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# *Exxon Valdez* Oil Spill Restoration Plan

Update on Injured Resources and Services  
September 1996

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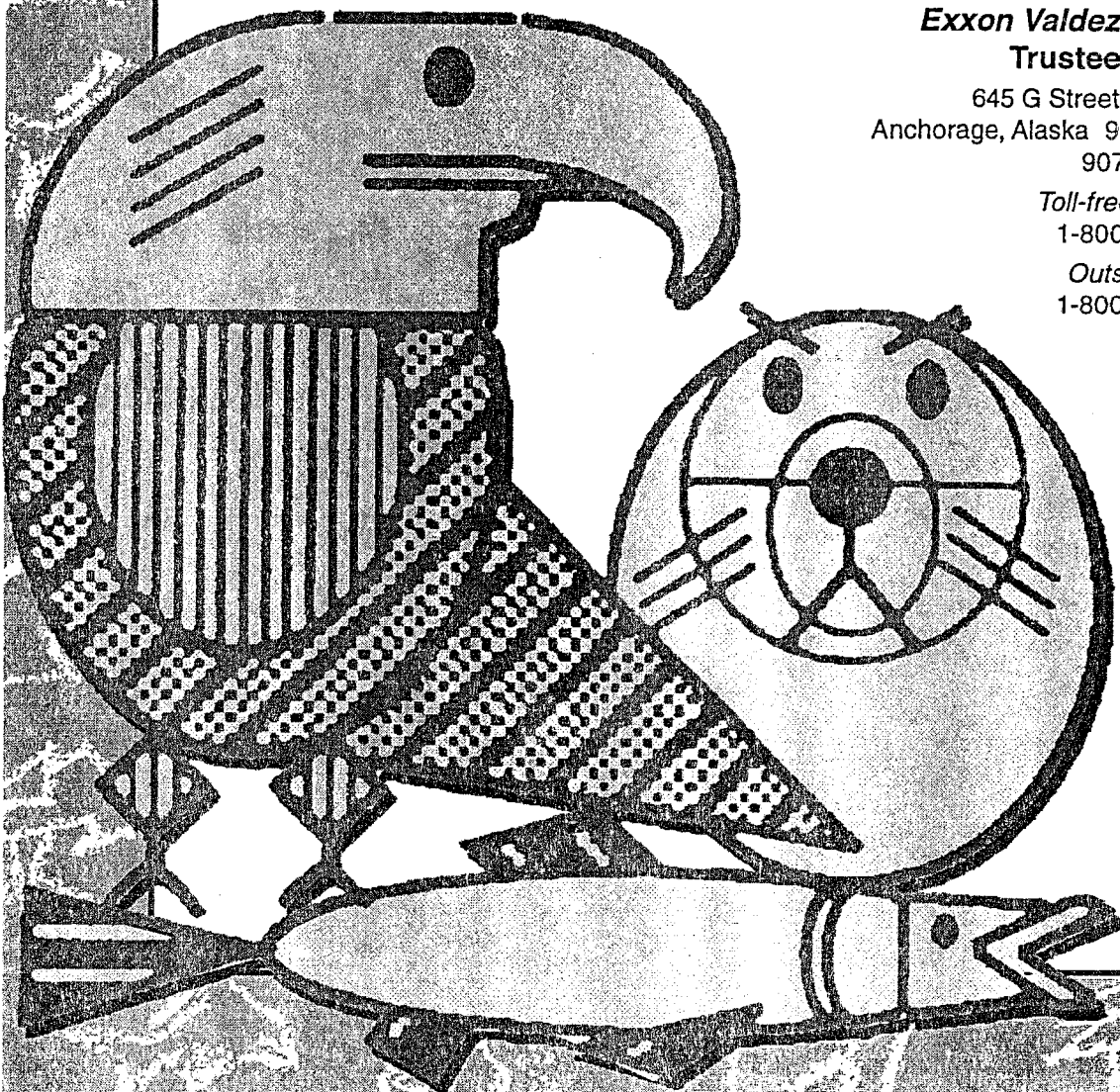
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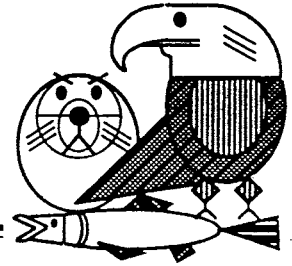


# Exxon Valdez Oil Spill Trustee Council

Restoration Office

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September 1996

Dear Reader:

The Trustee Council adopted the *Exxon Valdez Oil Spill Restoration Plan* in November 1994 with the intent that the plan would be updated as needed to incorporate new scientific information.

The enclosed documents update two parts of the *Restoration Plan*: the List of Injured Resources and Services in Chapter 4 and the summaries of Injury and Recovery and the Recovery Objectives in Chapter 5.

## List of Injured Resources and Services

Chapter 4 of the *Restoration Plan* indicates that the List of Injured Resources and Services (p. 32, Table 2) will be reviewed as new information is obtained. The approved revisions include changes to the recovery status of some resources (for example, moving Bald Eagles from the "recovering" category to "recovered") and additions to the list itself. In August 1995, the Council added Kittlitz's murrelets and common loons to the injured species list. In addition, the Council has now added three species of cormorants (red-faced, pelagic, and double-crested).

## Chapter 5: Goals, Objectives & Strategies

Chapter 5 of the *Restoration Plan* (pp. 33-56) discusses general goals and strategies for restoring injured resources and services and also provides specific information on the status, recovery objectives, and restoration strategies for individual resources and services. In the attached document, the Council now provides updated information on the status of injured resources and services, as well as revisions to the Recovery Objectives for injured resources and services. Readers are referred to annual work plans and invitations to submit proposals (e.g., *Invitation to Submit Proposals for Federal Fiscal Year 1997*) for the most current information on the restoration strategies chosen by the Council to achieve its recovery objectives.

Thank you for your interest in restoration following the *Exxon Valdez* oil spill.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Molly McCammon".

