



**Then and Now – A Message of Hope**  
**15th Anniversary of the *Exxon Valdez* Oil Spill**

EXXON VALDEZ OIL SPILL TRUSTEE COUNCIL



Recovery Status

Change in Focus

The GEM Program

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The settlement among the State of Alaska, the United States government and Exxon was approved by the U.S. District Court on October 9, 1991. It resolved various criminal charges against Exxon as well as civil claims brought by federal and state governments for the recovery of natural resource damages resulting from the oil spill. The *Exxon Valdez* Oil Spill Trustee Council was formed to oversee restoration of the injured ecosystem through the use of the \$900 million civil settlement.

The mission of the Trustee Council and all participants in Council efforts is to efficiently restore the environment injured by the *Exxon Valdez* oil spill to a healthy, productive, world-renowned ecosystem, while taking into account the importance of quality of life and the need for viable opportunities to establish and sustain a reasonable standard of living.

# Foreword

by Gail Phillips, Executive Director

In 1989, on the eve of the Easter weekend, an unthinkable event occurred which forever would change how Alaskans felt about the shipment of oil in the pristine waters off her shores. An Exxon Corporation tanker, the *Exxon Valdez*, ran aground on Bligh Reef in Prince William Sound, dumping millions of gallons of crude oil into one of the richest ocean habitats anywhere in the world. It's been fifteen years since this tragic event and we want to bring you up to date on the status of our recovery from the Spill.



Two years after the Spill, the State and Federal governments entered into a settlement agreement with Exxon to recover damages for injury to Alaska's natural resources. Since that time, the *Exxon Valdez* Oil Spill Trustee Council has directed the expenditure of more than \$820.5 million in the cleanup, restoration, purchase of habitat, and research and monitoring activities dedicated to the restoration of the affected environment. This restoration plan has been unprecedented and is the largest effort of its kind ever undertaken.

As the years passed, it has become more difficult to distinguish the lingering effects of the *Exxon Valdez* spill from other potential sources of environmental stress or natural variations. Restoration projects for impacts that can be directly attributed to the Spill have been largely completed. Most of the results anticipated in the original settlement have been achieved. The Trustee Council and the State of Alaska will continue to monitor the remaining effects of the Spill.

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We are resolved to avoid a similar tragedy by remaining vigilant and by sustaining our world class spill prevention and response system. Thanks to improved state and federal laws and oversight, extensive industry investment and the dedicated efforts of concerned local citizens, Prince William Sound today has the best oil transportation system in the world. We employ detailed spill planning, state-of-the-art spill prevention technology and constant response drills and exercises. Today, we are vigilant and prepared.

The old adage of "behind every cloud there is a silver lining" holds true in the case of the Spill: sophisticated and comprehensive prevention and spill response plans, critical baseline data, stringent state and federal laws governing the transport of oil and hazardous substances, and the continuing focus on the protection of our critical marine environments are part of the "silver lining" we have achieved today.

If you are interested in more information, please go to our website and we will be more than happy to send you our CD and brochure on the message of hope we are offering today – 15 years after the Spill.





## Status of Recovery

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In 1994, the *Exxon Valdez* Oil Spill Trustee Council set its sights high when it established its mission to restore Prince William Sound and the Gulf of Alaska to the "healthy, productive, world-renowned ecosystem" that existed before the spill. In doing so, the Trustee Council recognized that, in most cases, if protected from harm, injured species will recover on their own. Instead of direct intervention, such as rearing and releasing seabirds, the Trustee Council focused mostly on gaining knowledge and ensuring good stewardship as the best tools for fostering the long-term health of the marine ecosystem.

Since the *Exxon Valdez* settlement in 1991, hundreds of research, monitoring and general restoration projects have been funded with an investment to date of roughly \$177 million. A scientific program of this magnitude has resulted in a leap in knowledge about the marine environment on which all Alaskans depend. A better understanding of the ecosystem, along with significant improvements in the tools fish and wildlife managers use to evaluate populations, means better decisions for the health of those populations and the people who depend on them.

### HOW RECOVERY HAS PROGRESSED

The most recent survey of lingering oil was conducted in the intertidal zone of Prince William Sound in summer 2001 by NOAA's Auke Bay Lab. The survey covered roughly 8,000 meters of shoreline. Ninety-six sites were randomly selected from the total number of oiled beaches assessed during previous Trustee Council surveys.

