in water pollution issues.

Merritt's expertise led him to Oregon at the bequest of the Department of the Interior's Water Pollution Control Administration. When Congress authorized water treatment and sanitation projects in

## Merritt Mitchell

*Alaska's Clean Water Advocate*



rural Alaska, they asked Merritt to set up the program in Fairbanks. It was a career highlight, which included working in the UAF water laboratory, one of seven in the nation, largely funded through the efforts of Sen. Ted Stevens.

In Alaska's earliest days as a Territory and state, it's probably safe to say there were few who shared Merritt's knowledge of water quality protec-

tion gleaned through his field research and studies. Oftentimes, this knowledge would place him in tenuous positions, such as getting a cantankerous logger to stop dragging his logs to the mill through a spawning stream. Merritt was tenacious in protecting Alaska's water quality. He has even disputed a governor over pollution from pulp mills, prompting his resignation to take up sport fishing in Bristol Bay - where Liz grew up - for the second time. He first fished Bristol Bay in 1953. With 100 fathoms of net and a 4-cylinder motor, Merritt had one of only two private fishing vessels there at the time.

Merritt's involvement with Cook Inlet RCAC began in the mid-90s, when Jim Hornaday dragged him along to meetings and he got hooked. Since then, he has shared his considerable expertise and knowledge with us as a board member (1999-2000), public member, and an active participant on the Environmental Monitoring committee.

### *Industry continued from page 2*

accordance with Cook Inlet Spill Prevention and Response Inc.'s (CISPRI) technical manual, as well as executing successful overflights.

- **Furie Operating Alaska:** Staff participated in the Joint Information Center (JIC) in March and August drills, both with the same scenario: a surface blowout of crude oil and natural gas on the Spartan 151 jack-up rig. A primary goal was effective documentation of events using the Incident Command System processes.
- **XTO Energy:** Our Director

of Operations acted as Federal On-Scene Coordinator for the U.S. Coast Guard, with our Directors of Administration and Public Outreach playing active roles in the JIC for day one of this drill. The scenario focused on a pipeline break from the A platform, releasing 4,000 gallons of oil. Staff also saw a demonstration of CISPRI's oleophillic (fuzzy scrubber) skimmer (photo).

- **NordAq Energy:** This drill scenario centered on a 5000 gallon tank truck rollover. The objectives

were to exercise and demonstrate NordAq Energy's abilities to function within the Incident Command System and completely document their spill response. ☞



*Oleophillic skimmer demonstration at CISPRI*

## Promoting Safer Operations at Drift River



*John Williams and Hilcorp's John Barnes*

For the people working there, the Drift River Oil Terminal facility is a good assignment. The schedule is one week on/one week off. The quarters are comfortable and the food is good and plentiful. Twenty-six miles from Mt. Redoubt, but only minutes by plane from Kenai, the Drift River terminal is still remote enough that both black and brown bears, wolves, moose, and the occasional wolverine are sighted near the premises on a regular basis. Charger and Tank, the resident bear dogs, keep a protective eye out, but welcome visitors of the two-legged variety.

Hilcorp Alaska LLC is proposing the restart of Drift River operations in October, pending approval from the State. Cook Inlet RCAC has gone on record in support of phasing out Drift River terminal operations and replacing it and its associated tankers with a subsea crude oil pipeline within five years. (To read the Council's position paper on Drift River, visit our website at: [www.circac.org](http://www.circac.org).) In the interim, the Council has actively promoted the strengthening of oil spill prevention measures at the terminal for current operations. As part of an ongoing

dialogue, Hilcorp invited Cook Inlet RCAC council members and staff to tour the facility on August 30, for a firsthand look at progress being made in that regard.

