

**A request to reconsider funding for Project 22120114-J
Oceanographic Monitoring in Cook Inlet/Kachemak Bay**

Statement by Kris Holderied, Principal Investigator, NOAA Kasitsna Bay Laboratory
to the Exxon Valdez Oil Spill Trustee Council
January 18, 2022

My name is Kris Holderied, and I'm a scientist with the NOAA Kasitsna Bay Laboratory. Since 2012 I have been one of the Principal Investigators, along with researchers at the Kachemak Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve, of the EVOS Trustee Council-funded project "Oceanographic Monitoring in Cook Inlet/Kachemak Bay". Our project has been part of the Gulf Watch Alaska integrated ecosystem monitoring program from the beginning and was recommended for full funding by the Science Panel, Public Advisory Committee and Executive Director. It was not approved by the Trustees in October and I'm here to respectfully ask the Trustees to reconsider that decision.

Our project provides the coastal oceanographic context for the Trustee Council-funded nearshore and sea otter monitoring project, as well as for marine bird population changes in Cook Inlet. We collect data on plankton species at the base of the marine food web - the prey species that support fish, bird, and whale populations that were affected by the Exxon Valdez oil spill. One unique part of our project is that we collect data year-round, conducting small boat surveys every month to monitor oceanographic conditions and plankton communities. This frequent sampling allows us to determine changes in seasonal timing, as well as changes between seasons and between years. Collecting these data through the warm and cold climate shifts since 2012, in coordination with the Gulf Watch Alaska program, lets us better understand the mechanisms for how climate conditions drive changes in marine populations. In Cook Inlet, these spill-affected species include sea otters, killer whales, humpback whales, murrelets, and forage fish, including herring.

We also routinely monitor ocean acidification conditions and harmful algal bloom species that cause paralytic shellfish poisoning in marine birds and mammals, and the Trustees have mentioned the need for more of this information. Discontinuing our decade-long Cook Inlet time series will mean losing key monitoring of the base of the marine food web - at a time of more extreme changes in climate and species populations in the spill-affected area.

Therefore, we ask the Trustees to reconsider their initial decision and to entertain a motion at this meeting or in the future to approve funding for Gulf Watch Alaska's Oceanographic Monitoring in Cook Inlet. Thank you.