Molly McCammon  
Executive Director

enclosure

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Trustee Agencies

State of Alaska: Departments of Fish & Game, Law, and Environmental Conservation  
United States: National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, Departments of Agriculture and Interior

[Note to Readers: This document updates information on Injury and Recovery status and Recovery Objectives in Chapter 5 (pp. 33-56) and the List of Injured Resources and Services (p. 32) in the *Restoration Plan*.]

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## RESOURCES

### ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESOURCES

#### **Injury and Recovery**

The oil-spill area is believed to contain more than 3,000 sites of archaeological and historical significance. Twenty-four archaeological sites on public lands are known to have been adversely affected by cleanup activities or looting and vandalism linked to the oil spill. Additional sites on both public and private lands were probably injured, but damage assessment studies were limited to public land and not designed to identify all such sites.

Documented injuries include theft of surface artifacts, masking of subtle clues used to identify and classify sites, violation of ancient burial sites, and destruction of evidence in layered sediments. In addition, vegetation has been disturbed, which has exposed sites to accelerated erosion. The effect of oil on soil chemistry and organic remains may reduce or eliminate the utility of radiocarbon dating in some sites.

Assessments of 14 sites in 1993 suggest that most of the archaeological vandalism that can be linked to the spill occurred early in 1989, before adequate constraints were put into place over the activities of oil spill clean-up personnel. Most vandalism took the form of "prospecting" for high yield sites. Once these problems were recognized, protective measures were implemented that successfully limited additional injury. In 1993, only two of the 14 sites visited showed signs of continued vandalism, but it is difficult to prove that this recent vandalism was related to the spill. Oil was visible in the intertidal zones of two of the 14 sites monitored in 1993, and hydrocarbon analysis has shown that the oil at one of the sites was from the *Exxon Valdez* spill. Hydrocarbon levels at the second site were not sufficient to permit identification of the source or sources of the oil.

Monitoring of archaeological sites in 1994 and 1995 found no evidence of new damage from vandalism. The presence of oil is being determined in sediment samples taken from four sites in 1995.

None of the archaeological artifacts collected during the spill response, damage assessment, or restoration programs is stored within the spill area. These artifacts are stored in the University of Alaska Museum in Fairbanks and in the Federal Building in Juneau. Native communities in the spill area have expressed a strong interest in having them returned to the spill area for storage and display.

The Alutiiq Archaeological Repository in Kodiak, whose construction costs were partly funded by the Trustee Council, is the only physically appropriate artifact storage facility in the spill area. In 1995 the Trustee Council approved funds for development of a comprehensive community plan for restoring archaeological resources in Prince William Sound and lower Cook Inlet, including strategies for storing and displaying artifacts at appropriate facilities within the spill area.

#### **Recovery Objective**

Archaeological resources are nonrenewable: they cannot recover in the same sense as biological

resources. Archaeological resources will be considered to have recovered when spill-related injury ends, looting and vandalism are at or below prespill levels, and the artifacts and scientific data remaining in vandalized sites are preserved (e.g., through excavation, site stabilization, or other forms of documentation).

## **BALD EAGLES**

### **Injury and Recovery**

The bald eagle is an abundant resident of coast lines throughout the oil-spill area. Following the spill a total of 151 eagle carcasses was recovered from the oil-spill area. Prince William Sound provides year-round and seasonal habitat for about 5,000 bald eagles, and within the Sound it is estimated that about 250 bald eagles died as a result of the spill. There were no estimates of mortality outside the Sound, but there were deaths throughout the oil-spill area.

In addition to direct mortalities, productivity was reduced in oiled areas of Prince William Sound in 1989. Productivity was back to normal in 1990 and 1991, and an aerial survey of adults in 1995 indicated that the population has returned to or exceeded its prespill level in Prince William Sound.

### **Recovery Objective**

Bald eagles will have recovered when their population and productivity have returned to prespill levels. Based on the results of studies in Prince William Sound, this objective has been met.

## **BLACK OYSTERCATCHERS**

### **Injury and Recovery**

Black oystercatchers spend their entire lives in or near intertidal habitats and are highly vulnerable to oil pollution. Currently, it is estimated that 1,500-2,000 oystercatchers breed in south-central Alaska. Only nine carcasses of adult oystercatchers were recovered following the spill, but the actual number of mortalities may have been considerably higher.

In addition to direct mortalities, breeding activities were disrupted by the oil and clean-up activities. In comparison with black oystercatchers on the largely unoiled Montague Island, oystercatchers at heavily oiled Green Island had reduced hatching success in 1989 and their chicks gained weight more slowly during 1991-93. Interpretation of these data on reproductive performance, however, are confounded by lack of prespill data. Productivity and survival of black oystercatchers in Prince William Sound have not been monitored since 1993, and the recovery status of this species is not known.

### **Recovery Objective**

Black oystercatchers will have recovered when the population returns to prespill levels and reproduction is within normal bounds. An increasing population trend and comparable hatching success and growth rates of chicks in oiled and unoiled areas, after taking into account geographic differences, will indicate that recovery is underway.

## CLAMS

### **Injury and Recovery**

The magnitude of impacts on clam populations varies with the species of clam, degree of oiling, and location. However, data from the lower intertidal zone on sheltered beaches suggest that little-neck clams and, to a lesser extent, butter clams were killed and suffered slower growth rates as a result of the oil spill and clean-up activities. In communities on the Kenai Peninsula, Kodiak, and the Alaska Peninsula and in Prince William Sound concern about the effects of the oil spill on clams and subsistence uses of clams remains high (see Subsistence).

### **Recovery Objective**

Clams will have recovered when populations and productivity have returned to levels that would have prevailed in the absence of the oil spill, based on prespill data or comparisons of oiled and unoiled sites.

## COMMON LOONS

### **Injury and Recovery**

Carcasses of 395 loons of four species were recovered following the spill, including at least 216 common loons. Current population sizes are not known for any of these species, but, in general, loons are long-lived, slow-reproducing, and have small populations. Common loons in the oil-spill area may number only a few thousand, including only hundreds in Prince William Sound. Common loons injured by the spill probably included a mixture of resident and migrant birds, and their recovery status is not known.

### **Recovery Objective**

No realistic recovery objective can be identified without more information on injury to and the recovery status of common loons.