Participating in the site visit were council members **Carla Stanley**, **Scott Smiley**, **Michael Opheim**, **Walt Sonen**, **John Williams**, **Paul Shadura**, **Gary Fandrei** and RCAC's Executive Director **Mike Munger**, Science and Research Director **Susan Saupe**, Director of Operations **Steve "Vinnie" Catalano**, and Director of Public Outreach **Lynda Giguere**. Leading the tour for Hilcorp were Alaska Operations and Senior Vice President **John Barnes**, Facilities Manager **Bo York**, Environmental Manager **Bill Britt**, External Affairs Manager **Lori Nelson** and Cook Inlet Pipe Line Superintendent **Curtis Pennington**.

The day's agenda included a flyover, followed by an in-depth briefing, opportunities for questions and answers, and an on-the-ground walk/drive of the site. Bo York gave an update of progress being made to meet Hilcorp's goal of resuming normal operations by October, including a detailed explanation of work under way to fortify the protective berms. Afterwards, the groups headed out in the rain and piled into trucks for a drive along the newly fortified berm system. Since Mt. Redoubt's eruption in 2009, Drift River has shifted course, requiring a new configuration of the berms surrounding the tanks, as well as reinforcement of existing ones. York called their plan for the berms a "circle the wagon" approach as they now nearly completely surround the tanks. He pointed out the location where mud and debris from the volcanic

*Drift River continued on page 8*

## 2012 Council

**JOHN WILLIAMS**  
PRESIDENT  
City of Kenai

**GRACE MERKES**  
VICE PRESIDENT  
Kenai Peninsula Borough

**GARY FANDREI**  
SECRETARY/TREASURER  
Aquaculture Associations

**BOB FLINT**  
Recreational Interests

**ROB LINDSEY**  
City of Kodiak

**MOLLY MCCAMMON**  
Municipality of  
Anchorage

**DERIC MARCORELLE**  
Environmental Interests

**MICHAEL OPHEIM**  
Alaska Native  
Organizations

**ROBERT PETERKIN II**  
State Chamber of  
Commerce

**PAUL SHADURA**  
Commercial Fishing  
Interests

**SCOTT SMILEY**  
Kodiak Island Borough

**WALT SONEN**  
City of Seldovia

**CARLA STANLEY**  
City of Homer

## Welcome to Kenai, Admiral




*Rear Admiral Thomas Ostebo visits RCAC's Kenai Office*

In May, Cook Inlet RCAC welcomed **Rear Admiral Thomas Ostebo** to our Kenai Office. Admiral Ostebo commands the Seventeenth Coast Guard District, which is responsible for all Coast Guard operations in Alaska, and includes portions of the North Pacific Ocean, Arctic Ocean, and Bering Sea.

Cook Inlet RCAC Executive Director Mike Munger and Director of Science and Research Susan Saupe briefed the Admiral and his staff on a number of high priority issues, including a full overview of the organization and its operations, progress we've been making, with their help, on the Cook Inlet Navigation Risk Assessment; ShoreZone, spill prevention and response, our contaminant studies, and non-indigenous species, among many other topics.

Cook Inlet RCAC's executive director accompanied the Admiral throughout his visit. Together they viewed local facilities, and toured Cook Inlet Spill Prevention and Response Inc., where the Admiral was shown a test tank demonstration and overview of the

new smart boards to aid the unified command. We also arranged for the Admiral, his staff and our executive director to have lunch with Mayor Pat Porter of Kenai, Mayor Mike Navarre of the Kenai Peninsula Borough, and Mayor Peter Micciche of Soldotna.

Lastly, learning that the Admiral planned a flyover of tsunami debris-laden beaches the following week with Sen. Lisa Murkowski, Susan worked with ShoreZone contractors to provide maps of high probability debris beach locations and imagery. The feedback from Admiral Ostebo's office was that the information was invaluable for planning their flyover. 

## USCG Change of Command

The Port of Anchorage welcomed a new Captain of the Port and Commander Sector Anchorage when **Capt. Paul Mehler III** relieved **Capt. Jason Fosdick** at a Change of Command ceremony at National Guard Armory at

Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson on June 22. Capt. Jason Fosdick held the post since 2009. Rear Admiral Thomas Ostebo presided over the event, which honored Capt. Fosdick for his leadership and time served in the region.

