

Northwest Arctic Spill Response Preparedness Synthesis

Engaging Bering Strait communities in the protection of marine mammals and other resources





Defenders of Wildlife is a national, nonprofit membership organization dedicated to the protection of all native wild animals and plants in their natural communities. Our conservation work in Alaska includes working with Alaska Native communities on the Bering Strait—the largest marine wildlife corridor on the planet—and with other coastal communities at risk. Our goal is to increase the engagement of these communities in spill preparedness and response to ensure that spill response plans are guided by science and indigenous knowledge to reduce impacts to marine mammals and other Arctic wildlife.

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Cover photos: Pacific walrus, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service; bearded seal, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration; polar bears © Debbie Tubridy/TNWA Photography; tanker vessel, U.S. Coast Guard

Table of Contents

List of Acronyms	2
Introduction	4
1. Spill Preparedness and Response Overview	5
2. Wildlife Response Protocols and Roles in Spill Response Plans	9
3. Engaging Communities: Four Keys to Success1	3
4. Bridging Communication Gaps: Recommendations1	5
Conclusion1	18
Resources1	19
Endnotes	23

List of Acronyms

ACP	Area Contingency Plan
ADEC	Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation
ADF&G	Alaska Department of Fish & Game
AFE	Alaska Forum on the Environment
AMSS	Alaska Marine Science Symposium
AOOS	Alaska Ocean Observing System
ARRT	Alaska Regional Response Team
ERMA	Arctic Environmental Response Management Application (ERMA)
DHS&EM	Alaska Division of Homeland Security and Emergency Management
DOI	Department of the Interior
EPA	Environmental Protection Agency
ESA	Endangered Species Act
EWC	Eskimo Whaling Commission
FEMA	Federal Emergency Management Agency
FOSC	Federal On-Scene Coordinator
FWS	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
GRS	Geographic Response Strategies
HAZWOPER	Hazardous Waste Operations and Emergency Response Standard
IBR	International Bird Rescue
ICS	Incident Command System
LCC	Landscape Conservation Cooperative
MMPA	Marine Mammal Protection Act
MMC	Marine Mammal Commission
NCP	National Contingency Plan
NIMS	National Incident Management System
NMFS	National Marine Fisheries Service
NOAA	National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

NRDA	Natural Resources Damage Assessment		
NRP	National Response Plan		
NRS	National Response System		
NPRB	North Pacific Research Board		
NWA	Northwest Arctic		
NWA SCP	Northwest Arctic Subarea Contingency Plan		
NWSAB	Northwest Arctic Subarea Boundary		
OPA	Oil Pollution Act of 1990		
OSLTF	Oil Spill Liability Trust Fund		
OSRO	Oil Spill Response Organization		
PPOR	Potential Places of Refuge		
RP	Responsible Party		
SCP	Subarea Contingency Plan		
SONS	Spills of National Significance		
SOSC	State On-Scene Coordinator		
USCG	U.S. Coast Guard		
VOO	Vessels of Opportunity		

Introduction

The Arctic is warming roughly two times faster than anywhere else on Earth. As a result, Arctic summer sea ice is receding so rapidly that scientists expect it to disappear completely by mid-century. For example, the Bering Sea ice extent reported in February 2018 was the lowest (by far) since 1850 (National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Climate Science and Services April 2018 Climate Update). Meanwhile, reduced and unpredictable seasonal ice cover is increasing vessel transits and oil and gas exploration in the region (U.S. Climate Resilience Toolkit 2017).

With longer sea-ice-free periods, Bering Strait vessel transits increased from 220 to 480 between 2008 and 2012. This trend is expected to continue, especially as Arctic oil and gas development and related vessel transits increase. The Bering Strait region is not only experiencing increased vessel transits due to increased development and movement of goods, it is also one of the largest marine wildlife migratory corridors on the planet (Arctic Marine Shipping Assessment 2009). Increased vessel transits mean higher risks and impacts from accidents and oil spills. Increased risk from spills, coupled with renewed interest in oil and gas exploration and development in the Chukchi and Southern Beaufort seas, makes an incident affecting Arctic marine wildlife and the coastal communities that depend on it all but inevitable.

Arctic marine species health and marine food safety concerns throughout the region, highlight the need for improved communication with coastal Alaska Native communities to coordinate, plan and hold drills with spill-response agencies to ensure that these at-risk communities are part of a spill response. State and federal spill response agencies and tribal and other organizations are racing to keep pace with the changing Arctic and Bering Strait landscape, but spill preparedness and response is only as successful as a well-prepared, local, on-the-ground response with clear, transparent communication, coordination and planning among state, federal, tribal agencies and coastal communities.

With a regionally diverse and remote population and few roads and airports to connect them to spill response facilities, at-risk coastal communities need clear communication and coordination between agencies and communities to respond to spills quickly and efficiently. Defenders and others are partnering with state, federal and tribal response agencies to increase meaningful community spill preparedness engagement in coastal communities on the front lines. The goal is to increase meaningful community engagement so local Arctic marine wildlife and habitat experts can provide state and federal agency responders with up-to-date information on vulnerable wildlife and environmental conditions, along with community members that are ready to safely respond in the event of a spill and efforts to protect marine wildlife marine wildlife start as soon as possible.

The purpose of this synthesis is to highlight the importance of clear communication, coordination, tools, knowledge, resources and training opportunities with the goal of improving Arctic marine mammal survival in the event of a spill in the Bering Strait Region in the Northwest Arctic and coastal Alaska.

The synthesis outlines Alaska spill preparedness and response agencies and organization roles, responsibilities for Arctic marine mammals and highlights opportunities for communities to engage in developing and implementing response plans, participating in trainings and drills. The synthesis concludes with recommendations to increase effective community engagement. Defenders of Wildlife hopes this synthesis is a helpful guide and resource for those interested in becoming more involved in spill preparedness and response in their communities.