## COMMON MURRES

### **Injury and Recovery**

About 30,000 carcasses of oiled birds were picked up following the oil spill, and 74 percent of them were common and thick-billed murres (mostly common murres). Many more murres probably died than actually were recovered. Based on surveys of index colonies at such locations as Resurrection Bay, the Chiswell, Barren, and Triplet islands, and Puale Bay, the spill-area population may have declined by about 40 percent following the spill. In addition to direct losses of murres, there is evidence that the timing of reproduction was disrupted and productivity reduced. Interpretation of the effects of the spill, however, is complicated by incomplete prespill data and by indications that populations at some colonies were in decline before the oil spill.

Postspill monitoring of productivity at the colonies in the Barren Islands indicates that reproductive timing and success were again within normal bounds by 1993. Numbers of adult murre were last surveyed at those same colonies in 1994. At that time, the local population had not returned to prespill levels.

The Alaska Predator Ecosystem Experiment (APEX project), funded by the Trustee Council, is investigating the linkages among murre populations and changes in the abundance of forage fish, such as Pacific herring, sand lance, and capelin.

#### **Recovery Objective**

Common murre will have recovered when populations at index colonies have returned to prespill levels and when productivity is sustained within normal bounds. Increasing population trends at index colonies will be a further indication that recovery is underway.

### **CORMORANTS**

#### **Injury and Recovery**

Cormorants are large fish-eating birds that spend much of their time on the water or perched on rocks near the water. Three species typically are found within the oil-spill area.

Carcasses of 838 cormorants were recovered following the oil spill, including 418 pelagic, 161 red-faced, 38 double-crested, and 221 unidentified cormorants. Many more cormorants probably died as a result of the spill, but their carcasses were not found.

No regional population estimates are available for any of the cormorant species found in the oil-spill area. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Alaska Seabird Colony Catalog, however, currently lists counts of 7,161 pelagic cormorants, 8,967 red-faced cormorants, and 1,558 double-crested cormorants in the oil-spill area. These are direct counts at colonies, not overall population estimates, but they suggest that population sizes are small. In this context, it appears that injury to all three cormorant species may have been significant.

Counts on the outer Kenai Peninsula coast suggested that the direct mortality of cormorants due to oil resulted in fewer birds in this area in 1989 compared to 1986. In addition, there were statistically-significant declines in the estimated numbers of cormorants (all three species combined) in Prince William Sound based on pre- and postspill July boat surveys (1972-73 v 1989-91), and there were fewer cormorants in oiled than in unoiled parts of the Sound. More recent surveys (1993-94) did not show an increasing population trend since the oil spill. With support from the Trustee Council, these boat surveys will be repeated in 1996.

#### **Recovery Objective**

Pelagic, red-faced, and double-crested cormorants will have recovered when their populations return to prespill levels in the oil-spill area. An increasing population trend in Prince William Sound will indicate that recovery is underway.

## CUTTHROAT TROUT

### **Injury and Recovery**

Prince William Sound is at the northwestern limit of the range of cutthroat trout, and few stocks are known to exist within the Sound. Local cutthroat trout populations rarely number more than 1,000 each, and the fish have small home ranges and are geographically isolated. Cutthroat trout, therefore, are highly vulnerable to exploitation, habitat alteration, or pollution.

Following the oil spill, cutthroat trout in a small number of oiled index streams grew more slowly than in unoiled streams, possibly as a result of reduced food supplies or exposure to oil, and there is concern that reduced growth rates may have led to reduced survival. The difference in growth rates persisted through 1991. No studies have been conducted since then, and the recovery status of this species is not known.

### **Recovery Objective**

Cutthroat trout will have recovered when growth rates within oiled areas are similar to those for unoiled areas, after taking into account geographic differences.

## DESIGNATED WILDERNESS AREAS

### **Injury and Recovery**

The oil spill delivered oil in varying quantities to the waters adjoining the seven areas designated as wilderness areas and wilderness study areas by Congress. Oil also was deposited above the mean high-tide line at these locations. During the intense clean-up seasons of 1989 and 1990, thousands of workers and hundreds of pieces of equipment were at work in the spill zone. This activity was an unprecedented imposition of people, noise, and activity on the area's undeveloped and normally sparsely occupied landscape. Although activity levels on these wilderness shores have probably returned to normal, at some locations there is still residual oil.

### **Recovery Objective**

Designated wilderness areas will have recovered when oil is no longer encountered in them and the public perceives them to be recovered from the spill.

## DOLLY VARDEN

### **Injury and Recovery**

Like the cutthroat trout, there is evidence that Dolly Varden grew more slowly in oiled streams than in unoiled streams, and there is concern that reduced growth rates may have led to reduced survival. However, no data have been gathered since 1991. The recovery status of this species is not known.



### **Recovery Objective**

Dolly Varden will have recovered when growth rates within oiled streams are comparable to those in unoiled streams, after taking into account geographic differences.

## **HARBOR SEALS**

### **Injury and Recovery**

Harbor seal numbers were declining in the Gulf of Alaska, including in Prince William Sound, before the oil spill. *Exxon Valdez* oil affected harbor seal habitats, including key haul-out areas and adjacent waters, in Prince William Sound and as far away as Tugidak Island, near Kodiak. Estimated mortality as a direct result of the oil spill was about 300 seals in oiled parts of Prince William Sound. Based on surveys conducted before (1988) and after (1989) the oil spill, seals in oiled areas had declined by 43 percent, compared to 11 percent in unoiled areas.

In a declining population deaths exceed births, and harbor seals in both oiled and unoiled parts of Prince William Sound have continued to decline since the spill. For the period 1989-1994, the average estimated annual rate of decline was about 6 percent. Changes in the amount or quality of food may have been an initial cause of this long-term decline. Although there is no evidence that such factors as predation by killer whales, subsistence hunting, and interactions with commercial fisheries caused the decline in the harbor seal population, these are among the on-going sources of mortality.

Harbor seals have long been a key subsistence resource in the oil-spill area. Subsistence hunting is affected by the declining seal population, and lack of opportunities to hunt seals has changed the diets of subsistence users who traditionally had relied heavily on these marine mammals.

### **Recovery Objective**

Harbor seals will have recovered from the effects of the oil spill when their population is stable or increasing.

