


MEMORANDUM

TO: Council, SSC and AP Members

FROM: Clarence G. Pautzke 
Executive Director

DATE: September 19, 1989

SUBJECT: Oil Spill and Other Habitat Issues

ACTION REQUIRED

Receive report from Habitat Committee and give further direction as necessary.

BACKGROUND

On August 29 the Council received a copy of the State/Federal Trustee Council's draft Natural Resources Damage Assessment Plan for the Exxon Valdez Oil Spill for review and comment. The document describes the studies necessary to determine the extent and magnitude of injury to natural resources of Prince William Sound and the adjacent Gulf of Alaska. The studies to assess injury are designed to support the development of restoration plans and to determine damages to be claimed for the loss of services of the natural resources. The Trustee Council is composed of the local agency directors of the Alaska Department of Fish and Game, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Environmental Protection Agency, U.S. Department of Commerce, and the U. S. Department of Interior.

The Habitat Committee met on September 26 to review the draft plan and prepare comments. Henry Mitchell, Chairman of the Committee, will present the meeting report and recommendations. The deadline for submitting comments on the draft plan to the Trustee Council is Friday, September 29.

The Committee also received a status report on Council staff activities pertaining to the Council's desire to increase Council involvement in habitat issues. Since June, staff has established an information network that ties the Council to NOAA Fisheries, the U.S. Army Corp of Engineers, ADF&G, EPA, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and the Minerals Management Service. The purpose of the network is to alert the Council and Habitat Committee to any significant habitat issue which may have an impact on natural resources which fall within the Council's jurisdiction.

As a result of this network, Council staff has been alerted to the agency and public comment period for scoping an Environmental Impact Statement for the proposed new five-year Outer Continental Shelf oil and gas leasing program for the period Fall 1991 to Fall 1996. The deadline for comments was August 25, 1989. Staff prepared a letter highlighting fishery habitat issues which we would like to see addressed in the EIS (Item C-4(a)).

Council staff has also been placed on the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Permit Application mailing list and to date has reviewed 31 permits for significant impacts to the fisheries environment. Staff has concluded that none of the applications fall within the 'significant' category. Proposals have ranged from constructing a 800'x 180' dock in Unalaska, to establishing a water ski course at Big Lake. Unless directed otherwise by the Council, the staff will continue to conduct this review of permit applications.

North Pacific Fishery Management Council

John G. Peterson, Chairman
Clarence G. Pautzke, Executive Director

605 West 4th Avenue
Anchorage, Alaska 99501



Mailing Address: P. O. Box 103136
Anchorage, Alaska 99510

Telephone: (907) 271-2809
FAX (907) 271-2817

August 25, 1989

Debra Purvis
Minerals Management Service
Mail Stop 644
381 Eldon Street
Herndon, Virginia 22070

Dear Ms. Purvis:

This letter is in response to the Department of Interior's request for scoping comments on the proposed new five-year Outer Continental Shelf (OCS) oil and gas leasing program for the period fall 1991 to fall 1996. I understand that you intend to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) which will in part assess the potential impacts of OCS alternatives and related issues.

The North Pacific Fishery Management Council, established by the Magnuson Fishery Conservation and Management Act (MFCMA), provides regional input to the Secretary of Commerce on fisheries management. The Council is very aware of the importance of the marine habitat to the well being of fishery resources. The draft EIS should include an analysis of the potential impacts of oil and gas development on fishery resources, the commercial industry and the local communities dependent on them. The EIS should also address the following questions.

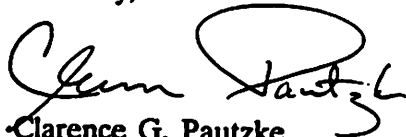
1. How might proposed oil and gas development affect fisheries and fishery habitat within the U.S. Exclusive Economic Zone (i.e. 200-mile limit)? Habitat should be defined as that habitat determined important to finfish and shellfish species managed under the MFCMA, or habitat important to species upon which managed species are dependent for food. In past environmental analyses, the primary focus of potential impacts on fish resources was limited to salmonids, walleye pollock, and Pacific whiting. Many other species of fish (e.g., herring, Pacific cod, sablefish) and shellfish (e.g., king crab, Tanner crab) can be found throughout the water column at certain stages of their life history and throughout the proposed study area. All these species support important fisheries off Alaska. At a minimum these additional species and the species they prey on should be included in your analyses. I have attached a complete list of federally managed species off Alaska for your information.
2. What effect will the proposed activities have on water circulation patterns, nutrient production and export, saltwater intrusion, freshwater inflow, availability of nursery areas, migration corridors, and overwintering areas?

