

EVOS Tribal and Community Involvement

Our Commitment

Since its inception, the *Exxon Valdez* Oil Spill Trustee Council has been committed to public participation and local community involvement in all aspects of the restoration program. The Trustee Council recognizes the tremendous loss of livelihood and cultural heritage caused by the 1989 oil spill and has devoted a major portion of the restoration funds to the restoration of natural and archaeological resources that are important culturally and economically. This effort has included significant public and community involvement and outreach. As the Gulf Ecosystem Monitoring program develops, the Trustee Council hopes to expand community involvement, use of local and traditional knowledge, public participation, education, and outreach. These will be major components of the Trustee Council's long-term effort to restore and better understand the northern Gulf ecosystem.

As an organization, the Trustee Council is committed to having community members actively involved in:

- Planning and developing the program
- Guiding the goals and topics of research projects
- Collecting data and participating in long-term monitoring efforts
- Providing Traditional Ecological Knowledge
- Interpreting results in a local context
- Educating other community members about ongoing research

Some of this involvement will come in the form of participation in various planning and review committees. Other involvement will be in the form of working with scientists to provide quality data and input into the GEM program. Portions of GEM monitoring will rely on citizen volunteers based on successful programs throughout North America. Requests for proposals will ask proposers to state how communities will be involved and informed about each project. Funds for community involvement and/or TEK components will be provided.

The remainder of this report documents the efforts and actions the Trustee Council has taken to date to involve tribes, communities, stakeholders and the general public.

A. Community Involvement Project

From 1995-2001, the Trustee Council has provided almost \$2 million to the Chugach Regional Resources Commission (CRRC) to hire a community facilitator in each of ten spill area communities as well as a region-wide community involvement coordinator. CRRC is a regional organization of several tribal governments in the Chugach region, including Prince William Sound and Lower Cook Inlet. Facilitators typically have been employees of the tribal government in each community. The communities included Chenega Bay, Tatitlek, Valdez, Cordova, Port Graham, Nanwalek, Seldovia, Ouzinkie, Seward, and Chignik Lake. The facilitators had five major purposes:

1. **Provide results of oil spill restoration projects to the communities.** Facilitators were paid to disseminate twice-monthly updates provided by the Community Involvement Coordinator about the restoration effort to members of their local communities. They would also attend the Trustee Council's Annual Restoration Workshops where they could talk directly to scientists and obtain answers to their questions in a manner they could understand and share when they returned to their communities.
2. **Facilitate communication between local communities and the Trustee Council.** The project was designed to provide for regular communication between communities, facilitators, and the Trustee Council. Each month, the facilitators were to meet with members of their community to request opinions, ideas for restoration projects, and concerns and then submit a monthly report to the Community Involvement Coordinator who would pass the information on to the Trustee Council. Facilitators also participated in retreats and workshops to evaluate the program and provide feedback to the Trustee Council.
3. **Promote community-based projects and involvement throughout the life of the restoration effort.** Facilitators worked with the Community Involvement Coordinator and EVOS staff to help spill area communities develop competitive proposals for projects of interest to local community members. Many of these projects are described in Section C below.
4. **Serve as primary contact for EVOS in the Community.** Requests for information, assistance, and input were all filtered through the facilitator who served as key contact person. Principal investigators were urged to use them as their village contact.
5. **Provide tribal input into development of GEM.** Facilitators have been regularly briefed on the status of GEM planning and consulted about their priorities. The project has helped fund development of natural resource management plans in several villages, with an eye towards seeing that these local plans and the GEM plan are complementary.

B. Integrating Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK)

In 1994, the Trustee Council received its first call from a community resident to incorporate Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) of spill area residents into the restoration program. Two years later, the 1996 annual restoration workshop had TEK as its theme and led to a set of protocols for incorporating TEK into restoration projects developed by a committee of Alaska Natives and others and approved later that year by the Trustee Council. The Trustee Council has provided funds each year since 1995 toward the goal of incorporating TEK into the restoration program. Efforts have included:

1. Developing a TEK handbook and reference guide for biologists documenting the sources of TEK in the spill area and incorporating it into a western science approach.
2. Providing funds for CRRC to contract with TEK expert Henry Huntington. He has worked directly with Alaska Native elders and hunters as well as scientists to bridge the gap between these two different approaches to understanding the natural world. A result of this process is that several EVOS projects incorporate TEK directly into their data sets and results, including projects on community natural resource management,

fish and seabird studies, and a series of films about Alutiiq culture (see examples below).