## **HARLEQUIN DUCKS**

### **Injury and Recovery**

Harlequin ducks feed in intertidal and shallow subtidal habitats where most of the spilled oil was initially stranded. More than 200 harlequin ducks were found dead in 1989, mostly in Prince William Sound. Many more than that number probably died throughout the spill area. Since the oil spill occurred in early spring, before wintering harlequins had left the oil-spill area, the impacts of the oil spill may have extended beyond the immediate spill area. The geographic extent of these impacts is not known.

Bile samples from harlequin ducks (combined with samples from Barrow's and common goldeneye) collected in eastern and western Prince William Sound and in the western Kodiak Archipelago in 1989-90 had higher concentrations of hydrocarbon metabolites than a small number of samples from harlequins and goldeneye collected at Juneau. Prespill data on harlequin populations and productivity are poor and complicated by possible geographic

differences in habitat quality. However, the summer population in Prince William Sound is small, only a few thousand birds. There continues to be concern about poor reproduction and a possible decline in numbers of molting birds in western versus eastern parts of the Sound.

### **Recovery Objective**

Harlequin ducks will have recovered when breeding and postbreeding season densities and production of young return to prespill levels. A normal population age- and sex-structure and reproductive success, taking into account geographic differences, will indicate that recovery is underway.

## **INTERTIDAL COMMUNITIES**

### **Injury and Recovery**

Portions of 1,500 miles of coastline were oiled by the spill in Prince William Sound, on the Kenai and Alaska peninsulas, and in the Kodiak Archipelago. Both the oil and intensive clean-up activities had significant impacts on the flora and fauna of the intertidal zone, the area of beach between low and high tides. Intertidal resources are important to subsistence users, sea and river otters, and to a variety of birds, including black oystercatchers, harlequin ducks, surf scoters, and pigeon guillemots.

Impacts to intertidal organisms occurred at all tidal levels in all types of habitats throughout the oil-spill area. Many species of algae and invertebrates were less abundant at oiled sites compared to unoiled reference sites. Other opportunistic species, including a small species of barnacle, oligochaete worms, and filamentous brown algae, colonized shores where dominant species were removed by the oil spill and clean-up activities. The abundance and reproductive potential of the common seaweed, *Fucus gardneri* (known as rockweed or popweed), was also reduced following the spill.

On the sheltered, bedrock shores that are common in Prince William Sound, full recovery of *Fucus* is crucial for the recovery of intertidal communities at these sites, since many invertebrate organisms depend on the cover provided by this seaweed. *Fucus* has not yet fully recovered in the upper intertidal zone on shores subjected to direct sunlight, but in many locations, recovery of intertidal communities has made substantial progress. In other habitat types, such as estuaries and cobble beaches, many species did not show signs of recovery when they were last surveyed in 1991.

### **Recovery Objective**

Intertidal communities will have recovered when community composition on oiled shorelines is similar to that which would have prevailed in the absence of the spill. Indications of recovery are the reestablishment of important species, such as *Fucus* at sheltered rocky sites, the convergence in community composition on oiled and unoiled shorelines, and the provision of adequate, uncontaminated food supplies for top predators in intertidal and nearshore habitats.

## KILLER WHALES

### **Injury and Recovery**

More than 80 killer whales in six "resident" pods regularly use Prince William Sound within their ranges. Other whales in "transient" groups are observed in the Sound less frequently. There has been particular concern in Prince William Sound about the resident AB pod, which numbered 36 animals prior to the spill. Fourteen whales disappeared from this pod in 1989 and 1990, during which time no young were recruited into the population. Although four calves were added to the AB pod during 1992-94, surveys in 1994 and 1995 indicate the loss of five more adult whales. The link between these losses and the oil spill is only circumstantial, but the likely mortality of killer whales in the AB pod in Prince William Sound following the spill far exceeds rates observed for other pods in British Columbia and Puget Sound over the last 20 years. In addition to the effects of the oil spill, there has been concern about the possible shooting of killer whales, perhaps due to conflicts with long-line fisheries.

The AB pod may never regain its former size, but overall numbers within the major resident killer whale pods in Prince William Sound are at or exceed prespill levels. There is concern, however, that a decline in resightings of individuals within the AT group of transient killer whales has accelerated following the oil spill.

### **Recovery Objective**

Killer whales in the AB pod will have recovered when the number of individuals in the pod is stable or increasing relative to the trends of other major resident pods in Prince William Sound.

## KITTLITZ'S MURRELETS

### **Injury and Recovery**

The Kittlitz's murrelet is found only in Alaska and portions of the Russian Far East, and a large fraction of the world population, which may number only a few tens of thousands, breeds in Prince William Sound. The Kenai Peninsula coast and Kachemak Bay are also important concentration areas for this species. Very little is known about Kittlitz's murrelets. However, they associate closely with tidewater glaciers and nest on scree slopes and similar sites on the ground.

Seventy-two Kittlitz's murrelets were positively identified among the bird carcasses recovered after the oil spill. Nearly 450 more *Brachyramphus* murrelets were not identified to the species level, and it is reasonable to assume that some of these were Kittlitz's. In addition, many more murrelets probably were killed by the oil than were actually recovered. One published estimate places direct mortality of Kittlitz's murrelets from the oil spill at 1,000-2,000 individuals, which would represent a substantial fraction of the world population.

Because of the highly patchy distribution of Kittlitz's murrelet, the difficulty of identifying them in the field, and the fact that so little is known about this species, the recovery status of the Kittlitz's murrelet is not known. The Trustee Council has funded an exploratory study on the ecology and distribution of this murrelet starting in 1996.

### **Recovery Objective**

No recovery objective can be identified for Kittlitz's murrelet at this time.

## **MARBLED MURRELETS**

### **Injury and Recovery**

The northern Gulf of Alaska, including Prince William Sound, is a key area of concentration in the distribution of marbled murrelets. The marbled murrelet is federally listed as a threatened species in Washington, Oregon, and California; it is also listed as threatened in British Columbia.

