

January 7, 2022

Dear *Exxon Valdez* Oil Spill Trustees,

I appreciate your continuing support of the Alaska Department of Fish and Game surveys (22170111-F), population modeling (22120111-C), and herring disease (22120111-E) projects. I believe they are the three projects most important to understanding the status of the recovery of Pacific herring, an unrecovered injured resource, in Prince William Sound. Interactions with pink salmon are often quoted as being the reason for a lack of recovery of herring so choosing to examine this topic (22220111-I) will address the concerns with the interaction of these two important resources.

There are two unfunded projects that have created important holes in the future herring component:

1. A postdoctoral researcher that was budgeted in the larval growth (22220111-H) proposal was to perform analysis for the salmon interaction (22220111-I) proposal as well. We can fill this gap by using the cross-component postdoc budgeted in the Program Management Team proposal provided those postdocs remain funded.
2. The discontinuation of the aerial surveys of forage fish (22220111-K). This proposal was designed around community involvement with the surveys being contracted to a former herring spotter pilot and the inclusion of paid internships to involve students from the region. Scientifically, this work has shown significant value in predicting the two largest incoming year-classes across the northern Gulf of Alaska from Sitka to Kodiak. Knowing the incoming year-class strength is important for predicting the fishable biomass and we recently determined these surveys are a better predictor of incoming year-class strength than previously thought. These surveys incorporate community involvement, represent a relatively inexpensive new tool for predicting population recovery, and have implications beyond Prince William Sound.

In summary, I request that you fund the postdoctoral researchers in the management budget (2222LTRM NOAA; \$360,000) to allow us to cover the analysis needs of the salmon interaction proposal. I also request that you reconsider funding of the first five years of the aerial surveys (22220111-I) at a cost of \$248,750 to allow for providing internships, community involvement, and allow the project to demonstrate its value to regional fisheries researchers.

Thank you very much for consideration of my comments.

W. Scott Pegau

Coordinator of the Herring Research and Monitoring program