1. Spill Preparedness and Response Overview

Congress passed the Oil Pollution Act of 1990 (OPA 90), in part as a response to the 1989 Exxon Valdez oil spill—at the time the largest spill ever in U.S. waters. OPA 90 contains provisions that strengthened the nation's ability to prevent and respond to oil spills, such as implementing contingency plans, clarifying the role and liability of the responsible party (RP) for spill response, and establishing vessel operation standards. <u>https://www.uscg.mil/Mariners/National-Pollution-Funds-Center/NPFC-Laws-and-Regulations/</u>

Following the creation of OPA 90 in 1994, the National Oil and Hazardous Substances Pollution Contingency Plan update specified that Area Contingency Plans (ACPs) contain a Fish and Wildlife and Sensitive Environments Plan "to provide for coordinated, immediate and effective protection, rescue, and rehabilitation of, and minimization of risk of injury to, fish and wildlife resources and habitat."

Spills of National Significance

A major spill, or Spill of National Significance (SONS), is defined by the National Contingency Plan (NCP) as "an oil spill that due to its severity, size actual or potential impact on the public health, and welfare, or the environment, or the necessary response effort is so complex that it requires extraordinary coordination of federal and state, local and Responsible Party (RP) resources to contain, and cleanup the discharge." SONS involve multiple agencies and organizations of hundreds to thousands of individuals in conducting cleanup efforts. While large spills like Deepwater Horizon or Exxon Valdez make the news-smaller and more frequent spills can have impacts on wildlife, habitat and coastal communities too.

Alaska Regional Response Team

The Alaska Regional Response Team (ARRT) was created to meet OPA 90 provisions, including working with regional stakeholders and federal and state response agencies that oversee spill prevention, preparedness and response efforts in Alaska. The ARRT is co-chaired by the U.S. Coast Guard (USCG) and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and includes 12 other federal agencies and the Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation (ADEC) (Table 1). The ARRT's primary goals are to support Federal On-Scene Coordinators (described below) with spill responses, maintaining contingency plans and leading and participating in drills and exercises. The ARRT also hosts a Wildlife Protection Subcommittee (on which Defenders serves). For more information go to http://www.akrt.org

The USCG enforces federal spill response laws and regulations in U.S. marine waters. The ADEC is the lead state agency for oil spill planning and response in Alaska. The Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G), the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) and the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) are the state and federal wildlife trustee agencies. Agency representatives work collaboratively during a response to identify and protect at risk wildlife and habitat (resources) using the Incident Command System (ICS). They also keep current on preventative measures by participating trainings and drills

Table 1. Alaska Regional Response Team (ARRT) Members

ARRT Co-Chair Environmental Protection Agency, Emergency Response Program (Region 10)				
ARRT Co-chair U.S. Coast Guard (17th Coast Guard District)				
Alaska Dept. of Environmental Conservation (ADEC) Representative				
Dept. of Agriculture, U.S. Forest Service				
Dept. of Commerce, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA)				
Dept. of Defense, Alaskan Command (ALCOM)				
Dept. of Energy				
Dept. of Health and Human Services (DHHS)				
Dept. of Homeland Security, Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)				
Dept. of Interior				
Dept. of Justice				
Dept. of Labor, Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA)				
Dept. of State				
Dept. Of Transportation – Federal Aviation Administration (FAA)				
General Services Administration (GSA)				

For up-to-date contact information, go to http://www.alaskarrt.org/Documents.aspx?f=12263

Incident Command System, Unified Command Center and Federal On-Scene Coordinators

The ICS is led by the Unified Command Center, which includes Federal On-Scene Coordinators (FOSCs) and State On-Scene Coordinators (SOSCs). These coordinators are responsible for monitoring, providing technical assistance and directing spill personnel and resources. They also oversee agency response ensuring adherence to the guidelines set in place by the Alaska Regional Contingency Plan.

Wildlife Response

Most wildlife response personnel are in the ICS's environmental unit's wildlife branch and the habitat branch depending on the scope of the response. The ICS management system ensures all components of a response (state, federal, tribal and local agencies, other personnel, equipment, facilities, procedures, permitting, etc.) are managed with a common organizational structure and operations. Depending on the spill the environmental unit may include a tribal liaison officer, who is the point of engagement for Alaska Native community members (Figure 1).



Figure 1. Example of Unified Command Center and Incident Command System (ICS) for Oil Spills (DOI Inland Oil Spill Response Training 2018)

From 10 Subarea Contingency Plans to Four Area Contingency Plans

As of September 14, 2018, the Alaska Regional Contingency Plan and four Area Contingency Plans have replaced the Unified Plan and the 10 subarea contingency plans (Figure 2). **This document also refers to the subarea plans and will be updated when the transition is complete.** For more information on the new plans and maps go to <u>http://dec.alaska.gov/spar/ppr/contingency-plans/response-plans/</u> The Area Committees, co-chaired by the State On-Scene Coordinator(s) (ADEC) and the Federal On-Scene Coordinator (USCG or EPA) are responsible for keeping the new Area Contingency Plans updated. The Area Committees welcome and encourage the active participation of all interested stakeholders. For information about upcoming ARRT and Area Committee Meetings in your area, go to <u>http://www.alaskarrt.org/</u>.



Figure 2. Ten subareas with separate contingency plans recently consolidated into four areas, each covered by a new Area Contingency Plan

NOTE: ADEC will maintain access to the superseded Unified Plan and subarea contingency plans until August 2019 to ensure that response information is available during this transition period. This document also refers to the unified and subarea plans and will be updated once the transition is complete.

Spill Response Stages and Geographic Response Strategies

Using the ICS structure, the spill personnel implement a response in three stages: primary, secondary and tertiary. Primary response involves stopping the spill and containing the immediate area impacted by the spill. Secondary response involves containing and collecting oil to prevent contaminants from reaching shoreline areas. Tertiary response focuses on nearshore and onshore oil and involves implementation of Geographic Response Strategies (GRSs). **GRSs are** site-specific response plans created to protect sensitive areas threatened by an oil spill. GRS are map-based to save time during the critical first few hours of an oil spill response. They are intended to be flexible since environmental conditions at GRS locations could change due to time of year, storm impact, erosion, and other factors. The built-in flexibility allows spill responders to modify the plans as conditions warrant. For more information go to <u>http://dec.alaska.gov/spar/ppr/response-resources/grs/</u>.