Since 2009, Mehler has served as the senior advisor on all Coast Guard related activities to the U.S. Senate oversight committee. Capt. Mehler is a graduate of Massachusetts Maritime Academy and holds a Master's of Science degree in Quality Systems Management. Mehler is also a Coast Guard Licensed Unlimited Third Mate.

Before joining the U.S. Coast Guard, Mehler worked as an analyst for the American Bureau of Shipping. He was commissioned in 1990, and has served throughout the United States, including assignments in Texas, Maine, Virginia, Kentucky, and Washington, D.C. Highlights of his career include four Meritorious Service Medals, three Coast Guard Commendation Medals, the 9-11 Medal, Joint Service Achievement Medal, three Coast Guard Achievement Medals, and four Commandant's Letters of Commendation. Capt. Mehler has served as Commanding Officer of the U.S. Coast Guard Marine Safety Unit Chicago, where he was the senior Coast Guard officer responsible for overseeing all

*USCG continued on page 6*




*Left to right: Capt. Mehler, Adm. Ostebo, Capt. Fosdick*



*USCG continued from page 5*

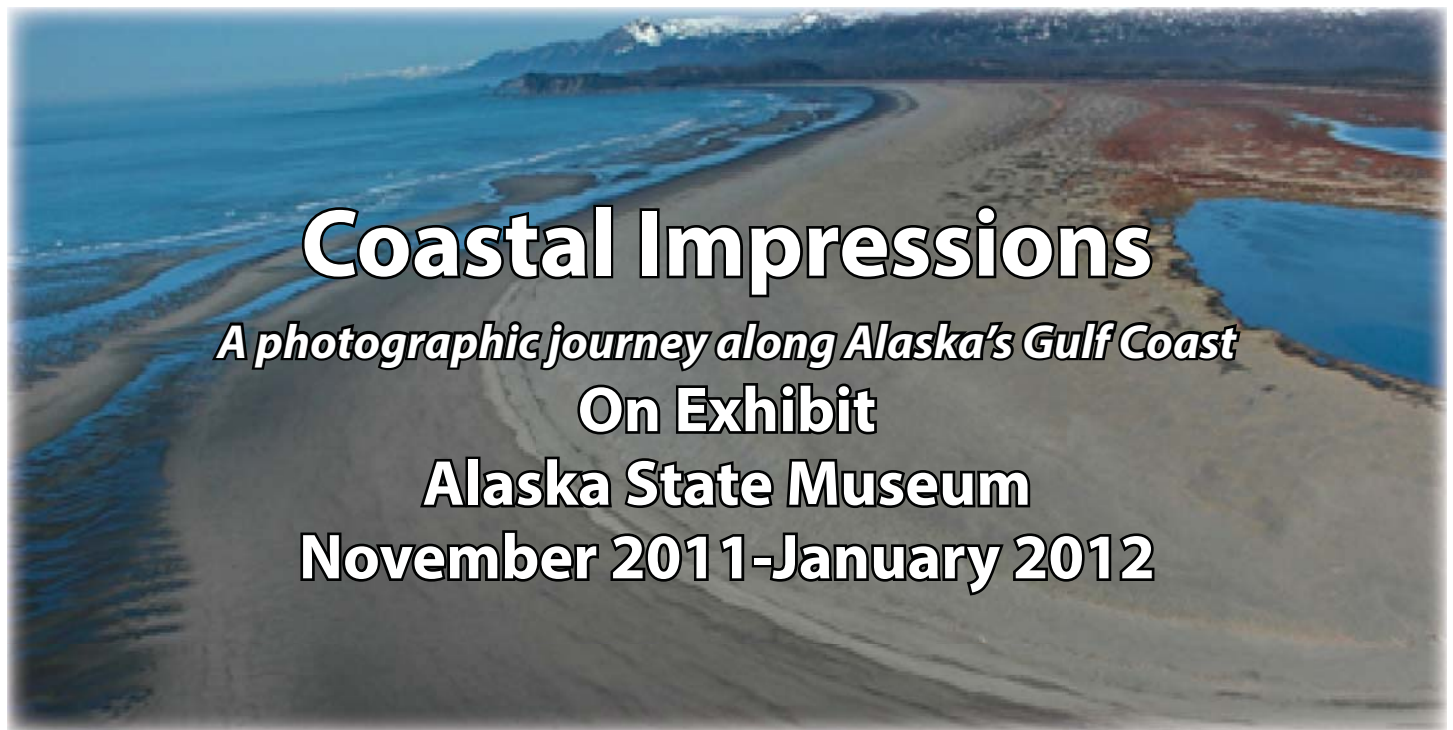
Coast Guard activities in Illinois and Indiana.

