

Aleutian Islands Waterways Safety Committee Meeting Summary

September 23, 2024

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

Committee Members Present

Steven Gabelein – Passenger Vessels, Primary
Ingo Rose – Tank Vessels, Primary
Capt. Seth Chase – Barges & Associated Tugs, Primary
David Ridge – Barges & Associated Tugs, Alternate
Capt. Chris Iszler – Assist Tugs, Primary
Ernie Weiss – Port Director, Harbor Master, Local Government, Primary
Kyle Watson – Salvage, Primary
Andrew Hartsig – Conservation Organization, Primary
Capt. David Arzt – Marine Pilots, Primary
Andrew Mew – Ship’s Agents, Primary
Karen Pletnikoff – Subsistence User, Primary
Capt. Steve White – Vessel Monitoring & Tracking, Primary

Ex-Officio

Ethan Nichols, ADF&G
LT Caroline Wilkinson, NOAA Office of Coast Survey
Carley Lowe, NOAA/NMFS
Bridget Crokus, USFWS
Jeff Williams, USFWS
Nadine Kochuten, ABSI
Coast Guard Sector Western Alaska & U.S. Arctic
Capt. Christopher Culpepper
CDR Scott Farr
Elizabeth Burges

Managing Board

Capt. Buddy Custard (USCG-Retired), President
Peggy McLaughlin, WSC Chair

Other

Sarah Allan, NOAA
Erika Ammann, NOAA
Ounalashka Corporation
Chelsea Bramble, Ounalashka Corporation
Rick Marks, City of Unalaska Contracted Lobbyist for Federal Matters
Frank Kelty, City of Unalaska Natural Resource Analyst
Chris Hladick, Contracted Advisor to City of Unalaska Administration (Former City Manager)
Marjie Veeder, City of Unalaska Acting City Manager
Sebastian O’Kelly, City of Unalaska Contracted Lobbyist for Federal Matters
Veronica Valera, USFWS
Sierra Fletcher, Nuka Research and Planning
Haley Griffin, Nuka Research and Planning
Samantha Ryea, Nuka Research and Planning

The eighth meeting of the Aleutian Islands Waterways Safety Committee (AIWSC) was called to order at 12:02 PM AKDT by AIWSC Chair, Peggy McLaughlin.

Motion Captain Steve White, Andrew Mew to approve the agenda as presented. Motion passes with no objection.

Motion Captain White, David Ridge(?) to approve the meeting summary from May 21, 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. Peggy then introduced Marjie Veeder, Sebastian O’Kelly, Frank Kelty, and Chris Hladick as representatives of the City of Unalaska invited to listen in on the briefing of the draft Assessment and Restoration Plan and Environmental Assessment (DARP/EA) for marine resources injured by the *M/V Selendang Ayu* oil spill provided by Sarah Allan, the regional resource coordinator in Alaska for NOAA’s Assessment & Restoration Division. Peggy then introduced both Sarah Allan and Erika Ammann, a fisheries biologist within the Alaska Region of NOAA’s Habitat Conservation Division and thanked them for taking the time to speak with the WSC.

Summary of DARP/EA for Marine Resources Injured by the Selendang Ayu Oil Spill

Sarah Allan and Erika Ammann provided a brief overview of the Selendang Ayu incident and the draft Assessment and Restoration Plan for marine resources, noting its focus on potential action plans for restoring shoreline habitats. The Natural Resource Trustees identified a range of potential projects that would provide restoration for shoreline habitats in the Aleutians Region and evaluated them based on established criteria.

The preferred restoration alternative identified by the Trustees was to establish the Aleutians Watch Program and Communications Upgrades in the Region. This will expand real-time monitoring capabilities to AIS-equipped vessels that are currently unmonitored and improve safety by tracking these vessels; upgrade land-based AIS receivers to have transmit capabilities; and compile contact information for the unmonitored vessels to facilitate traffic management and response. AIS will be used 24/7 to track currently unmonitored vessels through the Aleutians Region to identify vessels at risk and notify responders if necessary. Timely detection of and response to vessels at risk will prevent future oil spills and associated impacts to shoreline habitats. While one of the potential restoration project alternatives was to allocate funds to the AIWSC, the Trustees were unable to quantify reductions in spill risks resulting from the AIWSC's work.

A budget will be developed after the Plan is finalized for submittal to the National Pollution Funds Center (NPFC). The funds requested from the NPFC, which administers Oil Spill Liability Trust Fund, must meet the requirements of the Oil Pollution Act of 1990 (OPA 90). Frank Kelty asked about the possibility for Plan Alternatives 3 (distributing bilge socks and sorbent pads) and 4 (funding for the AIWSC) to receive funding. Erika replied that legal constraints may limit which projects can be funded and encouraged the City of Unalaska to include suggestions in their comments to support these alternatives consistent with the criteria from OPA 90. Sebastian O'Kelly added that it would be helpful for Unalaska to know the amount of funding and how it will be administered.