The survey results indicate a total area of approximately 20 acres of shoreline in Prince William Sound are still contaminated with oil. Oil was found at 58 percent of the 91 sites assessed and is estimated to have the linear equivalent of 5.8 km of contaminated shoreline.

Buried or subsurface oil is of greater concern than surface oil. Subsurface oil can remain dormant for many years before being dispersed and is more liquid, still toxic, and may become biologically available. A disturbance event such as burrowing animals or a severe storm reworks the beach and can reintroduce unweathered oil into the water. Results of the 2001 survey showed that the oil remaining on the surface of beaches in Prince William Sound is weathered and mostly hardened into an asphalt-like layer. The toxic components of this type of surface oil are not as readily available to biota, although some softer forms do cause sheens in tide pools.

The survey raised the possibility of continuing low level chronic effects of the *Exxon Valdez* oil spill. If there are continuing effects, it would most likely be restricted to populations residing or feeding in the isolated oil pockets. Other Trustee Council funded research indicates that these remaining pockets of oil are bioavailable and may be impeding the recovery of sea otters, harlequin ducks and possibly other species in the intertidal areas of heavily oiled regions.

The analysis of the injury and recovery status of all the resources only applies to recovery from effects of the 1989 oil spill. Many of these resources are also experiencing the effects of other natural and human factors, resulting in significant population declines. A major concern is how the changes in overall population from the initial oil-related damage may combine with other kinds of changes and disturbances in the marine ecosystem.

### LESSONS LEARNED

One of the major lessons of the *Exxon Valdez* oil spill was that the spill prevention and response capability in Prince William Sound was fundamentally inadequate.

In March 1989, nearly 11 million gallons of oil spread slowly over open water during three days of flat calm seas. Despite the opportunity to skim the oil before it hit the shorelines, almost none was scooped up. A response barge maintained by Alyeska Pipeline Service Company was out of service and unavailable for use. Even if it had responded, there were not enough skimmers and boom available to do an effective job.

Dispersants were applied, but were determined to be ineffective because of prevailing conditions. Even if dispersants had been effective, however, there was not enough dispersant on hand to make a dent in the spreading oil slick.

Since that time, several significant improvements have been made in oil spill prevention and response planning.

- The U.S. Coast Guard now monitors fully laden tankers via satellite as they pass through Valdez Narrows, cruise by Blich Island, and exit Prince William Sound at Hinchinbrook Entrance. In 1989, the Coast Guard watched the tankers only through Valdez Narrows and Valdez Arm.

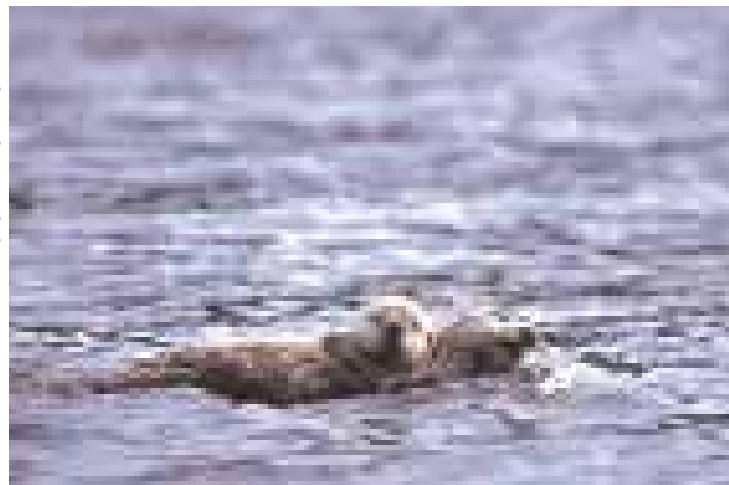
- Two escort vessels accompany each tanker while passing through the entire Sound. They not only watch over the tankers, but are capable of assisting them in the event of an emergency, such as a loss of power or loss of rudder control. Fifteen years ago, there was only one escort vessel through Valdez Narrows.

- Specially trained marine pilots, with considerable experience in Prince William Sound, board tankers from their new pilot station at Blich Reef and are aboard the ship for 25 miles out of the 70-mile transit through the Sound. Weather criteria for safe navigation are firmly established.