The Oil Spill Liability Trust Fund and Responsible Parties

Cleanup actions and associated costs from a spill are the obligation of the Responsible Party or RP. The actual cleanup is usually carried out by an Oil Spill Response Organization (OSRO) which is contracted by the RP. OSROs have agreements with oil and gas companies to provide necessary spill response equipment, supplies and trained personnel depending on the size of the spill. If the RP is unidentified, The Oil Spill Liability Trust Fund (OSLTF)—a billion-dollar fund to pay cleanup costs and damages resulting from oil spills or substantial threats of oil spills to navigable U.S. waters—may be used. The OSLTF covers costs not directly paid by the polluter (the RP) and the costs of responding to "mystery

spills," spills for which the pollution source has not been identified. Cleanup costs from mystery spills may be recouped from the RP (once they have been identified) after the spill event. https://www.uscg.mil/Mariners/National-Pollution-Funds-Center/About_NPFC/OSLTF/

Spill Response Equipment Caches and Potential Places of Refuge

To improve the response time in the remote NWA region, USCG, ADEC and/or Chadux Inc. (the NWA regional OSRO) position spill equipment caches (stored supplies) in hub communities, which are places with medium-size airports. These caches contain equipment for immediate response to small spills. Other preparedness measures include the identification of Potential Places of Refuge (PPOR), pre-identified harbor sites to aid decision-makers in responding to vessels in distress. Identification of PPOR's is critically important in states like Alaska where port facilities can be hundreds or thousands of miles apart. http://dec.alaska.gov/spar/ppr/ppor/home.htm

2. Wildlife Protocols and Roles in Spill Response Plans

This section outlines the current protocol for wildlife in federal and state plans and identifies wildlife response capacity (Table 2). It is important to note that as natural resource trustees NMFS and FWS were granted authority to enter into cooperative agreements with Alaska Native organizations in Section 119 of the Marine Mammal Protection Act Amendments of 1994 Public Law 103-238: "Agreements may involve: 1) Developing marine mammal co-management structures and processes with Federal and State agencies; 2) Participating in marine mammal research; 3) Collecting and analyzing data on marine mammal populations...."

Agreements encourage the exchange of information regarding the conservation, management, and utilization of marine mammals in U.S. waters in and around Alaska." These co-management agreements include individuals who are recognized marine mammal experts, who bring unique and sought-after area knowledge of marine wildlife and important habitat, which saves time and wildlife resources during a spill

FWS	NOAA	ADF&G
Migratory birds	Cetaceans	Works with ADEC to
Pacific walrus	Pinnipeds (except walrus)	assist with oil spill planning
Polar bear		and response efforts and
Sea otter		with FWS and NMFS to
Endangered Species Act	ESA compliance (Dept. of	manage and protect wildlife
(ESA) compliance (Dept. of	Commerce)	and to identify and protect
the Interior)		wildlife resources at risk
Individual Species Response	Joint Species Response Plans	during a spill response or
Plans		potential spill.

Table 2. Federal and State Wildlife Trustee Agency Responsibilities

Marine wildlife spill response falls into primary, secondary and tertiary response categories. Primary response includes the removal of oiled wildlife carcasses. Secondary response involves deterrence and pre-emptive capture of species not yet oiled but in the area near the spill. Tertiary response is the capture, rehabilitation and release of marine wildlife. Handling many species requires specific training and certification, and trustees from the responsible federal or state agencies maintain the permits for these actions. To learn more, go to document sections on ASLC, Chadux Inc. or NOAA/NMFS and FWS.

Annex G, also known as the wildlife protection guidelines, was developed by the ARRT's Wildlife Protection Working Group and approved by the ARRT. To access, go to ADEC website: <u>http://dec.alaska.gov/spar/perp/plans/uc.htm</u>. Annex G guidelines are also consistent with the guidelines in the NCP, the federal government's plan for responding to oil spills. <u>https://www.epa.gov/emergency-response/national-oil-and-hazardous-substances-pollution-contingency-plan-ncp-overview#Key Provisions of the NCP</u>.

Subarea Contingency Plans

In addition to Annex G, each Subarea Contingency Plan (SCP) has a sensitive area section and designated Geographic Response Strategy (GRS) section. The list of sensitive areas for the NWA subarea was compiled by the Sensitive Areas Work Group to establish levels of concern. High priority sensitive areas are identified, detailing reasons for designation and land ownership information. As stated in the North West Arctic Subarea Contingency Plan (NWA SCP), "Often, the most detailed, up-to-date biological and resource use information comes from people who live and work in the impacted area, reinforcing the critical importance to work closely with these communities before and during a spill so current information and local expertise can be utilized." The NWA SCP further states that "They may also have a good idea of which spill response techniques (especially exclusion and diversion booming) are practicable under prevailing weather and current condition."

Geographic Response Strategies

According to the NWA SCP, Geographic Response Plans "are oil spill response plans tailored to protect a specific sensitive area from impacts following a spill. Environmental conditions at GRS sites frequently change according to season, storm impact, erosion, substrate redistribution, and other factors, so GRS are intended to be flexible, allowing spill responders to modify them as prevailing conditions dictate. These response plans are map-based strategies that can save time during the critical first few hours of an oil spill response. They show responders where sensitive areas are located and where to place oil spill protection resources... GRS's have been developed within each subarea by workgroups under the Subarea Committee's governance. GRS workgroup participants include State and Federal resource trustee agencies, local spill response experts, and local stakeholders. Public involvement is essential to ensure sites selected and the strategies developed reflect the environmental protection priorities of local communities, stakeholders, and resource users." The National Park Service's Beringia Program is working to identify gaps in these strategies to inform GRS work groups. For more information: https://dec.alaska.gov/spar/ppr/grs/home.htm.

Federal and State Agencies Involved in Spill Response Planning and Coordination

USCG

USCG is the principal federal agency responsible for maritime safety, security, and environmental stewardship in U.S. ports and waterways. USCG leads and coordinates response activities for marine oil

spills. Anyone witnessing an oil spill, chemical release or maritime security incident should call the National Response Center (NRC) hotline at 1-800-424-8802. The NRC is not a response agency. It serves as an emergency call center, fielding reports on spills and pollution incidents and forwarding them to the appropriate federal/state agencies for response. When notified of a spill, USCG contacts the local, state, health and emergency officials and natural resource trustees—including the Department of the Interior—about the location and extent of the spill. These agencies coordinate to evaluate the spill size and its potential effects on resources and to decide if and how their agency will respond. http://nrc.uscg.mil/.