3. Conducting two workshops to develop tribal management programs and bringing several scientists to spill area communities to share information.

Examples of projects incorporating TEK as a result of Trustee Council efforts include:

1. Scientist Jody Seitz conducted an extensive project involving Traditional Ecological Knowledge. Researchers interviewed thirty-nine spill area community members to document the historical distribution of forage fish such as juvenile herring, sandlance, capelin, and eulachon. This information was mapped and provided to the Alaska Predator Ecosystem Experiment (APEX) and Sound Ecosystem Assessment (SEA) researchers. The results were extremely valuable because they could not have been obtained from other historical sources or from current data collection efforts.
2. Scientist Dan Rosenberg solicited local participation from communities and conveyed results of his research on surf scoters, an important subsistence resource. The project idea came from local communities. Rosenberg worked with them throughout all stages of the project, from project design to writing the final report.
3. The Trustee Council provided funding support to the Alaska Native Harbor Seal Commission, which uses Alaska Native hunters to conduct biosampling of harbor seal tissues using lab-approved techniques. In 1999, the commission reached an agreement with the National Marine Fisheries Service to co-manage harbor seal populations.
4. Three videos have been produced with Trustee Council funds to provide the public information about Traditional Ecological Knowledge and concerns about subsistence use after the oil spill. The first two, *Alutiiq Pride: A Story of Subsistence* and *Changing Tides in Tatitlek* describe subsistence methods, interview Alaska Native people who experienced the spill first hand, show actual subsistence hunts, and illustrate the importance of subsistence in Alutiiq culture. The third documents the communities of Chenega Bay and Ouzinkie in relation to the effects of the oil spill, residual oil in the spill region, and concerns about PSP, a natural toxin found in clams harvested for food. These videos were distributed at no charge to all schools in Alaska via their school districts, all spill area tribal councils, and any other library or school in the U.S. upon request.
5. The Trustee Council funded Elders/Youth Conferences in 1995 and 1998 that brought together Alaska Native elders, youth, other subsistence users, scientists, and managers to share ideas about subsistence issues and facilitate community involvement. The Trustee Council paid for four people from each of 20 spill area communities to attend each conference. Participants shared stories, voiced frustration, and asked scientists questions about subsistence issues. They also developed ideas for youth to get more involved through spirit camps, internships, and educational opportunities. These workshops facilitated collaboration between communities of the spill area, while concerns and ideas generated at the conference were reported to the Trustee Council.

C. Use of Criminal Settlement funds on subsistence projects

A total of \$6,219,611 from the criminal settlement with Exxon, Inc. was appropriated to the Alaska Department of Community and Economic Development (DCED) to implement a grant program with the purpose of restoring, replacing, or enhancing subsistence resources or other services damaged or lost as a result of the *Exxon Valdez* oil spill. The grants were limited to the nine non-incorporated communities of Tatitlek, Chenega Bay, Port Graham, Nanwalek, Karluk, Chignik Lake, Chignik Lagoon, Perryville, and Ivanof Bay. The three Alaska state representatives on the Trustee Council must be consulted before grants are awarded. As community involvement and subsistence projects were proposed to the Trustee Council, those that could not be funded through the civil settlement were passed to this grant program, which was not as legally constrained in its scope of fundable projects. The Trustee Council funded the planning process that preceded the grant awards and provided peer review for all proposals under this program. The planning process included sending a team to visit all 9 communities to brief them about the program and assist them identifying and prioritizing potential projects. To date, the state representatives of the Trustee Council have approved 24 projects. These projects include:

- Spirit camps in Prince William Sound and Kodiak Island
- Mariculture, hatchery, and processing facilities for the villages of Tatitlek, Chenega Bay, Chignik Lake, Chignik Lagoon, Perryville, and Ivanof Bay.
- Salmon enhancement projects on major subsistence runs near Nanwalek and Port Graham, and on the Kametolook River
- A weir project on the Chignik River
- A subsistence management education program in Tatitlek
- Cultural education centers and programs in Chignik Lagoon, Chignik Lake, Ivanoff Bay, and Perryville
- A preschool language program in Nanwalek
- Community smoke houses in Karluk
- A floating skiff dock in Port Graham
- Archaeological display equipment in Chignik Lake
- A “Subsistence, Stewardship, and Oil Spill Recovery Gathering” in Tatitlek