As Captain of the Port, Capt. Mehler is responsible for the largest amount of coast line in the United States, serves as Federal on Scene Coordinator, Federal Maritime Security Coordinator, Officer in Charge of Marine Inspection, and SAR Mission Coordinator. Mehler also joins the Cook Inlet Risk Assessment management team. 

*Capt. Jason Fosdick with Cook Inlet RCAC Executive Director Mike Munger*

## **Cook Inlet RCAC Honors Capt. Jason Fosdick**

During his tour of duty, Capt. Jason Fosdick became a good friend to Cook Inlet RCAC staff and Council. With Council Resolution 2012-05, we honored him for his exceptional direction, insight and leadership to our Board of Directors and Committees and thank him for his commitment to Cook Inlet, its mariners and the environment. Capt. Fosdick's expertise and leadership have helped us advance a Cook Inlet Risk Assessment, the Cook Inlet Ice Observation Network, and Winter Ice Rules for Navigation. Here's wishing him fair winds and following seas.



## Cook Inlet RCAC Honors Dr. Richard Prentki

On June 15, the Council honored retiring Ex-officio member Dr. Richard Prentki for 20-years of service as a federal representative and active participant on the Environmental Monitoring Committee (EMC). The EMC monitors for early detection of environmental effects in Cook Inlet from oil industry operations, provides the Board of Directors expert advice and recommendations, and promotes increased communication between participating state and federal agencies, interest groups and citizens. Dr. Prentki served on the Council, while employed as a primary scientist for physical oceanography studies with the Minerals Management Service, now known as the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management. We look forward to any opportunity to work with Dick in the future and wish him good luck and good health in retirement. ↪



*Dr. Richard Prentki*

## Cook Inlet RCAC Welcomes New Members

The Kodiak Island Borough on June 22, appointed **Scott Smiley** to represent its interests on the Council. Dr. Smiley fills the seat vacated by Elizabeth Chilton who resigned due to a new assignment in Seattle. Dr. Smiley recently retired from the University of Alaska Fairbanks School of Fisheries and Ocean Sciences Kodiak facility, where he was a professor and facility director for 23 years. He has a master's degree and PhD, both focused on sea cucumber biology, from the University of Washington, Department of Zoology. More recently, Dr. Smiley collaborated on a variety of USDA-funded research projects covering seafood processing byproducts, seafood safety, alternative salmon products as well as seafood harvesting, processing and marketing.



*Dr. Scott Smiley*

The City of Seldovia has appointed **Walt Sonen** to represent their interests on the board. Sonen is a 36 year resident of the Seldovia area and Alaska, and makes his living as a commercial fisherman. He serves on the board of the Seldovia Oil Spill Response Team, and has been involved with the organization almost since its inception after the Exxon Valdez spill. He is committed to a clean and healthy Cook Inlet environment, a legacy that he believes should be maintained by and for us all.