ARRT

The ARRT advocates community involvement with the environmental unit section of the ICS to identify sensitive areas and habitat use. The ARRT also encourages communities to "join subarea committees, comment on plans, engage the ARRT, get trained in ICS, and identify a tribal liaison officer." For more information, see "Guidelines for Coordination and Consultation with Federally-Recognized Tribes," <u>http://www.alaskarrt.org/files/ARRT%20Tribal%20Guidance%20Final%204-15-14.pdf</u>. The ARRT also welcomes community member proposals for meeting agendas, presentations and participation. They publish an annual tribal newsletter detailing outreach efforts. To read the latest edition go to <u>http://www.alaskarrt.org/Documents.aspx?f=12371</u>.

DHS&EM

The Alaska Division of Homeland Security and Emergency Management (DHS&EM) is guiding the creation of "Small Community Emergency Response Plans" (SCERPs), customized flip books with essential, community-specific information for responding to a disaster. A community that is prepared to deal with a disaster can minimize its impact and possibly save lives. By clearly defining how the community will manage a disaster and identifying supporting local, regional and state resources, a SCERP puts all the information a community needs to succeed in one place. This is an exciting new approach to emergency management for small communities. For additional information, call the DHS&EM SCERP Planning Team toll-free at 1-800-478-2337 or 1-907-428-7000. Learn more at https://ready.alaska.gov/plans/.

Chadux Inc.

Chadux, Inc., the OSRO for the NWA region holds trainings annually in the region for interested individuals. HAZWOPER training, which is required for all individuals who wish to be part of a spill response and Vessels of Opportunity are two examples. <u>http://www.osha.com/courses/hazwoper.html</u> To learn more about Chadux Inc. and their Alaska operations go to <u>https://www.chadux.com/</u>.

ADEC and ADF&G

ADEC is the lead state agency for oil spill planning and response. ADF&G biologists also work with ADEC on oil spill planning and response. ADF&G, FWS and NMFS are the three agencies in Alaska with responsibilities to manage and protect wildlife. These agencies work closely during a spill response. To learn more <u>https://dec.alaska.gov/spar/ppr/prevention-preparedness</u> If you would like to receive updates on proposed revisions to Alaska Oil Spill Prevention and Contingency Plan regulations call 907-465-5283, dec.cpr@alaska.gov or visit the ADEC website: <u>http://dec.alaska.gov/spar/ipp/regulation-project.htm</u>.

FWS

FWS's trust resources include migratory birds, sea otters, walruses, polar bears and national wildlife refuge lands. FWS creates and maintains species response plans which provide specific species' spill

response guidelines to state and federal response personnel. For more information go to <u>https://www.fws.gov/alaska/fisheries/contaminants/spill.htm</u> These plans include species behavior and physiology; sampling, deterrence and treatment protocols; and resources needed to respond, including permits and training requirements. The polar bear species response plan link is <u>https://www.fws.gov/alaska/fisheries/contaminants/pdf/Polar%20Bear%20WRP%20final%20v8_Publ</u> ic%20website.pdf . The Pacific walrus plan and Northern sea otter plan is currently being revised. For spill response permitting information, go to <u>https://dec.alaska.gov/spar/ppr/response-resources/permits-tool/#nogo</u>

NMFS (NOAA)

NOAA's Office of Response and Restoration leads response to oil spills, chemical accidents and other emergencies in coastal areas. Under the National Contingency Plan or NCP, NOAA is responsible for providing scientific support to the FOSC for oil and hazardous material spills. In Alaska, NOAA's NMFS created Arctic Marine Mammal Disaster Response Guidelines with community input (https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/resource/document/arctic-marine-mammal-disaster-responseguidelines-2017). Finalized in 2017, these guidelines "were developed pursuant to statutory obligations" under the Oil Pollution Act of 1990 and regulatory obligations under the NCP." The NCP "is the federal government's blueprint for responding to both oil spills and hazardous substance releases." NCP regulations "require a fish and wildlife response plan, developed in consultation with FWS, NOAA (NMFS) and other interested parties (including state fish and wildlife trustee agencies), for the immediate and effective protection, rescue, rehabilitation of, and the minimization of damage to, fish and wildlife resources and their habitat that are harmed or that may be jeopardized by a discharge." The Arctic Marine Mammal Disaster Response Guidelines include a noteworthy communication flowchart of protocols developed in consultation with communities for notifying and working more effectively with Alaska Native communities, including a sampling protocol for Arctic marine food safety measures. Natural Resource Disaster Assessment (NRDA) https://response.restoration.noaa.gov/environmentalrestoration/natural-resource-damage-assessment.html is the process that NOAA and other wildlife trustees use to study the effects of an oil spill or hazardous substance release "on fish, wildlife, surrounding habitats, and public use of those resources." Scientists work together with communities and other stakeholders to identify the extent of natural resource damage and specify the type and amount of restoration required. A NRDA has three goals: evaluate environmental harm; make the polluters pay; and implement restoration.

NRDA requires legally defensible baseline data to secure appropriate compensation for resource damage and losses including marine subsistence food, habitat, wildlife. NRDA sampling often occurs at the same time as the spill response, further stretching spill response staff and resources. Additionally, wildlife sampling equipment is not widely available in the NWA region, because 1) equipment management and upkeep are costly, 2) wildlife impacts are not always immediate and 3) personnel trained in wildlife response are not widely available in the region. Defenders recommends that NRDA wildlife sampling equipment and local community training are more widely available ahead of spills so that communities can be trained ahead of a spill.

In 1992, in the aftermath of the Exxon Valdez oil spill, NOAA created the Damage Assessment, Remediation and Restoration Program (DARRP). The program "works with teams composed of state, tribal and federal agencies, often in cooperation with industry" and involves the public as it develops plans for restoration. To date, DARRP has recovered \$10.3 billion for "restoration from those responsible for environmental harm." For more information: <u>https://darrp.noaa.gov/about-darrp</u>.

