

Aleutian Islands Waterways Safety Committee Meeting Summary

Jan 23, 2025

12:00pm – 2:00pm (AKST) via Teleconference

Committee Members Present

Frank Vargas – Commercial Fishing, Primary
Steven Gabelein – Passenger Vessels, Primary
David Ridge – Barges & Associated Tugs, Alternate
Capt. Chris Iszler – Assist Tugs, Primary
Ernie Weiss – Port Director, Harbor Master, Local Government, Primary
Jennifer Tungul – Terminal Operators, Primary
Todd Duke – Salvage, Primary
Andrew Hartsig – Conservation Organization, Primary
Andrew Mew – Ship's Agents, Primary
Capt. Steve White – Vessel Monitoring & Tracking, Primary

Managing Board

Capt. Buddy Custard (USCG-Retired), President
Peggy McLaughlin, WSC Chair
Shari Coleman, Secretary/Treasurer

Ex-Officio

LT Caroline Wilkinson, NOAA Office of Coast Survey
Carley Lowe, NOAA/NMFS
Nadine Kochuten, ABSI

Other

Kelly Drummond, Skipper Science Partnership
Sierra Fletcher, Nuka Research
Haley Griffin, Nuka Research

The ninth meeting of the Aleutian Islands Waterways Safety Committee (AIWSC) was called to order at 12:04 PM AKST by AIWSC Chair, Peggy McLaughlin.

Motion Andrew Hartsig, Jennifer Tungul to approve the agenda as presented. Motion passes with no objection.

Motion Ernie Weiss, Andrew Hartsig to approve the meeting summary from September 23, 2024, as presented. Motion passes with no objection.

Introductions and Opening Comments

Haley Griffin began role call by listing the individuals present at the meeting. Ms. McLaughlin introduced Kelly Drummond, the Program Manager of the Skipper Science Partnership Program.

Skipper Science Partnership Presentation

The Skipper Science Partnership, led by the Aleut Community of St. Paul Island Tribal Government, began in 2016 in Unalaska. The Skipper Science App, primarily used by fishermen, was revitalized in 2021 with support from regional communities and government. Participating fishermen use the app to gather data to provide a clearer picture of environmental conditions and highlight what participants consider important to report upon. In summer 2021, data on water temperature, weather events, and sightings of seabirds and marine mammals were gathered. The program produces seasonal reports that are available on the website, with 2023 activities included in NOAA's 2023 Ecosystem Status Report for the Aleutian Islands.

Incentives like honorariums have been used, and outreach efforts have increased to expand the app's user base and generate more observations. Outreach has focused on Southeast Alaska and the Gulf of Alaska, but targeted research projects have been created in collaboration with partners to address specific data needs. These include working with the Alaska Fisheries Development Foundation on seabird bycatch in the salmon gillnet fishery and with the Alaska Fisheries Science Center on Black Cod feeding habits and shifts in the food web in the eastern Gulf of Alaska. The program is also partnered with the National Weather Service (NWS) on a project collecting in-situ observations of freezing spray accumulation on vessels. These observations will improve NWS's forecasting algorithms and enhance marine safety, in collaboration with Axiom Data Science, the Alaska Ocean Observing System (AOOS), and the Marine Exchange of Alaska.

Ms. Drummond encouraged interested parties to download the app and participate in data collection this season. For more information, contact Ms. Drummond at kdrummond@aleut.com. The Skipper Science Partnership looks forward to expanding its user base and building partnerships with Alaska's fishing communities and other organizations. Learn more at skipperscience.org. Shari Coleman and Captain Buddy Custard both thanked Kelly for her time and for presenting this information to the group.

Ex-Officio Reports

NOAA

LT Caroline Wilkinson reported that an expedition was completed last summer out to Attu Island, where three World War II ship wrecks were discovered. NOAA will soon release updated bathymetry data for this area. New surveys are also slated for St. Paul and St. George Islands this year.

ABSI

Nadine Kochuten reported that ABSI is working with the Aleut Community of St. Paul Island to write a proposal to support the various efforts of the Indigenous Sentinels Network (ISN), including to support the Skipper Science Partnership. ABSI is interested in technological investments that will improve activities such as community trainings in the region. Work hasn't yet begun on the waste management project ABSI and the Aleutian Pribilof Island's Association (APIA) are partnering on. ABSI remains engaged with Arctic Watch as well.