The marbled murrelet population in Prince William Sound had declined before the oil spill. The causes of the prespill decline are unknown, but may be related to changing food supplies. It is not known whether the murrelet population was still declining at the time of the oil spill, but the spill caused additional losses of murrelets. Carcasses of nearly 1,100 *Brachyramphus* murrelets were found after the spill, and about 90 percent of the murrelets that could be identified to the species level were marbled murrelets. Many more murrelets probably were killed by the oil than were found, and it is estimated that as much as 7 percent of the marbled murrelet population in the oil-spill area was killed by the spill.

Population estimates for murrelets are highly variable. Postspill boat surveys do not yet indicate any statistically significant increase in numbers of marbled murrelets in Prince William Sound, nor is there evidence of any further decline.

### **Recovery Objective**

Marbled murrelets will have recovered when its population is stable or increasing. Stable or increasing productivity will be an indication that recovery is underway.

## **MUSSELS**

### **Injury and Recovery**

Mussels are an important prey species in the nearshore ecosystem throughout the oil-spill area, and beds of mussels provide physical stability and habitat for other organisms in the intertidal zone. For these reasons, mussel beds were purposely left alone during *Exxon Valdez* clean-up operations.

In 1991, high concentrations of relatively unweathered oil were found in the mussels and underlying byssal mats and sediments in certain dense mussel beds. The biological significance of oiled mussel beds is not known, but they are potential pathways of oil contamination for local populations of harlequin ducks, black oystercatchers, river otters, and juvenile sea otters, all of which feed to some extent on mussels and show some signs of continuing injury.

About 30 mussel beds in Prince William Sound are known still to have oil residue, and 12 of them were cleaned on an experimental basis in 1994. By August 1995, these beds showed a 98 percent reduction in oil in the replacement sediments, compared to what had been there before. Mussel beds along the outer Kenai Peninsula coast, the Alaska Peninsula, and Kodiak

Archipelago were surveyed for the presence of oil in 1992, 1993, and 1995. Hydrocarbon concentrations in mussels and sediments at these Gulf of Alaska sites is generally lower than for sites in the Sound, but at some sites substantial concentrations persist.

Subsistence users continue to be concerned about contamination from oiled mussel beds. The Nearshore Vertebrate Predator project is focusing on mussels as a key prey species and component of the nearshore ecosystem.

#### **Recovery Objective**

Mussels will have recovered when concentrations of oil in the mussels and in the sediments below mussel beds reach background levels, do not contaminate their predators, and do not affect subsistence uses.

### **PACIFIC HERRING**

#### **Injury and Recovery**

Pacific herring spawned in intertidal and subtidal habitats in Prince William Sound shortly after the oil spill. A significant portion of these spawning habitats as well as herring staging areas in the Sound were contaminated by oil. Field studies conducted in 1989 and 1990 documented increased rates of egg mortality and larval deformities in oiled versus unoiled areas. Subsequent laboratory studies confirm that these effects can be caused by exposure to *Exxon Valdez* oil, but the significance of these injuries at a population level is not known.

The 1988 prespill year-class of Pacific herring was very strong in Prince William Sound, and, as a result, the estimated peak biomass of spawning adults in 1992 was at a record level. In 1993, however, there was an unprecedented crash of the adult herring population. A viral disease and fungus were the probable agents of mortality, and the connection between the oil spill and the disease outbreak is under investigation. Numbers of spawning herring in Prince William Sound remained depressed through the 1995 season. Preliminary results from the Sound Ecosystem Assessment (SEA) Project indicate the possible significance of walleye pollock as both competitors with and predators on herring, which may indicate that there is a connection between the lack of recruitment of strong year classes of herring and the presence of large numbers of pollock in Prince William Sound.

Pacific herring are extremely important ecologically and commercially and for subsistence users. Reduced herring populations could have significant implications for both their predators and their prey, and the closure of the herring fishery from 1993 through 1996 has had serious economic impact on people and communities in Prince William Sound.

#### **Recovery Objective**

Pacific herring will have recovered when the next highly successful year class is recruited into the fishery and when other indicators of population health are sustained within normal bounds in Prince William Sound.

## PIGEON GUILLEMOTS

### **Injury and Recovery**

Although the pigeon guillemot is widely distributed in the north Pacific region, nowhere does it occur in large numbers or concentrations. Because guillemots feed in shallow, nearshore waters, the guillemots and the fish on which they prey are vulnerable to oil pollution.

Like the marbled murrelet, there is evidence that the pigeon guillemot population in Prince William Sound had declined before the spill. The causes of the prespill decline are unknown. It is estimated that 10-15 percent of the spill-area population may have died following the spill. Guillemot nesting on the Naked Islands was well-studied in 1978-81. Postspill surveys using the same methods indicated a decline of about 40 percent in guillemots in the Naked Islands. Based on boat surveys, the overall guillemot population in the Sound declined as well.

Numbers of guillemots recorded on boat surveys are highly variable, and there is not yet any statistically significant evidence of a postspill population increase. The factors responsible for the guillemot's prespill decline may negate or mask recovery from the effects of the oil spill.

The Alaska Predator Ecosystem Experiment (APEX) project is investigating the possible link between pigeon guillemot declines to the availability and abundance of forage fish, such as Pacific herring, sand lance, and capelin. The Nearshore Vertebrate Predator (NVP) project also addresses the possibility that exposure to oil continues to limit the guillemot's recovery. Both projects are supported by the Trustee Council.

### **Recovery Objective**

Pigeon guillemots will have recovered when their population is stable or increasing. Sustained productivity within normal bounds will be an indication that recovery is underway.

## PINK SALMON

### **Injury and Recovery**

About 75 percent of wild pink salmon in Prince William Sound spawn in the intertidal portions of streams and were highly vulnerable to the effects of the oil spill. Hatchery salmon and wild salmon from both intertidal and upstream spawning habitats swam through oiled waters and ingested oil particles and oiled prey as they foraged in the Sound and emigrated to the sea. As a result, three types of early life-stage injuries were identified: First, growth rates in juvenile pink salmon from oiled parts of Prince William Sound were reduced. Second, there was increased egg mortality in oiled versus unoiled streams. A possible third effect, genetic damage, is under investigation.