The public comment period is open until October 3. Comments should be sent in writing to Sarah's email (sarah.allan@noaa.gov) with 'Selendang Ayu' in the subject line. Ms. Allan also encouraged the group to reach out with any questions.

Bridget Crokus added that a restoration plan for marine mammals, birds, and human use marine resources is being drafted by the Trustees, led by the Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), with ongoing stakeholder collaboration to address the Region's ecological needs. A completed draft is anticipated no earlier than the end of 2025.

All relevant Selendang Ayu case documents, including the draft Damage Assessment and Restoration plan for marine resources, can be found here: <https://www.fws.gov/project/mv-selendang-ayu-oil-spill-natural-resource-damage-assessment-and-restoration>.

Ex-Officio Reports

USCG

Captain Culpepper reported that the Coast Guard has committed to purchasing the commercially available icebreaker 'Aiviq' to be homed in Juneau. The vessel will be operational, then dry docked for refitting and then operational once again within the next calendar year. Three patrol boats are on schedule for decommissioning within the next year and will be replaced by three Fast Response Cutters, set to arrive in Kodiak and used for maintenance and weapons sustainment. One of the Cutters will eventually rehome in Homer after their expansion project is completed. The new vessels will be able to strengthen the network of capability and capacity in Southeast Alaska. Cutters will remain present in Kotzebue for operations over the next few weeks. The Cutter 'Healy' will be back in operation soon after an electrical fire occurred. The Coast Guard has also been holding exercises, including a recent tsunami exercise.

Andrew Mew inquired about the reason for homeporting the 'Aiviq' in Juneau instead of Kodiak or Dutch Harbor. David Ridge also asked about the vessel's towing capabilities. Captain Culpepper explained that Juneau is a more suitable location given the maintenance facilities, mooring capabilities, and infrastructure present to support the vessel crew. Although this asset would be beneficial in Kodiak or Dutch Harbor, there isn't sufficient linear space in those areas to accommodate it. 'Aiviq' will still be deployed to these locations when needed.

NOAA

LT Caroline Wilkinson reported that the vessel *Fairweather* suffered a steering casualty and was not able to complete some of its mapping missions in the region. However, communications are ongoing to continue mapping efforts with the help from other vessels and resources.

USFWS

Bridget Crokus reported that the USFWS recently received 1,900 hard copies of the Alaska Spill Response Wildlife Identification Aid, a reprinting funded by the Oil Spill Recovery Institute. Created in cooperation with the Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G) and NOAA Fisheries, this tool helps first responders to quickly identify wildlife species during an oil spill and begin the appropriate response operations as soon as

possible. Please reach out to Ms. Crokus (bridget_crokus@fws.gov) or fwsakspillresponse@fws.gov to request hard copies of the Wildlife ID Aid. An electronic copy of this ID Aid and a tutorial on its use are available here: <https://alaskarrt.org/LinkPage?site=arrt&page=wildlife>.

ADFG

Ethan Nichols provided updates on the status of various fisheries in the state and federal waters of the Aleutian Islands and Bering Sea Management area. Fisheries this season continue to target golden king crab, sablefish, halibut, and Pacific cod. The North Peninsula Dungeness crab fishery has landed 815,000 lbs so far and will end on October 15. Vessels also continue to fish for pollock and cod in the Bering Sea and Bristol Bay. The North Pacific Fishery Management Council has yet to set quotas for winter crab fisheries, however a significant increase has been observed in the population numbers of adult male and juvenile snow crabs.

ABSI

Nadine Kochuten stated that she will be taking over for Aaron Poe as the primary representative on the Committee for the Aleutian and Bering Sea Initiative (ABSI). ABSI has been working closely with the Arctic Watch effort, and there is a handful of workshops ABSI has scheduled from November into spring 2025 in coordination with several Tribes and regional organizations (i.e., Unanga Tribe, Aleutian Pribilof Islands Association (APIA) and Kodiak Area Native Association). Ms. Kochuten also reported coordinating with Karen Pletnikoff and APIA to establish a sustainable materials management program in the Region. ABSI will also be making a \$5,000 contribution to the WSC.

Work Group Reports

Storm Avoidance

Captain White reported that the work group's first meeting focused on considerations associated with developing storm avoidance guidance for vessels in the Aleutian Islands. He thanked the group for their expertise, including the input from Pilots and the Coast Guard. Captain White highlighted that the Marine Exchange of Alaska has real-time monitoring from the *R/V Sikuliaq* and is working on a project to better predict icing conditions. Ms. McLaughlin suggested that this work should eventually be included in the Waterways Safety Plan (WSP). Participation is encouraged at the work group meeting on September 26.

Emergency Response

Captain Custard spoke on behalf of Todd Duke, noting that although the work group has not yet convened, Todd is actively working behind the scenes as part of a national initiative and has gathered information for the work group members to review. David Arzt concurred.