Commercial salmon fishing in Port Chalmers.



Sea otter mother and pup in Jackpot Bay.



Blisky archaeological excavation site, Kodiak Island.





- Congress enacted legislation requiring that all tankers in Prince William Sound be double-hulled by the year 2015. It is estimated that if the *Exxon Valdez* had had a double-hull structure, the amount of the spill would have been reduced by more than half. There are presently three double-hulled and twelve double-bottomed tankers moving oil through Prince William Sound. Two more *Endeavor* class tankers are under construction by ConocoPhillips, their expected induction into service is 2004 and 2005.

- Contingency planning for oil spills in Prince William Sound must now include a scenario for a spill of 12.6 million gallons. Drills are held in the Sound each year.

- The combined ability of skimming systems to remove oil from the water is now 10 times greater than it was in 1989, with equipment in place capable of recovering over 300,000 barrels of oil in 72 hours.

- Even if oil could have been skimmed up in 1989, there was no place to put the oil-water mix. Today, seven barges are available with a capacity to hold 818,000 barrels of recovered oil.

- There are now 40 miles of containment boom in Prince William Sound, seven times the amount available at the time of the *Exxon Valdez* spill.

- Dispersants are now stockpiled for use and systems are in place to apply them from helicopters, airplanes, and boats.

The debate continues to rage over whether a spill the size of the *Exxon Valdez* disaster can be contained and removed once it's on the water. But there is little doubt that today the ability of industry and government to respond is considerably strengthened from what it was at the time of the spill.

Complacency is still considered one of the greatest threats to oil spill prevention and response. To help combat that threat the Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation (ADEC) conducts both scheduled and unannounced drills and participates in regular training exercises in Prince William Sound each year. Community training programs have been established and local fishing fleets have been trained to respond to spill emergencies.

In addition, the Prince William Sound Regional Citizens' Advisory Council, established by an act of Congress, serves as a citizen watchdog over the Alyeska Terminal, the shipping of oil through the Sound, and the government agencies that regulate the industry. A similar citizen's organization watches over oil issues in Cook Inlet (Cook Inlet Regional Citizens' Advisory Council).

## STATUS OF INJURED RESOURCES

Fifteen years after the *Exxon Valdez* oil spill, it is clear that some fish and wildlife species injured by the spill have not fully recovered. It is less clear, however, what role oil plays in the inability of some populations to bounce back. An ecosystem is dynamic — ever changing — and continues its natural cycles and fluctuations at the same time that it struggles with the impacts of spilled oil. As time passes, separating natural change from oil-spill impacts becomes more and more difficult.

The Trustee Council recognizes 30 resources or species as injured by the spill. Depending on their status as of 2002, these have been placed in one of five categories:

### Not Recovering

These resources are showing little or no clear improvement since spill injuries occurred.

- Common loon
- Cormorants (3 species)
- Harbor seal
- Harlequin duck
- Pacific herring
- Pigeon guillemot

### Recovery Unknown

Limited data on life history or extent of injury is available. Current research is either inconclusive or not complete.

- Cutthroat trout
- Dolly Varden
- Kittlitz's murrelet
- Rockfish
- Subtidal communities

### Recovering

Substantive progress is being made toward recovery objectives. The amount of progress and time needed to achieve recovery vary depending on the resource.

- Clams
- Wilderness Areas
- Intertidal communities
- Killer whale (AB pod)
- Marbled murrelet
- Mussels
- Sea otter
- Sediments

### Human Uses

Human services which depend on natural resources were also injured by the oil spill. These services are each categorized as "recovering" until the resources they depend on are fully recovered.

- Commercial fishing
- Passive use
- Recreation and tourism
- Subsistence

### Recovered

Recovery objectives have been met.

- Archaeological resources
- Bald eagle
- Black oystercatcher
- Common murre
- Pink salmon
- River otter
- Sockeye salmon





## Change of Focus

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The northern Gulf of Alaska is one of the world's most productive ecosystems. Biological production in the Gulf provides hundreds of millions of dollars annually in income from the seafood, recreation and tourism industries, as well as the subsistence resources on which many Alaskans depend.

The Gulf contains 25 species of marine mammals, 26 species of seabirds and 287 known species of fish, and the surrounding area is home to more than half of Alaska's human population.