Alaska Wildlife Spill Response Organizations

Alaska Marine Stranding Network

The Alaska Marine Stranding Network is a NOAA program. The agreement holder for the NWA region is the Alaska Sea Grant program. A program staff is the main point of contact for many Alaska coastal communities on everything from oiled wildlife to beached marine mammal carcasses. These agreement holders are trained to do extensive sampling and/or safely ship carcasses to necropsy laboratory locations. For more information on the Alaska Marine Stranding Network go to https://alaskafisheries.noaa.gov/pr/strandings.

Alaska SeaLife Center

The Alaska SeaLife Center (ASLC) provides statewide wildlife response as part of the Alaska Marine Stranding Network (described above) in the event of a spill, unless otherwise specified by the RP. ASLC has holding and rehabilitation capabilities for pinnipeds, small cetaceans, Pacific walrus calves and Northern sea otters. For details, visit <u>www.alaskasealife.org</u>.

Alaska Zoo

The Alaska Zoo has polar bear holding and rehabilitation capabilities (<u>www.alaskazoo.org</u>). Additional information on holding treatment capacity is available at <u>https://alaskafisheries.noaa.gov/pr/strandings</u> and in the species-specific response plans.

Arctic marine wildlife holding modules and washing tables, primarily built for polar bears and co-funded by Defenders and FWS, are also housed in Prudhoe Bay and maintained by Alaska Clean Seas (the North Slope OSRO). Spill response holding and care equipment for pinnipeds, small cetaceans, Pacific walrus calves and Northern sea otters are also located in Prudhoe Bay and built and maintained at ASLC.

3. Engaging Communities: Four Keys to Success

The engagement of Alaska Native communities through regular, respectful, clear communication is essential to protecting people, marine mammals and other resources in the event of a spill., agencies can successfully engage these communities, increase participation and improve outcomes.

1. Establishing and regularly updating community interaction guidelines

Recognizing the importance of community engagement, most agencies have a "tribal desk guide" or similar document outlining communication standards for staff interacting with communities, including requirements for field biologists to take cultural awareness training in preparation for working in Alaska Native communities. While important, these tribal desk guides are often vague and outdated, and agencies should commit to improving them and keeping them updated.

NOAA's Arctic Marine Mammal Disaster Response Guidelines contains an updated and comprehensive guide to community engagement in spill response. These guidelines -finalized in January 2017, were created with significant input from communities and provides extensive current contact information for the region as well as detailed flowcharts covering appropriate notification protocols and rules for community engagement. This level of dialogue with communities is highly recommended for all spill response agencies.

2. Encouraging participation in the public comment process

Opportunities for community involvement in federal decision-making related to spill response and preparedness are announced in the *Federal Register*, the daily government publication that posts notices of subarea contingency plans, species response plans and regulation changes like the proposed vessel traffic lane change along the Bering Strait coastline. It is important to note that public comments are read and considered in the preparation of a final document or ruling, but the government entities involved do not have to respond to individual comments. (See the "Resources" section starting on page 20 for links to agency websites and newsletters.)

3. Providing more community engagement opportunities and trainings

Spill events impacting marine wildlife can attract relatively large numbers of well-meaning volunteers. Volunteer expertise and training requirements vary from spill to spill. Volunteer engagement is closely managed due to safety and liability concerns. For a major spill, ADEC will direct the responsible party (RP) to train and hire additional workers (volunteers may be considered but will be hired as employees) as necessary. If no RP is identified (or the RP refuses to hire needed additional workers), then ADEC will use its contractors and proceed with emergency hiring of workers, as necessary. ADEC will bill the RP and recover all costs for the response, including the agency's costs for additional workers.

Despite safety requirements, individuals still have many avenues for getting involved in spill preparedness and response. For example, members of the public interested in helping in the event of a spill should explore getting HAZWOPER certified. Certifications range from basic to more advanced and the level of training received determines what an individual does during a spill event. The Alaska SeaLife Center offers a HAZWOPER certification and refresher course each year. To learn more visit <u>www.alaskasealife.org.</u> Chadux Inc also offers HAZWOPER and other trainings. To learn more contact <u>www.chudux.com</u>.

Vessels of Opportunity—the VOO program—is conducted by OSROs including Chadux Inc. According to Chadux Inc. as of January 2018, Alaska Chadux has retainers with 46 Vessels of Opportunity (VOOs) in numerous Alaskan port cities, including Kodiak, Dutch Harbor, Valdez, Nome, False Pass, Homer, Whittier, and Cordova. Each year, Chadux conducts VOO training and exercises to ensure vessel crews are familiar with Chadux response equipment, recovery tactics and safety requirements. For more information go to https://www.chadux.com/voo/enrollment/.

4. Working with nongovernmental groups

Conservation organizations and other nonprofits including the Alaska Zoo and Alaska SeaLife Center are vital partners in spill preparedness and response efforts, including increasing meaningful community engagement and advocating for the resources needed. Defenders of Wildlife, for example, has advocated for increased local expert involvement as first responders, wildlife observers and advisors, given more community participation in USCG subarea committees, drills and planning a priority and taken important steps—highlighted on the next page—to achieve these goals.

Defenders of Wildlife, Spill Response Preparedness Advocate

In addition to representing conservation organizations on the ARRT's Wildlife Protection Working Group and synthesizing and sharing the available information on Arctic marine mammals and spill preparedness and response via this document, Defenders:

- Served on FWS's Polar Bear Conservation Management and Recovery Plan (CMP) team to develop a plan that includes measures to improve community engagement in spill preparedness, planning and response. Defenders will also serve on FWS Human-Bear Conflict Working Group to make recommendations and advise the Service's Executive Steering Committee being formed in November 2018 to oversee the CMP implementation.
- Brought together specialists and Bering Strait community members to contribute new science and tools to inform the update of the Pacific Walrus Species Response Plan that will guide FWS in the event of a spill in the region.
- Contributed to the regional stakeholders' committee process proposed for the updated Alaska Federal/State Preparedness Plan for Response to Oil and Hazardous Substance Discharges/Releases (Unified Plan) and the NWA Sensitive Area Plan.
- Co-funded the design and acquisition of state-of-the-art polar bear holding modules and washing tables, stainless steel equipment for safely treating polar bears at the scene of a spill.
- Designed and delivered spill response training tools like the Bering Strait Response Teaching Tool (BSRTT) and training videos with input from stakeholders. http://bsrtt.defenders.org
- Created community spill awareness posters, brochures and other educational materials for distribution at region-wide community and teacher and agency trainings and workshops.