In the years preceding the spill, returns of wild pink salmon in Prince William Sound varied from a maximum of 21.0 million fish in 1984 to a minimum of 1.8 million in 1988. Since the spill, returns of wild pinks have varied from a high of about 14.4 million fish in 1990 to a low of about 2.2 million in 1992. There is a particular concern about the Sound's southwest management district, where returns of both hatchery and wild stocks have been generally weak since the oil spill. Because of the tremendous natural variation in adult returns, however, it is difficult to

attribute poor returns in a given year to injuries caused by *Exxon Valdez* oil. For pink salmon, mortalities of eggs and juveniles remain the best indicators of injury and recovery.

Evidence of reduced juvenile growth rates was limited to the 1989 season, but increased egg mortality persisted in oiled compared to unoiled streams through 1993. The 1994 and 1995 seasons were the first since 1989 in which there were no statistically significant differences in egg mortalities in oiled and unoiled streams. These data indicate that recovery from oil-spill effects is underway.

The Sound Ecosystem Assessment (SEA) Project is exploring oceanographic and ecological factors that influence production of pink salmon and Pacific herring. These natural factors are likely to have the greatest influence over year-to-year returns in both wild and hatchery stocks of pink salmon.

#### **Recovery Objective**

Pink salmon will have recovered when population indicators, such as growth and survival, are within normal bounds and there are no statistically significant differences in egg mortalities in oiled and unoiled streams for two years each of odd- and even-year runs in Prince William Sound.

## **RIVER OTTERS**

#### **Injury and Recovery**

River otters have a low population density and an unknown population size in Prince William Sound, and, therefore, it is hard to assess oil-spill effects. Twelve river otter carcasses were found following the spill, but the actual mortality is not known. Studies conducted during 1989-91 identified several differences between river otters in oiled and unoiled areas in Prince William Sound, including biochemical evidence of exposure to hydrocarbons or other sources of stress, reduced diversity in prey species, reduced body size (length-weight), and increased territory size. Since there were no prespill data and sample sizes were small, it is not clear that these differences are the result of the oil spill.

The Nearshore Vertebrate Predator project, now underway, will shed new light on the status of the river otter. In 1995 the Alaska Board of Game used its emergency authority to restrict trapping of river otters in western Prince William Sound to ensure that the results of this study are not compromised by the removal of animals from study areas on Jackpot and Knight islands.

#### **Recovery Objective**

The river otter will have recovered when biochemical indices of hydrocarbon exposure or other stresses and indices of habitat use are similar between oiled and unoiled areas of Prince William Sound, after taking into account any geographic differences.

## ROCKFISH

### **Injury and Recovery**

Very little is known about rockfish populations in the northern Gulf of Alaska. A small number of dead adult rockfish was recovered following the oil spill, and autopsies of five specimens indicated that oil ingestion was the cause of death. Analysis of other rockfish showed exposure to hydrocarbons and probable sublethal effects. In addition, closures to salmon fisheries apparently increased fishing pressures on rockfish, which may have adversely affected the rockfish population. However, the original extent of injury and the current recovery status of this species are unknown.

### **Recovery Objective**

No recovery objective can be identified.

## SEA OTTERS

### **Injury and Recovery**

By the late 1800s, sea otters had been eliminated from most of their historical range in Alaska due to excessive fur harvesting by Russian and American fleets. Surveys of sea otters in the 1970s and 1980s, however, indicated a healthy and expanding population, including in Prince William Sound, prior to the oil spill. Sea otters are today an important subsistence resource for their furs.

About 1,000 sea otter carcasses were recovered following the spill, although additional animals probably died but were not recovered. In 1990 and 1991, higher-than-expected proportions of prime-age adult sea otters were found dead in western Prince William Sound, and there was evidence of higher mortality of recently weaned juveniles in oiled areas. By 1992-93, overwintering mortality rates for juveniles had decreased, but were still higher in oiled than in unoiled parts of the Sound.

Based on boat surveys conducted in Prince William Sound, there is not yet statistically significant evidence of an overall population increase following the oil spill (1990-94). This lack of a significant positive trend, however, may result from low statistical power in the survey, which will be repeated in 1996.

Based on observations by local residents, it is evident that the sea otter is abundant in much of Prince William Sound. There is no evidence that recovery has occurred, however, in heavily oiled parts of western Prince William Sound, such as around northern Knight Island. The Nearshore Vertebrate Predator project, which was started in 1995, should help clarify the recovery status of the sea otter in the western Sound.



### **Recovery Objective**

Sea otters will have recovered when the population in oiled areas returns to its prespill abundance and distribution. An increasing population trend and normal reproduction and age structure in western Prince William Sound will indicate that recovery is underway.

## **SEDIMENTS**

### **Injury and Recovery**

*Exxon Valdez* oil penetrated deeply into cobble and boulder beaches that are common on shorelines throughout the spill area, especially in sheltered habitats. Cleaning and natural degradation removed much of the oil from the intertidal zone, but visually identifiable surface and subsurface oil persists at many locations.

The last comprehensive survey of shorelines in Prince William Sound, conducted in 1993, included 45 areas of shoreline known to have had the most significant oiling. Based on that survey, it was estimated that heavy subsurface oil had decreased by 65 percent since 1991 and that surface oil had decreased by 50 percent over the same time period. Surveys also have indicated that remaining shoreline oil in the Sound is relatively stable and, by this time, is likely to decrease only slowly. Oil also persists under armored rock settings on the Kenai and Alaska peninsulas, and this oil has undergone little chemical change since 1989.

In 1995, a shoreline survey team visited 30 sites in the Kodiak Archipelago that had measurable or reported oiling in 1990 and 1991. The survey team found no oil or only trace amounts at these sites. The oiling in the Kodiak area is not persisting as it is at sites in Prince William Sound due to the higher energy settings in the Kodiak area, the state of the oil when it came ashore, and the smaller concentrations of initial oiling relative to the Sound.

Following the oil spill, chemical analyses of oil in subtidal sediments were conducted at a small number of index sites in Prince William Sound. At these sites, oil in subtidal sediments reached its greatest concentrations at water depths of 20 meters below mean low tide, although elevated levels of hydrocarbon-degrading bacteria (associated with elevated hydrocarbons) were detected at depths of 40 and 100 meters in 1990 in Prince William Sound. By 1993, however, there was little evidence of *Exxon Valdez* oil and related microbial activity at most index sites in Prince William Sound, except at those associated with sheltered beaches that were heavily oiled in 1989. These index sites--at Herring, Northwest, and Sleepy bays--are among the few sites at which subtidal oiling is still known to occur.

