

Exxon Valdez Oil Spill
Restoration Project Annual Report

Traditional Ecological Knowledge

Restoration Project 98052B
Annual Report

This annual report has been prepared for peer review as part of the *Exxon Valdez* Oil Spill Trustee Council restoration program for the purpose of assessing project progress. Peer review comments have not been addressed in this annual report.

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Study History: This 052 series of projects was initiated as Community Interaction and Use of Traditional Knowledge in FY1995. In FY1996, specific tasks were added to bring traditional ecological knowledge (TEK) into the EVOS process. The project was designed to facilitate the inclusion of traditional and local knowledge of spill area residents in the overall restoration program and to increase the interactions between researchers and area residents concerning ongoing research and dissemination of results from such research. The project title was changed to Community Involvement/Traditional Ecological Knowledge (96052-2). The following year, TEK was made into a separate project (97052B). This report covers the second year of the Traditional Ecological Knowledge project (98052B).

Abstract: The goal of this project is to facilitate the inclusion of traditional ecological knowledge in research projects funded by the *Exxon Valdez* Oil Spill Trustee Council and in the overall EVOS Restoration Program. The project involves assisting researchers in the collection and interpretation of traditional ecological knowledge, assisting communities in participating in such efforts, and developing products to support both activities. The goal is to make appropriate use of traditional ecological knowledge within the context of the EVOS Restoration Program and consistent with community interests.

Key Words: Chugach Regional Resources Commission (CRRC), community facilitators, community involvement, Kenai Peninsula, Prince William Sound, TEK, TEK specialists, traditional ecological knowledge.

Project Data: (will be addressed in the final report)

Citation:

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INTRODUCTION

The *Exxon Valdez* oil spill caused severe disruption to the lives of many people living in the spill impact area. The spill also caused residents of the area to be concerned about the safety of their wild food sources and the integrity of the surrounding natural environment. While scientific studies aimed at restoring the resources and services damaged by the oil spill occurred throughout the spill area, most of the researchers worked for agencies or institutions based outside the spill area itself. Residents of the spill area felt that they were not adequately involved in the restoration process, either through regular communication with the researchers and the Trustee Council, or through participation in restoration activities, including the use of traditional ecological knowledge (TEK) of the region. At the same time, restoration researchers recognized that spill area residents have extensive traditional knowledge that could help them answer questions and interpret their findings in ways not possible through conventional scientific means or with existing documented data. This project was intended to enhance efforts made under Restoration Project 96052 (Community Involvement/Traditional Ecological Knowledge) to turn the common interest in traditional knowledge into a substantive contribution to the Restoration Program.

Background

The initial call for involving traditional ecological knowledge was made by a community representative in 1994, as described in the previous annual report on Restoration Project 96052. While the Community Involvement/Traditional Ecological Knowledge project had been underway for two years, many people involved in the project felt that it was making little progress to the goal of increasing the role of traditional ecological knowledge in the Restoration Program. The 1996 Restoration Workshop included traditional ecological knowledge as its theme, and one outcome was the recognition of the need for a set of protocols to guide the appropriate use of traditional ecological knowledge for restoration researchers. In April 1996, a workshop was held in Anchorage with the community facilitators and representatives of Trustee Council agencies, facilitated by Henry Huntington. This workshop developed draft protocols, which were then revised by the agencies and approved by the Trustee Council in December 1996.

A second outcome of the 1996 Restoration Workshop and of the protocols workshop was the idea to separate the traditional ecological knowledge component of project -052 from the community involvement component, and to hire a traditional ecological knowledge (TEK) specialist to carry out the work of the project. This approach was approved for FY97, to be done by the Chugach Regional Resources Commission with the assistance of the Alaska Department of Fish and Game, Division of Subsistence, with the Alaska Department of Fish and Game as lead trustee agency. The project's first year, FY97, was described in last year's annual report.

OBJECTIVES

The objective of the project is to facilitate the appropriate use of traditional ecological knowledge to help achieve the goals of the EVOS Restoration Program.

METHODS

This project was coordinated by the Chugach Regional Resources Commission through a cooperative agreement with the Alaska Department of Fish and Game. CRRC contracted with a TEK Specialist, Dr. Henry P. Huntington, to provide assistance to communities and to researchers in using traditional ecological knowledge appropriately in the course of restoration research activities. The Traditional Ecological Knowledge Advisory Group provided additional guidance to the project, and included all the Community Facilitators as well as agency representatives, researchers, a regional Native organization representative, and an outside expert in traditional ecological knowledge.