4. Bridging Communication Gaps: Recommendations

In general, community outreach and inclusion in spill preparedness and response is improving but still insufficient. In the interest of improving dialogue, raising public awareness and managing expectation, Defenders offers the following recommendations for addressing communication gaps identified over five years of investigation.

1. Improve engagement with communities

Agencies should provide notice via local sources like radio, community centers and social media before and after planned visits, drills, meetings and workshops to increase public knowledge and

understanding. Communities must be adequately informed of opportunities to participate in the spill preparedness and response process and of research being conducted in remote regions that should include appropriate and timely community outreach. For example, communities where research is conducted are often not aware of it all, underscoring the need for notification on a larger scale. Agencies should follow the standard used by the NPRB's Arctic Program or the ARRT evaluation of tribal outreach and interagency guidelines and objectives. Specifically, agencies should:

- Review existing agency-specific community engagement protocols, identify internal gaps and create an improvement plan with meaningful community input.
- Update agency protocols to include the city, tribal and Tribal Corporation offices for each community.
- Conduct internal agency-specific staff surveys to assess knowledge of community engagement protocols and to solicit suggestions and recommendations for improving engagement.
- Form a community engagement task force within the ARRT with the sole purpose of ensuring the ARRT and its member agencies are striving to provide the best information possible to all communities and to ensure that relevant ARRT work plan goals are met.

2. Increase community participation in meetings, spill drills and trainings.

- Visit all communities within the region representing a subarea contingency plan update.
- Conduct public multi-agency workshops in hub communities and provide options for those who cannot attend in person such as videos, screencasts and teleconferencing lines.
- Make the agenda and any materials needed for the meeting available to all participants in advance to foster a transparent process ensuring a more inclusive discussion and understanding among all parties and stakeholders.
- Use community time more efficiently by planning meetings, visits, workshops and drills to precede or follow annual and quarterly regional, local and statewide meetings, trainings, gatherings such as the Alaska Forum on the Environment-Anchorage, Kawerak Regional Conference-Nome, Alaska Marine Science Symposium-Anchorage, the ARRT meetings, Eskimo Walrus Commission (and other marine wildlife co-management meetings) and Alaska Federation of Natives. This will reduce the financial costs for travel for all parties, including agency staff, regional organizations and community stakeholders.
- Increase attendance at critical community trainings such as HAZWOPER, offered annually in the region, by scheduling them so they do conflict with peak harvest time and other important local and cultural events.
- Increase community participation in spill preparedness and planning drills and meetings by working with local radio stations and community leaders to broaden outreach to ensure the community knows about events they could or should attend.
- Consider compensation for community engagement in agency meetings since many individuals do not get paid for time away from their jobs to participate in workshops and trainings, recognizing their invaluable wildlife and habitat expertise.
- Hold open public discussions rather than closed-door meetings. Feature panels with community members along with agency staff and include topical discussions such as evaluating the performance of an agency (or multiple agencies) following an exercise, training session or major

event to ensure concerns are heard directly and, if possible, addressed at the event or shortly thereafter.

- Provide sufficient details when promoting meetings, training or workshops, such as contact information specifics and, if the event is private, share how individuals and organization can apply to participate.
- 3. Improve outreach materials by seeking community input and regularly evaluating and updating information.
- Survey communities to determine information needs and to identify communications tools, methods and timing that need improvement. Share survey results in a timely manner with communities.
- Facilitate the dissemination of important information by ensuring that community members know what agencies and individuals are responsible for what (marine, near shore, land-based incidents, etc.) in Alaska. Create a flip chart or general guide to response agencies, tribal liaisons (if available), points of contact by job title (response coordinator, Alaska area planner, ARRT coordinator, etc.). Communities want clear information on agencies, their roles and the geographic areas that they cover or manage in the event of a spill. Many do not have access to internet, so plan to provide information in booklets or other printed formats. Include the month and year of publication on all materials distributed by DEC, EPA and USCG and other spill response agencies to help eliminate the sharing of outdated information, which can lead to misunderstandings that erode trust and relationship building essential for engagement.
- Provide job titles (e.g., chief, contingency planning force readiness) for points of contact listed on agency-produced handouts to ensure communities can directly contact the right person to answer questions, hear and handle concerns and foster a professional working relationship between agencies and communities.
- Update and redistribute publication items as needed and include requirements for how and when information is updated in all distributed materials.

4. Maintain specific information and contacts for community wildlife experts and their roles, responsibilities and procedures and regularly update this information.

Spill response and preparedness guidelines commonly include placeholders for local wildlife and habitat experts. As a spill response unfolds, agencies will try to work with communities to identify local wildlife experts, but such attempts will be rushed and likely leave much-needed experts untapped. Response time to a spill will be timelier if local wildlife and habitat experts are identified and included as part of the planning process.

• Incorporate local knowledge and input by identifying and integrating local paraprofessionals community members that have intimate knowledge of changes in the surrounding environment, ocean currents and, most importantly, the behavior and habitat use of wildlife species. Not all experts will be available when a spill occurs, so it is best to identify organizations with multiple experts and include regularly updated contact information for all of them in spill preparedness plans, drills and responses. To ensure a more timely and effective response, experts should be included in their region's spill planning, drills, workshops and trainings.

Conclusion

The Bering Strait accommodates three sea routes, and with sea ice expected to disappear from the area as soon as 2040, the prospect of significantly increased vessel traffic—including from adventure tourism and rapidly expanding oil and gas development in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge's coastal plain, the NPR-A and offshore in the southern Beaufort Sea—cannot be underestimated. Yet, according to a 2016 report, *The Bering Strait: Reducing Risk Through International Cooperation and Capability Improvements*, the United States and Russia, the two sides responsible for its management, "have not spoken in two years and have not carried out a functional, bilateral oil spill response exercise in 18 years." This is bad news for wildlife and communities.

