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Citizens promoting the environmentally safe operation of the Alyeska terminal and associated tankers.

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Alaska State Chamber of Commerce

Chugach Alaska Corporation

City of Cordova

City of Homer

City of Kodiak

City of Seldovia

City of Seward

City of Valdez

City of Whittier

Community of Chenega

Community of Tatitlek

Cordova District Fishermen United

Kenai Peninsula Borough

Kodiak Island Borough

Kodiak Village Mayors Association

Oil Spill Region Environmental Coalition

Oil Spill Region Recreational Coalition

Port Graham Corporation

Prince William Sound Aquaculture Corporation

Anchorage

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Valdez

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March 18, 2025

Senator Forrest Dunbar
Alaska Legislature
State Capitol, Room 125
Juneau, Alaska 99801

Senator.Forrest.Dunbar@akleg.gov

SUBJECT: Support for SJR 12, "Urging the United States Congress and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration to address outages of National Data Buoy Center stations."

Dear Senator Dunbar:

The Prince William Sound Regional Citizens' Advisory Council (PWSRCAC or Council) expresses our support for Senate Joint Resolution 12 (SJR 12) "Urging the United States Congress and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration to address outages of National Data Buoy Center stations."

The Council is a federally mandated, independent nonprofit corporation whose mission is to promote the environmentally safe operation of the Valdez Marine Terminal (VMT) and associated tankers. Our work is guided by the Oil Pollution Act of 1990, and our contract with Alyeska Pipeline Service Company. PWSRCAC's 19 member organizations are communities in the region affected by the 1989 Exxon Valdez oil spill, as well as commercial fishing, aquaculture, Alaska Native, recreation, tourism, and environmental groups.

Because of the relatively narrow focus of PWSRCAC's mission, our interest in SJR 12 is to support the prompt maintenance of the National Data Buoy Center (NDBC) stations most important to oil spill prevention and response activities in Prince William Sound and the Northern Gulf of Alaska, and to ensure they are operating reliably. In particular, the C-MAN weather stations at Middle Rock (MRK2) and Bligh Reef (BLI2), the NDBC Buoys at Orca Bay (46060) and Seal Rocks (46061), and to a lesser extent the Cape Cleare (46076) and Cape Suckling (46082) buoys are the primary sources of regional weather data for oil tankers. While PWSRCAC's primary mission is the safe transportation of oil through our region, the weather information from these stations also benefits subsistence gathering, commercial fishing, charter boats, tour boats, cruise ships, tugs, commercial vessels of all sizes, and recreational users.

Timely and accurate weather information at remote locations is critical to the safe transportation of oil by tankers leaving the VMT and traveling through Prince William Sound. The Oil Discharge Prevention and Contingency Plan for Prince William Sound Tankers, approved by the State of Alaska, outlines waterway closures to tanker traffic in the region that are predicated on certain weather conditions. Closure and reopening decisions are made by United States Coast Guard (USCG) personnel at the Vessel Traffic Service operated by USCG Marine Safety Unit (MSU) Valdez.

All tanker traffic (inbound and outbound) in Port Valdez and/or the Valdez Narrows is stopped when sustained winds exceed 40 knots. When operational, the USCG uses the NDBC station on Middle Rock to determine if they should close Port Valdez and/or the Valdez Narrows to tanker traffic.

Likewise, Hinchinbrook Entrance, the waterway between Prince William Sound and the Gulf of Alaska, is closed to outbound tankers carrying crude oil if winds are in excess of 45 knots sustained or seas are in excess of 15 feet. When operational, the USCG uses the NDBC Seal Rocks Buoy to make this decision.

The Seal Rocks buoy broke free of its anchor in October 2023, and was only re-established in May 2024. However, after redeployment, NDBC discovered that the wave sensor on the buoy was not functioning properly. With the assistance of the USCG Cutter Liberty in Valdez, NDBC personnel replaced the wave sensor on September 12, 2024; however, it stopped reporting again on October 17. If the current plan to repair the buoy in April 2025 is successful, this means that the wave sensor on the buoy has only been functional for a single month in the past year and a half.

The Seal Rocks buoy is a key safeguard to the responsible shipping of crude oil in our region. PWSRCAC's primary concern with laden tankers exiting Hinchinbrook Entrance during winds and waves near the closure threshold centers on the ability of the escort tugs to respond in a safe and timely manner to an emergency. Without real-time data from properly functioning buoys and weather stations, closure determinations must be made by extrapolating information from distant buoys and weather forecasts, and requesting weather reports from nearby vessels. Vessels are often equipped with an anemometer capable of measuring wind speed. However, estimates of wave height are made by vessel crew and are arguably more subjective than wave heights measured by the buoys. Sending a vessel out into inclement weather to provide a weather report also introduces increased risk to the vessel and crew. PWSRCAC wants to ensure that laden tankers do not depart the VMT in conditions that preclude the tug crews from safely and effectively performing a rescue should a tanker experience a problem in adverse weather.

Prince William Sound and the northern Gulf of Alaska are known for powerful wind events called "barrier jets" and "williwaws." These wind events can be strong enough to pose a hazard to large vessels, including tankers. Accurate and timely weather reports are essential to preventing accidents and protecting Alaska's people, environment, and economies from another devastating oil spill.

Thank you again for the introduction of SJR 12 and your interest in the safe transportation of oil from Alaska. Please do not hesitate to contact me if the Council can assist you in any way with passage of the resolution. Should you have questions or desire more information about the Council, or the importance of these buoys, please feel free to contact us.

Sincerely,



Donna Schantz
Executive Director



Robert Archibald
President