### **Recovery Objective**

Sediments will have recovered when there are no longer residues of *Exxon Valdez* oil on shorelines (both tidal and subtidal) in the oil-spill area. Declining oil residues and diminishing toxicity are indications that recovery is underway.

## SOCKEYE SALMON

### **Injury and Recovery**

Commercial salmon fishing was closed in Prince William Sound and in portions of Cook Inlet and near Kodiak in 1989 to avoid any possibility of contaminated salmon being sent to market. As a result, there were higher-than-desirable numbers (i.e., overescapement) of spawning sockeye salmon entering the Kenai River, Red and Akalura lakes on Kodiak Island, and other lakes on Afognak Island and the Alaska Peninsula. Initially these high escapements may have produced an overabundance of juvenile sockeye that overgrazed the zooplankton, thus altering planktonic food webs in the nursery lakes. Although the exact mechanism is unclear, the result was lost sockeye production as shown by declines in the returns of adults per spawning sockeye.

The effects of the 1989 overescapement of sockeye salmon have persisted in the Kenai River system through 1995. Although the overall escapement goal for that system was met in 1995, there is concern that the initial overescapement will continue to affect post-spill year-classes.

Production of zooplankton in both Red and Akalura lakes on Kodiak Island has rebounded from the effects of the overescapement at the time of the oil spill. There continues to be some problem in the rate of production of sockeye fry in Red and Akalura lakes. This problem may or may not be linked to the overescapement, and possible additional factors include low egg-to-fry survival, competition from other freshwater fishes, and the interception of adults in the mixed-stock fishery harvest offshore.

### **Recovery Objective**

Sockeye salmon in the Kenai River system and Red and Akalura lakes will have recovered when adult returns-per-spawner are within normal bounds.

## SUBTIDAL COMMUNITIES

### **Injury and Recovery**

Oil that was transported down to subtidal habitats apparently caused changes in the abundance and species composition of plant and animal populations below lower tides. Different habitats, including eelgrass beds, kelp beds, and adjacent nearshore waters (depths less than 20 meters), were compared at oiled and unoiled sites. Biologically, the greatest differences were detected at oiled sites with sandy sea bottoms in the vicinity of eelgrass beds, at which there were reduced abundances of eelgrass shoots and flowers and helmet crabs. The abundance and diversity of worms, clams, snails, and oil-sensitive amphipods (sand fleas) also were reduced. Organisms living in sediment at depths of 3-20 meters were especially affected. Some opportunistic (i.e., stress-tolerant) invertebrates within the substrate, mussels and worms on the eelgrass, and juvenile cod, were greater in numbers at oiled sites.

By 1993, oil concentrations in sediments had dropped considerably, so that there was little difference between oiled and unoiled sites. The eelgrass habitat, the only habitat examined in 1993, revealed fewer differences in abundances of plants and animals. As was true in 1990, however, some opportunistic species still were more abundant at oiled sites. These included the opportunistic worms and snails, mussels and worms on the eelgrass, and juvenile cod.

Preliminary results from eelgrass habitats visited in 1995 revealed that natural recovery had occurred. No difference was detected in abundance of eelgrass shoots and flowers, mussels on eelgrass, amphipods, helmet crabs, and dominant sea stars between oiled and unoiled sites. The abundance of small green sea urchins, however, was more than 10 times greater at oiled sites. The possibility that urchins increased due to a reduction in numbers of sea otters, which prey on urchins, is being examined in the Nearshore Vertebrate Predator Project. Analyses of the recent oil concentrations in sediments and organisms that live within the substrate are not yet complete.

#### **Recovery Objective**

Subtidal communities will have recovered when community composition in oiled areas, especially in association with eelgrass beds, is similar to that in unoiled areas. Indications of recovery are the return of oil-sensitive species, such as amphipods, and the reduction of opportunistic species at oiled sites.

## **SERVICES**

### **COMMERCIAL FISHING**

#### **Injury and Recovery**

Commercial fishing is a service that was reduced through injury to commercial fish species (see individual resources) and also through fishing closures. In 1989, closures affected fisheries in Prince William Sound, lower Cook Inlet, upper Cook Inlet, the outer Kenai coast, Kodiak, and Chignik. Most of these fisheries opened again in 1990. Since then, there have been no spill-related district-wide closures, except for the Prince William Sound herring fishery, which was closed in 1993 and has remained closed since then due to the collapse of the herring population and poor fishery recruitment since 1989. These closures, including the on-going closure of the herring fishery in Prince William Sound, harmed the livelihoods of persons who fish for a living and the communities in which they live. To the extent that the oil spill continues to be a factor that reduces opportunities to catch fish, there is on-going injury to commercial fishing as a service.

On this basis, the Trustee Council continues to make major investments in projects to understand and restore commercially important fish species that were injured by the oil spill. These projects include: supplementation work, such as fertilizing Coghill Lake to enhance its sockeye salmon run and construction of a barrier bypass at Little Waterfall Creek; development of tools that have almost immediate benefit for fisheries management, such as otolith mass marking of pink salmon in Prince William Sound and in-season genetic stock identification for sockeye salmon in Cook Inlet; and research such as the SEA Project and genetic mapping which will enhance the ability to predict and manage fisheries over the long-term.

#### **Recovery Objective**

Commercial fishing will have recovered when the commercially important fish species have recovered and opportunities to catch these species are not lost or reduced because of the effects of the oil spill.

## PASSIVE USE

### **Injury and Recovery**

Passive use of resources includes the appreciation of the aesthetic and intrinsic values of undisturbed areas, the value derived from simply knowing that a resource exists, and other nonuse values. Injuries to passive uses are tied to public perceptions of injured resources. Contingent valuation studies conducted by the State of Alaska for the *Exxon Valdez* oil spill litigation measured substantial losses of passive use values resulting from the oil spill.