Through collaboration, local communities, tribal organizations and others overcame transboundary issues and opened a spill preparedness and response dialogue. In fact, the Bering Strait region harbors dozens of communities with deep ties to the ecosystem. Under Title I Section 101 (a) (6) (B) (b) (1,2,3) of the Marine Mammal Protection Act of 1972 (amended 2007), Alaska Natives have a legal right to harvest marine mammals for subsistence purposes. As the risk of spills increase, better integration of communities in spill preparedness and response is critical because spills affect not only marine wildlife but communities' food safety, food security, cultural ties and small-scale economies. Through increased community inclusion, spill preparedness and response can be improved with the meaningful and timely addition of on-the-ground experts who are well equipped to inform responding entities.

Spill preparedness and response in the Northwest Arctic involves many parties and challenges related to its remoteness and an ever-changing climate. The only way to have meaningful engagement and remain responsible stewards of our environment is by bringing people together to tackle the problems. We encourage federal, state, tribal agencies and organizations to take the steps we propose to ensure a healthy and productive ecological future for the Bering Strait.

Resources

National Response Center U.S. Coast Guard Oil Spill Hotline: 1-800-424-8802

State of Alaska

Reporting a Spill- https://dec.alaska.gov/spar/spillreport.htm

During normal business hours call the nearest DEC response team office. **Outside normal business hours** call: 1-800-478-9300 (International: 1-907-269-0667)



Reporting a Stranding- https://alaskafisheries.noaa.gov/pr/strandings

Report injured, entangled or dead whales, seals or sea lions in the water or on the beach. The most important information to collect is the date, location of stranding (including latitude and longitude), number of animals and species. Please do not move or touch the animal. Contact:

- NMFS statewide 24-hour Stranding Hotline: 877-925-7773 or 877-9-AKR-PRD
- <u>Online Notification Form</u>
- Protected Resources Office (M-F 8:00-4:00):
 - Juneau: 907-586-7235
 - Anchorage: 907-271-5006
- Alaska SeaLife Center Stranding and Oiled Wildlife Response Hotline: 888-774-7325 / for more information go to <u>http://www.alaskasealife.org/stranding_guidelines</u>

NOTE: If the stranded animal is a Pacific walrus, sea otter or polar bear, call the FWS Marine Mammals Management Office in Anchorage (1-800-362-5148, business hours) or Alaska SeaLife Center in Seward (1-888-774-7325, 24-hours/day).

Mapping Tools

Arctic ERMA <u>http://response.restoration.noaa.gov/maps-and-spatial-data/environmental-response-management-application-erma/arctic-erma.html</u>

Alaska Ocean Observing System <u>www.aoos.org</u> Bering Strait Response Teaching Tool: <u>www.http://bsrtt.defenders.org</u> ADEC Maps: <u>http://dec.alaska.gov/das/GIS/apps.htm</u>

Newsletters

NOAA blogs <u>http://oceanservice.noaa.gov/blogs.html</u> ADEC Spill Response List Serve <u>http://list.state.ak.us/mailman/listinfo/dec-ipp-oil-spill-contingency-plan-regulations/jl.htm</u> NMFS stranding newsletter https://alaskafisheries.noaa.gov/pr/strandings Arctic waterways safety committee website, http://www.arcticwaterways.org/ ARRT tribal newsletter annual <u>http://alaskarrt.org/Documents.aspx?f=12371</u>

Training Opportunities

https://www.chadux.com/services/preparedness http://www.safetytraineronline.com/1alaska.php http://response.restoration.noaa.gov/training-and-education www.alaskasealife.org (Hazwoper training)

NWA Subarea Contacts

USCG, National Response Center (Oil spill/chemical spill/maritime security)	1-800-424-8802
USCG, Maritime Emergency in State	1-800-478-5555 or 1-888-399-5555
Maritime Emergency Nationwide & International	1-907-463-2000
Emergency VHF-FM	Channel 16
Emergency HF	2183.4 (2182) and 4126.4 (4125)
Telex	496115066
Easylink	62907427
Alaska, Department of Homeland Security and Emergency Management	1-907-428-000, 1-877-242-5643
Alaska State Troopers – Nome Search and Rescue	1-907-443-2835
Port of Nome	1-907-443-6619
Captain of the Port, Western Alaska	1-907-428-4200
USCG Department of Homeland Security – Radio information for boaters (incl. frequencies)	http://www.navcen.uscg.gov/?pageName=mt Boater
NOAA-NMFS (Marine Mammal Stranding)	1-877-925-7773

NW Arctic and North Slope Wildlife, Response and Community Organizations

Regional Native Organization Northwest Arctic Borough 907-442-2500 KGallahorn@nwabor.org

Co-Management: Alaska Beluga Whale Committee Willie Goodwin, Chairman 907-412-1248 <u>argagiag@gmail.com</u>

Co-Management: Alaska Ice Seal Committee John Goodwin, Chairman 907-442-3181 jgoodwin@otz.net

Co-Management: Indigenous People's Council for Marine Mammals (IPCoMM) Michael Miller, Chairman 907-349-806 <u>ctorsenipcomm@alaska.net</u> <u>www.ipcommalaska.org</u>

Co-Management: Alaska Nannut Co-Management Council Benjamin Payenna, Chair (primary), Nome, Alaska Millie Hawley, Vice Chair (alternate), Kivalina, Alaska

Regional Native Corporation NANA Anchorage 907-265-4100

Regional Native Non-Profit Organization Maniilaq 907-412-0361 charris@maniilaq.org

Tribal Organization Native Village of Kotzebue 907-442-5303 Email: <u>kotzebueira@gmail.com</u>

Local Emergency Planning Committee Work: 907-441-2500 X155; Cell: 412-2272 cjones@nwabor.org

NWAB 24 Hour Emergency Contact Work: 907-442-8217 Cell: 412-2038 <u>lferguson@nwabor.org</u> Media Outreach Contact KOTZ Radio 907-442-3434 /rhensley@kotz.org Arctic Sounder 907-770-0820 ads@reportalaska.com