D. Youth Area Watch

In 1995, the Trustee Council launched the Youth Area Watch (YAW) program with the objective of involving youth from spill area communities in the science behind the restoration effort. Under the direction of the Chugach School District and Kodiak Island Borough School District, teachers are trained annually at the Alaska Sealife Center or Kodiak College. Students have participated in YAW from Cordova, Tatitlek, Valdez, Whittier, Chenega Bay, Seward, Nanwalek, Port Graham, Seldovia, Akhiok, Larsen Bay, Old Harbor, Port Lions, Kodiak City, Karluk, Chiniak and Port Lions. These students (grades 7-12) work with scientists on oil spill research both in the field and in the laboratory. Projects in which students have participated include:

- Harbor seal biosampling
- Seabird monitoring
- Identifying and photographing killer whales
- Analyzing chemicals found in intertidal mussels
- Collecting oceanographic data on cruises

- Sampling juvenile herring in Prince William Sound

In addition to assisting scientists, YAW students develop local restoration projects of their own that directly benefit their communities. Examples of these projects include:

- Black-legged kittiwake monitoring
- Constructing seal and orca skeletons for museum display
- Constructing a community greenhouse
- Teaching about composting
- Constructing a retrievable marine habitat in the community harbor

The program has also aligned itself with a major oceanographic study called the SALMON project through the University of Alaska, Fairbanks. YAW students compare oceanographic forecasts and predictions with their own observations in the field to help scientists refine their computer models. Teachers also provide local knowledge about climate change in the marine environment.

As of 2002, 168 students have participated in the Prince William Sound and Kodiak YAW programs with total funding from the Trustee Council of over \$885,000.

E. Other Restoration Projects

The Trustee Council has made a concerted effort to involve local communities affected by the oil spill in the restoration program. Projects funded include habitat enhancements of interest to sport and commercial fishermen, restoration of subsistence resources, food safety testing, and public outreach and participation. Here are some highlights that have resulted from the Trustee Council's effort to incorporate meaningful public participation and community involvement into the restoration program:

- Chenega residents worked with the National Marine Fisheries Service to clean up 12 local mussel beds.
- Local community members helped on a project to clean the Chenega area shoreline from residual *Exxon Valdez* oil on five cobble-boulder armored beaches.
- Alaska Native community members were paid to help NOAA conduct an extensive survey of lingering oil in Prince William Sound. Communities identified sites important to them that they wanted evaluated for residual oil and participated in the survey work itself.
- Waste management projects were funded in lower Cook Inlet, Kodiak Island, and Prince William Sound to address marine pollution in proximity to local communities and make improvements in local waste management infrastructure.
- The Trustee Council funded a project to restore coho salmon runs, producing 2,000 to 3,000 adults for harvest in a subsistence fishery near Tatitlek.
- With funding support from the Trustee Council, the Qutekcaak hatchery in Seward produced over 800,000 clams during each year of a pilot project to seed clam beds for subsistence use near Port Graham, Nanwalek, and Tatitlek.
- The Trustee Council contributed partial funding to rebuild the Port Graham salmon hatchery that was destroyed by fire in 1998. The hatchery provides pink, sockeye, and coho salmon for the benefit of subsistence and commercial fishermen.
- The Trustee Council funded a project initiated by locals in the Native Village of Perryville to rebuild a declining coho salmon run on the Kametolook River used for subsistence.

- The Trustee Council funded a project initiated by the Valdez Native Tribe in conjunction with NMFS to provide information on spot shrimp abundance for subsistence users in Prince William Sound.
- The Trustee Council funded restoration and recreation enhancements along several miles of the Kenai River. These included access stairs, floating docks, interpretive displays, and streambank restoration for the benefit of sportfishing and tourism.
- The Trustee Council funded an assessment and restoration plan for Mariner Park in Homer, which promoted recreationally compatible use of the area by residents and tourists.
- Construction of the Alutiiq Archaeological Repository in Kodiak was funded to protect archaeological resources and educate the public about Alutiiq culture. In addition, the Trustee Council provided funding to train volunteers to monitor and act as site stewards of archaeological sites on the Kenai Peninsula, Kachemak Bay, Uganik Bay, Uyak Bay, and the Chignik area of the Alaska Peninsula.
- The Trustee Council provided grant funds to Chugachmiut, Inc. to develop a regional archaeological repository in Seward, local display facilities in Chenega Bay, Tatitlek, Cordova, Valdez, Port Graham, Nanwalek, and Seldovia, and traveling exhibits.
- The Trustee Council funded the Port Graham Corporation to restore some salmon streams near the village of Port Graham.
- The Resource Abnormalities Study trained 61 volunteers in 19 spill area communities to take samples of abnormal animals harvested for subsistence. Samples were tested for hydrocarbons and human health effects at the National Marine Fisheries Service laboratory in Seattle. A Resource Abnormalities Hotline was established and the project communicated information on subsistence food safety to communities.