### **Recovery Objective**

Passive uses will have recovered when people perceive that aesthetic and intrinsic values associated with the spill area are no longer diminished by the oil spill.

## RECREATION AND TOURISM

### **Injury and Recovery**

The spill disrupted use of the spill area for recreation and tourism. Resources important for wildlife viewing and which still are injured by the spill include killer whale, sea otter, harbor seal, and various seabirds. Residual oil exists on some beaches with high value for recreation, and its presence may decrease the quality of recreational experiences and discourage recreational use of these beaches.

Closures of sport hunting and fishing also affected use of the spill area for recreation and tourism. Sport fishing resources include salmon, rockfish, Dolly Varden, and cutthroat trout. Since 1992, the Alaska Board of Fisheries has imposed special restrictions on sport fishing in parts of Prince William Sound to protect cutthroat trout populations. Harlequin ducks are hunted in the spill area. The Alaska Board of Game restricted sport harvest of harlequin ducks in Prince William Sound in 1991, and those restrictions remain in place.

Recreation was also affected by changes in human use in response to the spill. For example, displacement of use from oiled areas to unoiled areas increased management problems and facility use in unoiled areas. Some facilities, such as the Green Island cabin and the Fleming Spit camp area, were injured by clean-up workers.

In the years since the oil spill, there has been a general, marked increase in visitation to the spill area. However, there are still locations within the oil-spill area which are avoided by recreational users because of the presence of residual oil.

### **Recovery Objective**

Recreation and tourism will have recovered, in large part, when the fish and wildlife resources on which they depend have recovered, recreation use of oiled beaches is no longer impaired, and facilities and management capabilities can accommodate changes in human use.

## SUBSISTENCE

### **Injury and Recovery**

Fifteen predominantly Alaskan Native communities (numbering about 2,200 people) in the oil-spill area rely heavily on harvests of subsistence resources, such as fish, shellfish, seals, deer, ducks, and geese. Many families in other communities, both in and beyond the oil-spill area, also rely on the subsistence resources of the spill area.

Subsistence harvests of fish and wildlife in most of these villages declined substantially following the oil spill. The reasons for the declines include reduced availability of fish and wildlife to harvest, concern about possible health effects of eating contaminated or injured fish and wildlife, and disruption of lifestyles due to clean-up and other activities.

Subsistence foods were tested for evidence of hydrocarbon contamination from 1989-94. No or very low concentrations of petroleum hydrocarbons were found in most subsistence foods. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration determined that eating foods with such low levels of hydrocarbons posed no significant additional risk to human health. Because shellfish can continue to accumulate hydrocarbons, however, the Oil Spill Health Task Force advised subsistence users not to eat shellfish from beaches where oil can be seen or smelled on the surface or subsurface. Residual oil exists on some beaches near subsistence communities. In general, subsistence users remain concerned and uncertain about the safety of fish and other wildlife resources.

The estimated size of the subsistence harvest in pounds per person now appears to have returned to prespill levels in some communities, according to subsistence users through household interviews conducted by the Alaska Department of Fish and Game. These interviews also indicated that the total subsistence harvest began to rebound first in the communities of the Alaska Peninsula, Kodiak Island, and the lower Kenai Peninsula, but that the harvest has lagged behind a year or more in the Prince William Sound villages. The interviews also showed that the relative contributions of certain important subsistence resources remains unusually low. The scarcity of seals, for example, has caused people in Chenega Bay to harvest fewer seals and more salmon than has been customary. Herring have been very scarce throughout Prince William Sound since 1993. Different types of resources have varied cultural and nutritional importance, and the changes in diet composition remain a serious concern to subsistence users. Subsistence users also report that they have to travel farther and expend more time and effort to harvest the same amount as they did before the spill, especially in Prince William Sound.

Subsistence users also point out that the value of subsistence cannot be measured in pounds alone. This conventional measure does not include the cultural value of traditional and customary use of natural resources. Subsistence users say that maintaining their subsistence culture depends on uninterrupted use of fish and wildlife resources. The more time users spend away from subsistence activities, the less likely that they will return to these practices. Continuing injury to natural resources used for subsistence may affect ways of life of entire communities. There is particular concern that the oil spill disrupted opportunities for young people to learn subsistence culture, and that this knowledge may be lost to them in the future.

**Recovery Objective**

Subsistence will have recovered when injured resources used for subsistence are healthy and productive and exist at prespill levels. In addition, there is recognition that people must be confident that the resources are safe to eat and that the cultural values provided by gathering, preparing, and sharing food need to be reintegrated into community life.



[Note: This table is modified from p. 32 of the Restoration Plan.]

Table 2. Resources and Services Injured by the Spill

INJURED RESOURCES				LOST or REDUCED SERVICES
<b>Recovered</b> Bald eagle	<b>Recovering</b> Archaeological resources* Common murre Intertidal communities** Mussels Pink salmon Sediments Sockeye salmon Subtidal communities  ----- *Archaeological resources are not renewable in the same way that biological resources are, but there has been significant progress toward the recovery objective. **Status of intertidal communities based largely on monitoring in sheltered rocky habitats in Prince William Sound; status of other intertidal habitats is less certain or unknown, though some recovery can be anticipated.	<b>Not Recovered</b> Cormorants (3 species) Harbor seal Harlequin duck Killer whale (AB pod) Marbled murrelet Pacific herring Pigeon guillemot Sea otter (in oiled west. PWS)	<b>Recovery Unknown</b> Black oystercatcher Clams Common loon Cutthroat trout Designated Wilderness areas Dolly Varden Kittlitz's murrelet River otter Rockfish	Commercial fishing Passive uses Recreation and Tourism including sport fishing, sport hunting, and other recreation uses Subsistence

**Amending the List of Injured Resources and Services.** The list of injured resources and services will be reviewed as new information is obtained through research, monitoring, and other studies sponsored by the Trustee Council. In addition, information may be submitted to add to or otherwise change this list. This information can include research results, assessment of population trends, ethnographic and historical data, and supportive rationale. Information that has been through an appropriate scientific review process is preferable. If data have not been peer reviewed, they should be presented in a format that permits and facilitates peer review. Information to change the list will be reviewed through the Trustee Council's scientific review process.