KNOM Radio <u>http://www.knom.org/wp/showdirectory/community-announcements/</u> Submit a community announcement

Nome Nugget 907-443-5235 ads@nomenugget.com Informational flyers to communities; Community Contact Information

UAF Alaska Sea Grant Marine Advisory Program, Nome Gay Sheffield 907-443-2397 / 1-800-478-2202 gay.sheffield@alaska.edu

North Slope Borough North Slope Borough Department of Wildlife Management 907-852-0350 (days) or 907-750-5486 (evenings/weekends) http://www.north-slope.org/departments/wildlife-management/wildlife-emergency-response

KICY Radio 907-443-2213 Toll-free: 1-800-478-5429 office@kicy.org

Endnotes

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ARRT (Alaska Regional Response Team). 2010. Unified Plan Volume I: Alaska Federal/State Preparedness Plan for Response to Oil and Hazardous Discharge/Releases, Annex G Wildlife Protection Guidelines for Alaska. Available at website: http://dec.alaska.gov/spar/perp/plans/uc/Annex%20G%20(Jan%2010).pdf.

Clean Water Act (CWA) (33 USC 1251)

Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act (CERCLA) (42 USC Chapter 103)

ESA (16 USC 1531 et seq)

MMPA (16 USC Chapter 31)

(MMC) Marine Mammal Commission, 2008. Review of Co-Management Efforts in Alaska, 6-8 February 2008, Anchorage Alaska. Report of the Marine Mammal Commission. 72 pages.

Oil Pollution Act (OPA90) (33 USC 2701)

Sheffield, G. (2014). Report on the Marine Bird Mortality Event near Saint Lawrence Island, in the Bering Strait Region of Alaska, during November-December 2013: Response, Communications, and Outreach. Nome, Alaska, UAF-Alaska Sea Grant, Marine Advisory Program.

Stafford Act (Stafford Act 42 USC 5121 et seq)

(Unified Plan) Alaska Federal/State Preparedness Plan for Response to Oil & Hazardous Substance Discharges/Releases (Unified Plan), (Change 3) – January 2010. https://dec.alaska.gov/spar/perp/plans/uc.htm

http://oceana.org/publications/reports/the-bering-strait-marine-life-and-subsistence-data-synthesis

http://dec.alaska.gov/spar/PPR/plans/scp_nw.htm

https://www.cfr.org/report/arctic-imperatives

https://oceanconservancy.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/bering-sea-vessel-traffic-1.pdf

http://www.alaskarrt.org/Documents.aspx?f=12263

https://alaskafisheries.noaa.gov/sites/default/files/draft_ammdrguide1116.pdf

https://absilcc.org/outreach/Lists/Announcements/DispForm.aspx?ID=221

http://crrc.unh.edu/sites/crrc.unh.edu/files/media/docs/Workshops/nwab_12/NWAB_workshop_report_appendices.pdf

http://npcarcticpotentialreport.org/pdf/AR-Executive Summary-Final.pdf

http://www.asgdc.state.ak.us/maps/cplans/nwa/pdfs/ESI_DATA/INTRO.PDF

http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/ia/species/marine_mammals/immap.pdf

http://www.cmts.gov/downloads/CMTS_10-Year_Arctic_Vessel_Projection_Report_1.1.15.pdf

https://www.adn.com/arctic/article/polar-code-approval-timely-busy-bering-strait/2015/05/25/

https://alaskafisheries.noaa.gov/habitat/oil-spill-risk

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https://www.fws.gov/alaska/external/pdf/native affairs desk guide fws.pdf

https://www.fws.gov/nativeamerican/traditional-knowledge.html

https://www.fws.gov/alaska/fisheries/contaminants/pdf/Polar%20Bear%20WRP%20final%20v8_Public%20website.pdf

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http://www.alaskapublic.org/2016/11/01/sea-life-center-receives-grant/

https://response.restoration.noaa.gov/orr-where-you-live.html

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Community Oil Spill Response in Bering and Anadyr Straits. Hosted by Wildlife Conservation Society Final Workshop Summary & Recommendation Feb. 2014

https://www.epa.gov/oil-spills-prevention-and-preparedness-regulations/2016-national-preparedness-response-exercise

Pertinent Legislation/Plans Federal: • National Oil and Hazardous Substances Pollution Contingency Plan (NCP) (40 CFR § 300 et seq.) • Oil Pollution Act of 1990 (OPA 90) (33 USC § 2701 et seq.) • Clean Water Act (CWA), as amended by OPA 90 (33 USC § 1321 et seq.) • Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act (CERCLA) State: • Oil Discharge Contingency Plans AS 46.04.030 • State Master Plan AS 46.04.200 • Regional Master Plans AS 46.04.210 • Oil Discharge Contingency Plans 18 AAC 75.400-425 • Discharge Exercises 18 AAC 75.485 • Regional Master Plan Boundaries 18 AAC 75.495

"The National Response Plan (NRP, December 15, 2004) defines "incident" and "incident of national significance" as follows: Incident. An occurrence or event, natural or human-caused, that requires an emergency response to protect life or property. Incidents can, for example, include major disasters, emergencies, terrorist attacks, terrorist threats, wildland and urban fires, floods, hazardous materials spills, nuclear accidents, aircraft accidents, earthquakes, hurricanes, tornadoes, tropical storms, war-related disasters, public health and medical emergencies, and other occurrences requiring an emergency response. Incident of National Significance. An actual or potential high impact event that requires a coordinated and effective response by Federal, State, local, tribal, nongovernmental, and/or private sector entities to save lives and minimize damage or provide the basis for long-term community recovery and mitigation activities."

"The National Response Center (NRC) is the federal government's national communications center, which is staffed 24 hours a day by U.S. Coast Guard officers and marine science technicians. The NRC is the sole federal point of contact for reporting all hazardous substances releases and oil spills." Anyone witnessing an oil spill, chemical release or maritime security incident should call the NRC hotline at 1-800-424-8802. Anyone witnessing an oil spill, chemical release or maritime security incident should call the NRC hotline at 1-800-424-8802.