Waterways Safety Plan

Steven Gabelein shared that the group met several times over the last couple of months to review the WSP. Overall, five main areas have been identified within the WSP to target for revisions, including: overall document formatting and reorganizing, wildlife sections, oil spill response and preparedness, nautical charts/Coast Pilot sections, and five potential new sections. The new sections propose to include information on Marine Pilotage waters, salvage, the Polar Code, underwater noise reduction, and land use planning. Ms. McLaughlin charged all members with reviewing the revised version of the WSP.

Managing Board Report

Captain Custard echoed his appreciation to the work group for beginning to revise the WSP. He stated that the Managing Board's primary goal is to sustain the WSC via funding, noting that, as a 501(c)(3) charitable non-profit, donations are tax-deductible. Alaska Chaduġ, Centerline Logistics, and Resolve Marine have made a donation to the WSC, and the Board is working with ABSI and APIA to confirm their contributions. The Board will also submit comments on the Selendang Ayu DARP/EA and engage with the Alaska state legislature in the upcoming session to seek additional funding. Captain White inquired about the WSC's financial status, and Captain Custard replied that it costs around \$30,000 annually to maintain the organization's activities, with \$10,000 currently secured.

Facilitator's Report

Haley Griffin reported that the WSC now has an active LinkedIn page, encouraging everyone to connect and share ideas to create public engagement such as upcoming training opportunities, exercises, or community events. She also stated that implementing revisions to the Waterways Safety Plan is the current focus of the Committee, but that ideas for future presentations are welcome, too.

Briefing from Coast Guard Sector Western Alaska & U.S. Arctic

Captain Culpepper thanked Ms. McLaughlin's team in Dutch Harbor for their collaboration and noted that the new district Prevention Department Head, CDR Christine Brown, and Matt Burns will continue key initiatives in their new roles. The Office of Marine Environmental Response is coordinating public comments on their CG-MER Policy Letters and gathering feedback from Tribal partners. He encouraged input on these letters and mentioned that past meeting information is available online. The Coast Guard is increasing outreach efforts this fall, focusing on Incident Command System (ICS) training for cities and Tribes in the Aleutian Chain. Captain Culpepper will also conduct a briefing on the M/V Genius Star XI incident and invited participants to listen in. He expressed appreciation for the informative WSC meetings and insights from regional pilot associations, highlighting the balance between safe operations and maritime security in the Region, especially for growing issues like storm avoidance. He acknowledged ongoing challenges with China and Russia but reaffirmed the Coast Guard's commitment to maintaining a presence near U.S. waters. The agency works closely with the Department of Defense and remains mindful of subsistence fisheries and whaling to ensure coexistence among waterway users. Captain Culpepper welcomes feedback and creative solutions for improvement. Ms. McLaughlin thanked him for his availability to the WSC and the Dutch Harbor group.

New Business

Election of WSC Vice-Chair

Ms. Griffin explained the rationale for including this agenda item, noting that the WSC did not conduct an election for the Vice-Chair at the last committee meeting. Ms. Pletnikoff inquired about any expectations for the position, and since none exist, Ms. Griffin proposed that the Managing Board develop a list of expectations for the Vice-Chair role to present to the Committee before anyone considers taking on the position. Both Ms. McLaughlin and Captain Custard concurred with this suggestion.

Motion Captain Custard, Ernie Weiss to table the election of the WSC Vice-Chair until the Managing Board provides a list of expectations for the position. Motion passes with no objection.

Closing Comments

Ms. Griffin provided an overview of the discussions held during the meeting and outlined the action items. She thanked the Ex Officio representatives and Work Group Chairs for providing informative updates, and all participants for attending the meeting. Ms. McLaughlin also thanked participants for taking the time to attend the meeting and continue pushing forward the work of the Committee. The next meeting of the Managing Board will take place on December 10, from 11:00am – 12:00pm AKST.

Next Steps

Review Action Items

- Members will reach out to Ms. Griffin if interested in being a part of the Storm Avoidance work group.
- Members will review the revised version of the WSP.
- Nuka Research will work with the Managing Board to draft comments regarding the draft Assessment and Restoration Plan and Environmental Assessment for marine resources injured by the Selendang Ayu.
- Ms. Griffin will share the draft Damage Assessment and Restoration Plan with the Committee.
- Ms. Griffin will send an updated version of the Waterways Safety Plan to the Committee.
- Ms. Griffin will re-circulate information regarding donations to the Committee.
- 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 January. A doodle poll will be sent out to determine member availability.

Motion Andrew Hartsig, Steven Gabelein to adjourn the meeting. Meeting adjourned by Ms. McLaughlin at 1:34pm AKDT.

Meeting Materials: 1) Meeting Protocols, 2) Current Roster, 3) May 21, 2024, Meeting Summary, and 4) Waterways Safety Plan.