Work Group Reports

Storm Avoidance

Captain Steve White reported that the Storm Avoidance workgroup has made progress in drafting the guidance document and will continue to refine it. A few more meetings are needed before the document is ready to be sent to reviewers. Captain White also raised the question of who should receive the document once it's ready for review, suggesting weather routing services and vessel operators as potential recipients. Captain Custard expressed his appreciation for Captain White's leadership throughout the process.

Emergency Response

Todd Duke reported that the National Marine Fire Fighting (MFF) task force met last week and is working on a template for developing MFF plans. The Coast Guard is working collaboratively with Mr. Duke and others to develop a salvage plan as well. The plan is slated to be released soon, but there may be slight delays. There has been encouragement for the Coast Guard to conduct outreach to Aleut communities for feedback after the *Pan Viva* and *Genius Star XI* incidents. Mr. Duke also reported that Resolve Marine and Alaska Chadux are hosting a workshop on February 12 and 13, 2025 to discuss the Western Alaska oil spill response planning criteria. He encouraged anyone interested in participating to reach out to himself, Captain Custard, or Ms. Griffin.

Waterways Safety Plan (WSP)

Steven Gabelein reported that the work group held a few meetings in the summer and fall of 2024, and the WSP is at the stage where it can be split into sections for refining edits including: Wildlife, Oil Spill Response and Preparedness, Nautical Charts/Coast Pilot, potential new sections (Marine Pilotage Waters, Salvage, Polar Code, Underwater Noise Reduction, and Land Use Planning), and overall document formatting and reorganizing. Mr. Duke volunteered to make edits to the Salvage section. Ms. Griffin will reach out to the work group members to assign sections for review.

Managing Board Report

Captain Custard reported that the Managing Board met just before the holiday, focusing heavily on recruitment and budgeting. Two solicitations were sent out to the Committee and public, one to solicit interest in the vacant Managing Board position and the other to fill primary and secondary committee seats. The Board is working with APIA to possibly obtain a funding under a grant awarded to APIA as part of the Solid Waste Infrastructure for Recycling Grant Program. Captain Custard is also working with lobbyists at the state legislature to push for funding. He stated that members will see a letter in the near future soliciting another round of volunteer donations. The Committee has about \$1,500 in the bank currently. Captain Custard spoke to the recent Navigation and Vessel Inspection Circular (NVIC) titled, "Guidance for Improvement and Enhancement of Cooperative Relationships Through Local Harbor Safety Committees". While the AIWSC follows many of the elements included in this document, the Managing Board will review the document more thoroughly for any opportunities to continue improving the Committee.

Facilitator's Report

Ms. Griffin reported that Nuka Research has been providing support to the Storm Avoidance and WSP work groups and Managing Board since the last committee meeting.

Closing Comments

Andrew Hartsig asked if Captain Custard plans to advocate for AIWSC funding only or if it would be more general to other Harbor Safety Committees (HSCs) in the state. Captain Custard replied he needs to speak with legislators first to determine which argument would be the strongest for obtaining funding but agreed a statewide approach may be best. He encouraged others who may be working with the legislature to put in a good word for the HSCs. Mr. Hartsig stated that Ocean Conservancy obtained permission to engage with state legislatures and will reach out to Captain Custard separately.

Andrew Mew stated that he may have identified someone to fill the P&I Clubs seat on the Committee. He will send their contact information to Ms. Griffin. Captain Custard thanked Mr. Mew and expressed his appreciation to the group for volunteering their time to attend the meeting. He stated that he will work with the Ex Officio members to encourage their participation.

Review Action Items

- Ms. Griffin will email the WSP work group to assign members sections of the WSP for review.
- Mr. Mew will send Ms. Griffin contact information for the individual interested in the P&I Clubs seat.
- Ms. Griffin will draft a meeting summary for the Committee's review.
- Ms. Griffin will send a Doodle Poll to the Committee to determine availability for the next meeting.

Next Meeting Date

The next meeting will take place in late March or early April. A doodle poll will be sent out to determine member availability.

Motion Captain Custard to adjourn the meeting. Meeting adjourned by at 12:48pm AKDT.

Meeting Materials: 1) Meeting Protocols, 2) Current Roster, 3) September 23, 2024, Meeting Summary, and 4) Waterways Safety Plan.