Ultimately, it is our understanding of the Gulf of Alaska and our ability to share information that will determine the future of the Gulf ecosystem and the human activities that depend on it. To continue these activities into the future, we must be able to detect environmental change and distinguish between human-caused impacts and natural forces.

Prior to the *Exxon Valdez* oil spill, there was no baseline data available for the abundant number of species existing in Prince William Sound. Because of this lack of data, numbers of oil spill related casualties and recovery rates have been difficult to determine.

The Trustee Council's focus has gradually moved from recovery of injured resources to research and monitoring. Building an immense and invaluable database of information about the Gulf of Alaska ecosystem, Trustee Council-sponsored research is providing more information on fish, marine birds and mammals than ever imagined. These projects benefit commercial and sport fisheries, aquaculture, subsistence, recreation and tourism. A better understanding of the ecosystem, along with significant improvements in the tools fish and wildlife managers use to evaluate populations, means better decisions for the health of those populations and the people who depend on them.

Above: A field scientist observes Kittiwakes during research in Prince William Sound.

## THE GEM PROGRAM

The Gulf of Alaska Ecosystem Monitoring and Research (GEM) Program represents the Trustee Council's ongoing legacy of promoting long-term recovery of the spill-affected region by understanding the natural and human caused changes to the marine ecosystem. The Trustee Council has set aside more than \$90 million that will be managed as an endowment to provide ongoing funding (approximately \$5 million annually) for this program.

To learn more about the GEM Program, please visit the Trustee Council's website, [www.evostc.state.ak.us](http://www.evostc.state.ak.us).

The mission of the GEM Program is to sustain a healthy and biologically diverse marine ecosystem in the northern Gulf of Alaska through greater understanding of how its productivity is influenced by natural changes and human activities.

The GEM Program goals are to:

- detect annual and long-term changes in the marine ecosystem
- understand the causes of these changes
- inform the public, resource managers, policymakers and industry about what is happening in the northern Gulf of Alaska
- solve problems arising from human activities and help regulators improve resource management
- predict the status and trends of natural marine resources.

The program will accomplish these goals through a long-term research and monitoring effort working collaboratively with other organizations, institutions, local residents and communities.

The flagship of the GEM Program will be a core monitoring program which, when combined with the monitoring efforts of other research agencies and entities, will help detect environmental change over time and greatly expand the understanding of the Gulf of Alaska ecosystems. The program will be supplemented with short-term research to provide a better understanding and future generations to enjoy the great productivity and biodiversity of Alaska's oceans.

Harlequin duck research at Port Chalmers.



Sea otter research at Ingot and Disk Islands.



Harbor seal research at Montague Island.





## Uses of the Settlement

As part of the settlement approved by the US District Court, Exxon agreed to pay \$900 million with annual payments stretched over a 10-year period.

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The *Exxon Valdez* Oil Spill Trustee Council was formed to oversee restoration of the injured ecosystem through the use of the \$900 million civil settlement.

The Trustee Council adopted a Restoration Plan for the civil settlement funds in 1994 after an extensive public process. More than 2,000 people participated in public meetings or sent in written comments. The uses of the civil settlement were adopted in response to that public comment.

### Reimbursements: \$213.1 million

As part of the settlement agreement, \$173.2 million went to reimburse the federal and state governments for costs incurred conducting spill response, damage assessment, and litigation. Another \$39.9 million went to reimburse Exxon for cleanup work that took place after the civil settlement was reached.

### Research, Monitoring, General Restoration: \$177.3 million

Surveys and other monitoring of fish and wildlife in the spill region provide basic information to determine population trends, productivity, and health. Research increases our knowledge about the biological needs of individual species and how each contributes to the Gulf of Alaska ecosystem. Research also provides new information and better tools for effective management of fish and wildlife populations. General Restoration includes projects to protect archaeological resources, improve subsistence resources, enhance salmon streams, reduce marine pollution, and restore damaged habitats.

### Habitat Protection: \$407.4 million

Protection of habitat helps prevent additional injury to species due to intrusive development or loss of habitat. The Trustee Council accomplishes this by providing funds to government agencies to acquire title or conservation easements on land important for its restoration value.