F. Annual Restoration Workshops

Every year in January, the Trustee Council holds its annual workshop free to the public, where EVOS scientists report their findings and future research directions are discussed. The Trustee Council pays to bring all its researchers as well as representatives from each community to the meetings. Each year's workshop has a different theme and in 1996, the theme was community involvement. Input received at these workshops is invaluable, and many research topics and priorities are developed as a result. For the 10th anniversary of the oil spill, the Trustee Council released a report to the nation and a documentary about the first ten years of oil spill effects and restoration.

G. Public Information and Outreach

The Trustee Council has produced numerous publications that inform the public about the status of injured resources, what the Trustee Council does with its funding, and other EVOS-related issues and activities. Except as noted, all documents are sent to a mailing list of over 3,000 and their availability is noticed in papers throughout the spill region. Publications can also be requested from the Anchorage Restoration Office, and many can be downloaded from the Web site. Public information and outreach efforts include:

- Annual Status Reports document major projects and land purchases as well as results of the restoration program explained in lay terms. These reports include an accounting of expenditures from the Trust Fund.

- The Restoration Notebook series contains detailed natural history and recovery information written by biologists about eight specific species injured by the spill and one about the damage, recovery, and status of subsistence resources. This series was distributed at no charge to all schools in Alaska via their school districts, all spill area tribal councils, and any other library or school in the U.S. upon request.
- Since 1993, the Trustee Council has regularly published Restoration Updates, which are several page newsletters about recent Trustee Council actions, upcoming meetings, ongoing activities, and where to find more information.
- Annual work plans, the Restoration Plan, Invitations for Proposals, and other program documents (e.g. GEM program document) are circulated for public review. The Trustee Council considers all public comments on these drafts.
- As needed, the Trustee Council also releases publications related to specific projects such as a set of publications about each region of the spill area and the specific projects that have benefited each region.
- For three years, the Trustee Council funded a production of “Alaska Coastal Currents” a two-minute program about restoration research that aired several times weekly on public radio, accompanied by columns in several regional newspapers. By working through the media, these reports created an avenue for outreach to an even broader community.
- The Trustee Council has a Web site easily accessible to anyone with Internet access and designed for a variety of users from scientists to government resource managers to high school students. The site covers facts about the oil spill, restoration projects, habitat acquisition, and the GEM program and has many major publications and documents that can be downloaded. Information on funding and upcoming events is regularly posted. The URL is <http://www.oilspill.state.ak.us>.
- The Public Advisory Group is composed of 17 representatives of various stakeholder groups including fishermen, subsistence users, and the public at large. This group provides direct input to the Trustee Council and has visited many spill area communities on annual field trips.
- All Trustee Council and Public Advisory Group meetings are advertised, free, and open to the public. Those unable to attend any meeting can listen and participate via teleconference. Public comment periods are scheduled at each Trustee Council meeting and Public Advisory Group meeting.
- Community meetings have been an important part of the restoration process since the day of the oil spill. These meetings have addressed a wide variety of topics including public participation, the Restoration Plan, TEK, waste management, the GEM program, archaeology, community involvement, and science updates. Over the years, the Trustee Council has sponsored public meetings in the villages of Cordova, Juneau, Chenega, Kodiak, Homer, Valdez, Seward, Seldovia, Tatitlek, Whittier, Anchorage, Fairbanks, Chignik Lagoon, Chignik Lake, Ouzinkie, Port Lions, Karluk, Larsen Bay, Akhiok, Old Harbor, Port Graham, Nanwalek, Kenai/Soldotna, and Perryville.