RESULTS

Project Assistance

TEK Specialist Henry Huntington assisted Jody Seitz in her research on local and traditional knowledge of juvenile herring and feed fish in Prince William Sound and the lower Kenai Peninsula (97320T). Huntington traveled to Cordova (July 1998) and Seward (September 1998) to assist Seitz with data review and analysis.

Information Workshops

Three Information Workshops were held to help disseminate information from researchers to the communities, provide an opportunity for community members to discuss research methods and conclusions with researchers, and to explore the possibility of collaboration on future research projects. The first workshop was held in Tatitlek in October 1997. Dan Rosenberg, PI of Project 97427 on harlequin ducks and Project 98273 on scoters, described his research, discussed his findings on harlequins and his plans for scoters. As a result of the workshop, he was able to get Tatitlek residents to his field site in the spring of 1998 and to establish a continuing relationship with the community and the school.

The second workshop was held in Port Graham in January 1998, after earlier attempts to travel there failed due to poor weather. Rosenberg was again the PI, and this workshop was held in conjunction with a training workshop, described below. The third workshop was held in Chenega Bay in September 1998, again rescheduled from March 1998 due to weather. The Chenega Bay workshop included Rosenberg plus three PIs from the Nearshore Vertebrate Predators project complex (98025-NVP), Gail Blundell (river otters), Jim Bodkin (sea otters), and Tom Dean (clams). All three workshops were

received favorably in the communities, and there is strong interest in further workshops in FY99.

Community Assistance

Bryan Mac Lean was hired on contract to provide training assistance to the communities in a second attempt to address this component of the original project outline. The first such workshop led by Mac Lean was held in Port Graham in January 1998, as noted above. The timing was unfortunate because the village hatchery had burned down the week before. Nonetheless, community participation was strong and included Nancy Yeaton from Nanwalek who made the daily commute. The workshop was successful in addressing several of the underlying issues affecting the progress not only of the TEK project but of interactions with most EVOS-related activities.

As a result of the workshop, project staff decided to hold a Community Facilitators Retreat in June 1998 to address these and similar issues with all the Community Facilitators at one time. Mac Lean and a colleague, Mary Stachelrodt, facilitated the retreat, which was held at Rocky Point near Port Graham. This retreat succeeded in addressing many of the community concerns and goals for both the TEK project and the Community Involvement Project. As a result, most of the communities approved the TEK protocols that had been adopted by the EVOS Trustee Council in December 1996, and wrote letters supporting both projects to the Restoration Office, indicating their desire to continue with both efforts. This process led to some minor restructuring of the TEK project in the FY99 proposal.

Traditional Ecological Knowledge Handbook

This handbook is an ambitious undertaking, as with it we seek to assist both EVOS researchers and community residents in working with TEK. This means trying to simultaneously introduce the researchers to TEK, and the community residents to the scientific method. Some reviewers of earlier drafts of the Handbook recommended breaking it up into two separate documents, one for researchers, the other for community residents. However, project staff felt that this would serve to emphasize the divisions between these two groups, rather than bridge the gap. We thought it important that each group receive the same information. Additionally, in some cases EVOS project principal investigators are local residents, and not necessarily trained in the conventional western science mode.

Following extensive consultation and review among the TEK Advisory Group and others familiar with TEK research and related issues on the initial draft handbook, a second draft of the Handbook was submitted to the EVOS Chief Scientist in December 1997 for a second round of EVOS-directed peer review. The handbook was published in final form in October 1998.

TEK Database Reference Guide

This is intended to be used by researchers to identify sources of TEK on the EVOS area. The information in the Reference Guide was collected with a survey that was sent to nearly 100 potential respondents, including communities in the spill impact area, Alaska

Native associations, Native corporations and other Native organizations, state and federal agencies, libraries, archives, museums, and anthropologists. For the purpose of this survey, databases are defined as including everything from raw notes, photographs, audio tapes and video tapes, to formal databases organized on computer software. We did not collect any of the actual data. We instead gathered information on what data is out there, where it is, and what, if any, restrictions there are on access. There are, at present fifty entries in the Reference Guide, in thirty-six of which the respondent stated that they did have data on TEK.. The Reference Guide is available on computer diskette in AskSAM format, free of charge by contacting CRRC. We will continue to accept responses to the questionnaire, as they trickle in.

CONCLUSION

This project is making progress in involving spill area residents and their knowledge in the EVOS Restoration Program. While concerns remain about the ways in which traditional ecological knowledge is used, there is strong support for the overall aims of the project in both the communities and among the researchers who have been involved. The FY98 project provided us with further experience to use in designing a more effective program for FY99, building on the substantial successes of the Information Workshops in FY98. The support of the communities and the researchers, as well as the Trustee Council and their staff, has been crucial to the success of the project. We are pleased at the progress being made, and look forward to continuing this important project.

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