Above: Shoreline vegetation at McCarty Fjord, Kenai Fjords National Park.  
Right: Mussel research at Bay of Isles, Prince William Sound.

### Restoration Reserve: \$127.4 million

This savings account was established in recognition that full recovery from the oil spill would not occur for decades. Exxon's final payment was in September 2001, an investment fund continues to support longterm restoration activities through the GEM Program.

### Public Information, Science Management & Administration: \$32.4 million

This component of the budget includes management of the annual work plan and habitat programs, scientific oversight of research, monitoring and restoration projects, agency coordination, and overall administrative costs. It also includes the cost of public meetings, newsletters and other means of disseminating information to the public.

## RESEARCH AND MONITORING PROGRAMS

Trustee Council-sponsored research is providing more information on fish, marine birds, and mammals than ever imagined. These projects benefit commercial and sport fisheries, aquaculture, subsistence, recreation and tourism. Most prominent among them are three ecosystem-scale projects, known primarily by their acronyms: SEA, NVP, and APEX.

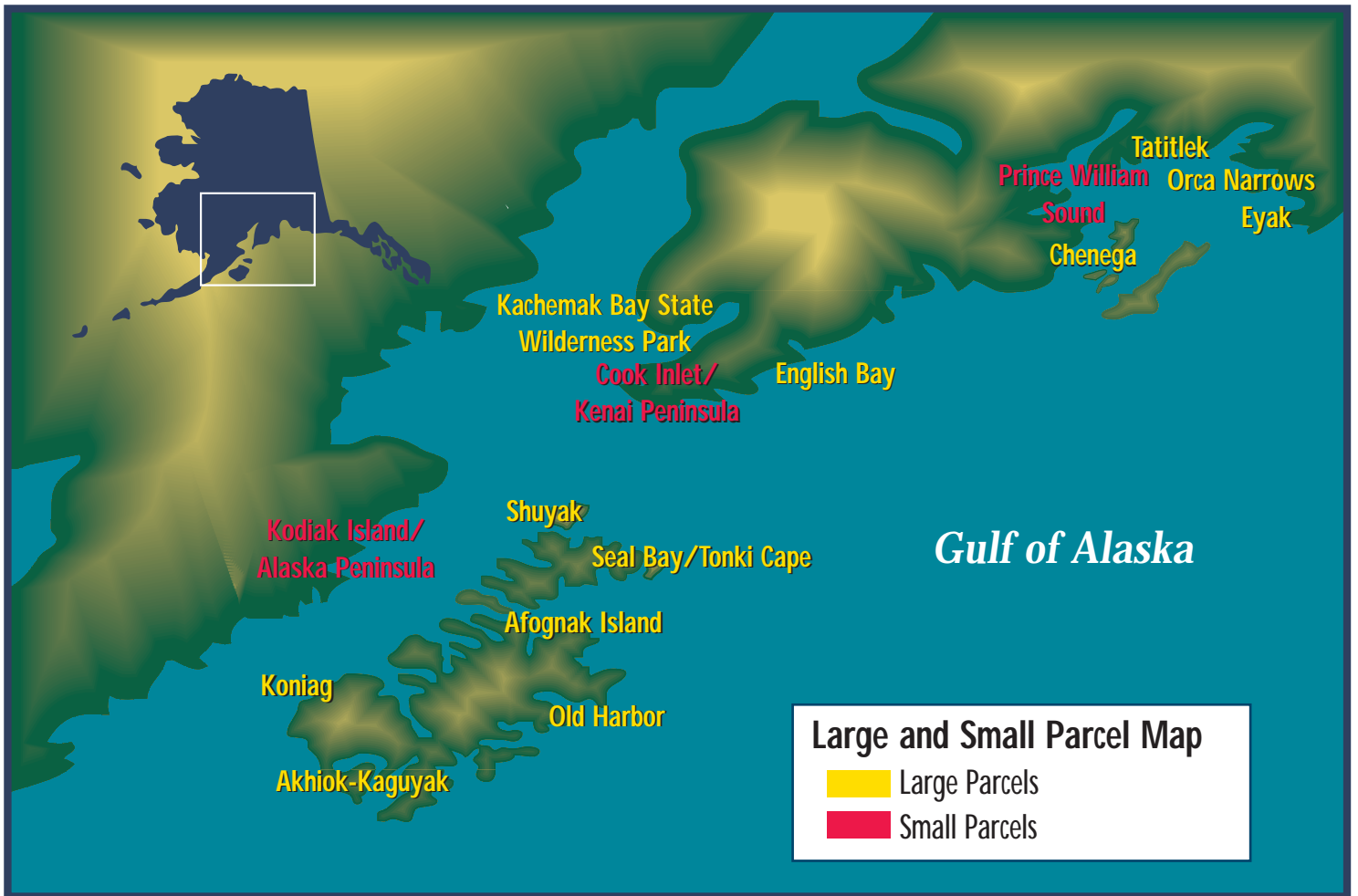
The [Sound Ecosystem Assessment \(SEA\)](#) project is the largest project undertaken by the Trustee Council, funded at \$22.4 million over a seven-year period. SEA has dozens of integrated components designed to obtain a clear understanding of the factors that influence productivity of Pacific herring and pink salmon in Prince William Sound. It was conceived in 1993 in Cordova, Alaska by scientists working with the fishing community after the Sound suffered a collapse of the herring fishery and erratic returns of wild and hatchery pinks. This project has produced vital information about the survival of juvenile salmon and herring and showed the variable effects of wind and ocean currents on plankton, the tiny plants and animals at the very base of the food chain. SEA has provided new insights into ocean currents, winds, nutrients, mixing, salinity and temperatures and how these physical factors influence plant and animal plankton, prey, and predators in the food web.

