

NEPA comments to the EVOS trustees regarding long-term monitoring - March 20, 2009.

Thank you for the opportunity to make public comments at the recent NEPA meeting in Kodiak Alaska on Thursday evening March 18. I thought the meeting was well organized and provided an outlet for useful exchange between the public and the trustee council. The following are a few comments to augment my verbal remarks at that meeting.

I feel it is imperative that the trustee council devise a method for supporting long-term ecological monitoring in the larger Gulf of Alaska, not just Prince William Sound. Many long term biological studies and time series, some continuous for more than four decades, are in danger of being cut or limited due to mounting budget pressures in sponsoring agencies and entities. It is critical to continue these longtime series monitoring projects. Examples are small-mesh trawl surveys (in bays and inlets around Kodiak Island, Shelikof Strait, and Alaska Peninsula) and winter bird surveys in several Kodiak Island bays. Future plans need to ensure that the scope of ongoing monitoring projects is not diminished and links to collected data are maintained for researchers and interested citizens.

Additionally there should be some provision to allow for small observational volunteer monitoring in coastal communities by private citizens. Examples of these projects might include; counts of sea otters in a particular bay in a given season, numbers of sea lions on a given haul out, and timing and arrival of nesting sea birds at rookeries. Overseeing and coordinating these activities can be done at very modest cost. All collected observation data needs to be provided to the interested general public and researchers annually. This activity will have to be continually monitored by review as discussed below.

One of the stated proposals of the council is to fund long-term monitoring with approximately \$25 million, to be spent over a twenty-year period. I don't believe that setting an arbitrary time line of twenty years is appropriate nor will it accomplish the goal of long-term monitoring. Since long-term monitoring requires a long-term funding base, I feel an endowment needs to be established either by the council directly forming a foundation for this purpose or in directing funds to an already up and running nonprofit foundation. I feel the council needs to set strict fiduciary principles when devising such an approach. Since the goal is to maintain a funding base for the long-term it will be necessary to manage monies at the lowest cost and provide fiscal controls that continue funds in perpetuity. A further requirement should be that agencies or individuals applying for funds should be able to match funding at least 1:1 to demonstrate commitment to proposed monitoring projects and maintenance of data series. By requiring a funding match a mechanism for leveraging available funds is easy to maintain in ongoing monitoring projects. The council could solicit a request for proposal to manage this monitoring endowment and let the interested public nominate appropriate nonprofit foundations that can meet these criteria.

All projects should be reviewed to ensure that goals established by the council are met. I recommend a panel of volunteer peer reviewers be established for selecting proposals and also to provide quality control of ongoing monitoring and data collection.

There needs to be a requirement to have free and open access to the data collected in these sponsored monitoring programs. A strict time limit for making this data available to other researchers and the general public should be set. Perhaps one year would be deemed appropriate by the public. The monitoring review board will require data publishing before additional funds are released for a continuing project.