

A request to reconsider funding for Project 22120114-E

Prince William Sound Marine Bird Monitoring During Fall and Winter

Statement by Mary Anne Bishop, Ph.D., Senior Research Scientist, Prince William Sound Science Center
To the EVOS Trustee Council
January 18, 2022

My name is Dr. Mary Anne Bishop, with the Prince William Sound Science Center. Since 2007 I have been the Principal Investigator of the project *Long-term Monitoring of Marine Birds in Prince William Sound during Fall and Winter*. Our project has been part of the Gulf Watch Alaska Pelagic Program since its beginning (2012) and was recommended for full funding in the draft EVOSTC work plan. However, for reasons that are not clear, it was not approved by the Trustees in October. I am here to respectfully ask the Trustees to reconsider their decision.

The 1989 spill took place in PWS during winter, and more than 1/3 of overwintering marine bird species were identified as injured by the spill. The number of bird species and abundance are different in winter versus summer. This is the only project studying marine birds during fall and winter in the Sound. The loss of this survey will result in the discontinuation of a 15-year dataset monitoring overwintering injured bird resources, including three species -Kittlitz's murrelet, marbled murrelet, and pigeon guillemot- that have still not recovered from the spill.

At the request of the science panel, our fall survey was designed to sample seabirds simultaneously with humpback whale and forage fish surveys to better understand predator-prey relationships. The loss of our marine bird component removes key predator data from that survey and reduces our understanding of how whales and marine birds impact prey populations, particularly herring that remain unrecovered from the spill.

Our project was also designed to provide data for the new and recently approved Mariculture-Recon project. Kelp farming takes place during fall and winter months. Without our GWA marine bird surveys during fall and winter, we will be unable to fully evaluate marine bird response to mariculture development and expansion, including direct interactions which could be detrimental to birds and industry operations.

In conclusion, I respectfully ask the Trustees to reconsider their initial decision, and at this meeting to entertain a motion to approve funding for Gulf Watch Alaska's PWS Seabird Monitoring in Fall and Winter. Thank you very much.