*Walt Sonen*

Coming on board as an Ex-Officio member is **Kathleen King**, appointed by the Department of Natural Resources. Ms. King works for the department as a natu-

*New Members continued on page 8*

## Coming up

### OCTOBER 2012

#### COOK INLET NAVIGATION RISK ASSESSMENT

October 30 and 31

Consequence Analysis Workshop

University of Alaska Anchorage

Contact (907-234-7821)

[www.cookinletriskassessment.com](http://www.cookinletriskassessment.com)

### NOVEMBER 2012

#### CLEAN GULF CONFERENCE & EXPO

November 13-15

New Orleans, LA

#### PACIFIC MARINE EXPO

November 27-29

Seattle, WA

### DECEMBER 2012

#### COUNCIL STRATEGIC PLANNING

December 6

Anchorage

#### QUARTERLY COUNCIL MEETING

December 7

Open to the Public

(and via Teleconference)

Anchorage

**New Members continued from page 7**

ral resource specialist. She has 20 years with the State, having also worked for the Department of Law and the Court System. Throughout her career, King has worked as a researcher, analyst and writer. She has earned a master's degree in public administration and a bachelor's degree in journalism, and currently serves as vice chair of the Alaska Public Offices Commission.

Life-long commercial fisherman **Paul Shadura**, who lives in Kenai, joined the Council to represent commercial fishing interests. In past years, Paul represented aquaculture interests on the council.



*Paul Shadura*

**Transitions**

Cook Inlet RCAC has promoted two of its key staff and hired another to keep operations running smoothly and efficiently. Former Director of Public Outreach **Jerry Rombach** has been promoted to Director of Administration, Lynda Giguere has been hired to assume his duties as Director of Public Outreach, and former Administrative Assistant Dinelle Penrod has become the Council's new Office Manager.

As Director of Administration, Jerry provides executive level organizational support, program development and hands-on program implementation to the Council. He oversees office operations, accounting and budgeting, and personnel. Among other things, he is responsible for coordinating the election and appointment process for directors, ensuring that the Council remains in compliance with Federal and State laws, initiates the annual recertification process with the U.S.

Coast Guard, and serves as a representative of the Executive Director when necessary.

**Lynda Giguere** joined Cook Inlet RCAC's team in July. She takes over responsibility for public and media engagement, council publications, heightening the council's visibility through community visits and public events, and assisting with our volunteer program, among her many other duties.



*Lynda Giguere*

She is looking forward to learning more about each council member at the next meeting in December.



*Dinelle Penrod*

Giguere is based in Anchorage.

**Dinelle Penrod** has been with Cook Inlet RCAC since 2010. Through her initiative, Dinelle had already assumed many of the duties of an Office Manager. With her promotion to that position, however, she now has the

recognition she deserves. Dinelle is the go-to person for a majority of office operations, and coordination of council and committee meetings, including publicizing public notices for upcoming meetings and arranging for their technical needs.

Together, they are working to heighten overall awareness of the Council and committee activities for our stakeholders.

**Drift River continued from page 4**

eruption in 2009 raised the floodplain from zero to 14 feet deep. To protect against what York called "a worst case scenario," Hilcorp is reinforcing the existing containment berms, and building an additional 3700 linear feet of new berm around Tanks 1-4. They are being strengthened by steel sheet pile. When finished, the berms will be 30 feet high.

Hilcorp Alaska acquired the Drift River oil terminal facility from Chevron in 2011. The extensive August tour was the most recent in a series of briefings and updates that Hilcorp has provided the Council regarding their operation's plans for the facility.

**Jack-up Rig Arrives in Homer**

Buccaneer Alaska's jack-up rig *Endeavour - Spirit of Independence* arrived in Homer on August 25 and has been at the city's Deep Water Dock ever since to complete needed modifications for Cook Inlet operations, and for ABS and USCG certifications. Council members Carla Stanley and Paul Shadura; PROPS committee public members Ted Moore and Jan Hansen, and council staff Vinnie Catalano,

Susan Saupe and Lynda Giguere went to Homer on September 18 to tour the rig, along with members of the media, Rep. Paul Seaton, and Mayor Hornaday. The Council continues to work with regulatory agencies and the company to share information and to ensure regulatory compliance.



*Photo by Carla Stanley*





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