The [Nearshore Vertebrate Predator \(NVP\)](#) project is a five-year study of factors limiting recovery of four indicator species using coastal lands and waters. The \$6.4 million project focuses on two fish eaters: river otters and pigeon guillemots, and two species that feed on shellfish and other invertebrates: harlequin ducks and sea otters. Nearshore areas were the hardest

hit by the *Exxon Valdez* oil, which clung to beaches and polluted waters on each succeeding tide. When this project was designed, all four predators exhibited signs of stress in oiled areas. These signs have been alleviated for river otters in recent years. Biologists continue to look at oil exposure as a potential factor for the lack of recovery of sea otters, harlequin ducks and pigeon guillemots, but also at such natural factors as food availability.

The [Alaska Predator Ecosystem Experiment \(APEX\)](#) concentrates on the productivity and recovery of seabirds based on the availability of forage fish as a food source. None of the seven seabird species on the injured resources list is considered recovered. This eight-year, \$9.7 million project looks at wide-ranging ecological changes in an effort to explain why some species, such as pigeon guillemots, are not recovering.





**HABITAT PROTECTION**

The long-term protection of threatened habitat, considered essential for the well-being of species injured by the oil spill, was one of the earliest goals of the Trustee Council. Restoration efforts in the Pacific Northwest have taught us that habitat protection is essential to the health of salmon species. Researchers have concluded that depleted salmon populations cannot rebuild if habitat that is critical during any of their life stages is seriously compromised.

This lesson extends as well to the other fish, birds, and mammals that nest, feed, molt, winter, and seek shelter in the spill area. Habitat protection also supports the restoration of commercial fishing, subsistence, recreation, and tourism, all of which are dependent upon healthy productive ecosystems.

By purchasing land throughout the spill region, the Trustee Council ensured that key habitats for injured species would not be further damaged by extensive development or logging, serious threats at the time of the spill. The Trustee Council felt that in an already spill impacted environment, purchasing land could go a long way toward allowing the ecosystem to recover.

The Trustee Council has dedicated nearly 60 percent of available settlement funds—over \$400 million--for habitat protection in the spill region. The habitat protection program is split into two programs based on the sizes of the land purchases. Since 1993, the Trustee Council has acquired the following:

HABITAT PROGRAM	ACRES ACQUIRED	COST
Large Parcels	635,770	\$373.1 million
Small Parcels	8,065	\$33.94 million
TOTAL	643,835	\$407.4 million

### Large Parcel Program

The goal of the Large Parcel Program (generally parcels over 1,000 acres) is to protect key habitats for injured species throughout the spill region. Lands are protected through a creative series of conservation easements, timber easements, and fee simple acquisitions.