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3. Will the proposed activities produce and release toxic or otherwise hazardous wastes? How will they be handled and disposed of?
4. What might the impacts be of an oil spill on commercial and subsistence fisheries in the region?

I appreciate this opportunity to participate in your EIS scoping process. Please feel free to contact the Council office if we can be of further assistance.

Sincerely,


Clarence G. Pautzke
Executive Director

Federally Managed Finfish and Shellfish Species off Alaska

Bering Sea/Aleutian Islands

<u>Target Species</u>	<u>Other Species</u>	<u>Prohibited Species</u>
Pollock	Sculpins	Pacific halibut
Sablefish	Skates	Pacific herring
Pacific cod	Eulachon	Pacific salmon
Squid	Smelt	Steelhead trout
Pacific ocean perch	Capelin	King crab
Other rockfish	Octopus	Tanner crab
Yellowfin sole	Shark	
Arrowtooth flounder		
Rock sole		
Other flatfish		
Greenland turbot		

Gulf of Alaska

<u>Target Species</u>	<u>Other Species</u>	<u>Prohibited Species</u>
Pollock	Atka mackerel	Pacific halibut
Pacific cod	Squid	Pacific herring
Flounders	Sculpins	Pacific salmon
Rockfish	Sharks	Steelhead trout
- slope assemblage	Skates	King crab
- shelf demersal assemblage	Eulachon	Tanner crab
- shelf pelagic assemblage	Smelts	
- thornyhead rockfish	Capelin	
Sablefish	Octopus	

Taxonomic names and other biological information are available from the NOAA - Alaska Fisheries Science Center, Building 4, 7600 Sand Point Way N.E., Seattle, WA 98115.

Vitae for Captain Mike Williams

Three weeks ago, Captain Mike Williams was appointed Senior Vice-President of Environmental Planning and Control, a new department created by the owners of Alyeska Pipeline Service Company.

Mike came to Alyeska on loan from BP Shipping last spring after the EXXON VALDEZ spill.

He has been the prime architect of Alyeska's Escort Response Vessel fleet, which accompanies all laden tankers in Prince William Sound and keeps on-station there more oil skimming and containment vessels than any other port in America.

Mike lead Alyeska's special task force that wrote the TANKER SPILL PREVENTION AND RESPONSE PLAN and submitted it to ADEC on August 1. He is currently overseeing Alyeska's role in the plan approval process with the Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation.

Mike went to sea when he was 17 years old and became a master mariner in the British merchant fleet. He has sailed oil tankers in many different parts of the world and in 1977 he was part of the oil industry team that helped the U.S. Coast Guard set up the Vessel Traffic Lanes in Prince William Sound.

Mike is now in the process of moving his family to Anchorage.

Anchorage Daily News



Winner Pulitzer Prize: Gold Medal for Public Service 1976, 1989

Gerald E. Grilly
Publisher

Howard Weaver
Managing Editor

Michael Carey
Editorial Page Editor

Katherine Fanning, Editor and Publisher 1971 to 1983
Lawrence Fanning, Editor and Publisher 1967 to 1971

9-22-89 Founded in 1946 by Norman C. Brown

Disaster calls, but is thwarted

When the engine quit on a 906-foot oil tanker in Prince William Sound Wednesday, there could have been big trouble. The disabled Atigun Pass was within a few miles of the infamous Bligh Reef, the scene last spring of the worst oil disaster ever in American waters. It wouldn't have taken much wind or current to push the Atigun Pass onto the reef, or onto other rocks.

But tragedy was avoided this time, primarily because of new procedures implemented since the Exxon Valdez ran aground March 24 and spilled nearly 11 million gallons of oil.

The new plan requires that escort vessels follow loaded tankers through Prince William Sound. It requires that oil-spill equipment be loaded on the escort vessels and that other skimming vessels and spill-containment equipment be available. The plan was developed at the urging of Gov. Steve Cowper, who threatened to shut down the trans-Alaska pipeline unless Alyeska Pipeline Service Co. improved its spill prevention and response system.

The plan worked like it was supposed to. When the Atigun Pass lost power, the escort vessels quickly hooked tow lines to the tanker and escorted it to a safe anchorage for repairs. The episode, which could have escalated into another maritime disaster, never became much more than a routine towing maneuver.

Credit is due the plan's creators and those who carried it out Wednesday. News accounts indicate response crews acted quickly upon learning of the Atigun Pass' problems, without waiting for a request for assistance. In all, it was the kind of response that can make Alaskans slightly more comfortable with oil tankers in their waters.