Most large parcels acquired by the Trustee Council were owned by Native corporations. The Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act of 1971 provided for Native villages to select 44 million acres of public lands in Alaska and set up corporations to manage those lands and provide economic benefits for their Native shareholders. Lands were selected for proximity to villages, historical uses, and future development opportunities. Large blocks of land were selected, including some of the finest timber tracts, most productive estuaries and bays, and valuable salmon streams. These lands provide critical habitat for many of the fish and wildlife resources injured by the 1989 oil spill.

### Small Parcel Program

The Small Parcel Program recognizes the special qualities and strategic value of smaller tracts of land. Small parcels, which are typically 1,000 acres or less, are located on coves, along important stretches of river, at the mouths of rivers, adjacent to valuable tidelands, and, often, close to spill-area communities. These properties are acquired for their habitat qualities as well as for their importance for recreational and subsistence use.

Because complete recovery from the oil spill may not occur for decades, and because healthy habitats are essential to the permanent recovery of the spill region, the Trustee Council has taken steps to extend into the future its effort to protect key habitats. By unanimous resolution in March 1999, the Council created a \$25 million endowment for ongoing acquisitions. After inflation proofing, investment earnings from the endowment are expected to be about \$1.25 million per year. The acquisition program will focus primarily on small tracts of valuable habitat.





## Tribal & Community Involvement

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 (GEM) 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 projects
- 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.



Above: Blinky archaeological site, Kodiak Island.  
Left: Riverbank restoration project, Kenai River.

## COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT HIGHLIGHTS

- Since 1995, the Council has provided funds to the Chugach Regional Resources Commission to facilitate community involvement in villages in the spill area. Participants have also promoted community-based projects and involvement, developed local natural resource management plans and provided tribal input on GEM's development.
- The Youth Area Watch program has allowed spill area students from Prince William Sound and Kodiak Island participate actively in restoration projects.
- Chenega residents helped National Marine Fisheries Service scientists clean oil from 12 local mussel beds and Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation staff clean residual oil on five local beaches used for subsistence. Alaska Native community members identified sites that they wanted evaluated and participated in the survey work itself during NOAA's 2001 lingering oil study in Prince William Sound.
- Fishery enhancement projects were funded in Tatitlek, Chenega Bay, Port Graham and Perryville, and the salmon hatchery in Port Graham, destroyed by fire in 1998, was rebuilt with Trustee Council assistance.
- Restoration and recreation enhancements were funded along several miles of the Kenai River for the benefit of sportfishing and tourism, such as access stairs, floating docks, interpretive displays and streambank restoration.
- The Council provided construction funds for the Alutiiq Archaeological Repository in Kodiak to protect archaeological resources and educate the public about Alutiiq culture.
- Grant funds were provided to Chugachmiut, Inc. to develop a regional archaeological repository in Seward, local displays in Chenega Bay, Tatitlek, Cordova, Valdez, Port Graham, Nanwalek and Seldovia and traveling exhibits.
- WisdomKeeper Workshops in Tatitlek and Port Graham resulted in communities identifying environmental concerns and proposal ideas the communities would like to see funded and well as learn about the GEM program.
- A Community Involvement Workshop focusing on proposal writing was held in Seward. The Trustee Council revised the annual invitation to require all proposals to have a community involvement component.



*Exxon Valdez oil spill cleanup at Sleepy Bay on Latouche Island, Prince William Sound.*

# The *Exxon Valdez* Oil Spill Trustee Council

The *Exxon Valdez* Oil Spill Trustee Council was formed to oversee restoration of the injured ecosystem through the use of the \$900 million civil settlement. The Council consists of three State of Alaska and three federal trustees (or their designees.)

These members include:

- Commissioner, Alaska Department of Fish and Game
- Commissioner, Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation
- Attorney General, Alaska Department of Law
- Secretary, U.S. Department of the Interior
- Director, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
- Secretary, U.S. Department of Agriculture



KEVIN DUFFY  
Alaska Department of Fish  
and Game



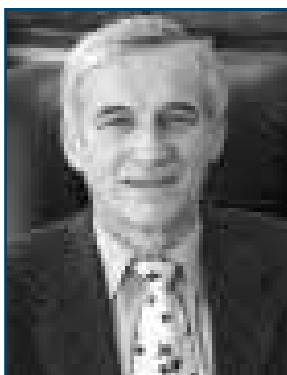
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