

Perspective from a Land & Resource Manager
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I still remember the phone call from the Coast Guard that December day, there is a vessel that has lost power and it is drifting towards Boglof Island. I am the Property Manager for the Ounalashka Corporation and I was the one that took the phone call from the Coast Guard notifying OC of the potential grounding. My coworker and I were wondering where is Boglof island. Then we realized they meant Bogoslof Island. Bogoslof Island is refuge land, it is a haul out for the endangered Stellar Sea Lion and Northern Fur Seal it is also nesting grounds for many types of sea birds. Pristine lands rarely touched by man. We were devastated to learn that it was heading towards that island. Imagine the conflict between relief and sadness knowing that it had missed Bogoslof but was now heading towards Skan Bay on Unalaska Island.

How frustrating to know there is nothing you can do but wait and listen while a vessel is moving towards the island where your community is located. And to make matters worse it was occurring on the Bering Sea side of the island where there is not a lot of human contact.

After the grounding there were more frustrations.

On the plus side, the incident command conducted daily community meetings, plus as an adjacent land owner and tribal representative there were daily briefings.

However, community members did not feel as if the Incident command was taking their suggestions seriously. In the beginning there was a lot of community participation, but by the end of the spill response there were hardly any participants.

People said that the oil would head towards Unalaska bay but this was not believed. Only to have tar balls start to show up in Unalaska bay.

People were questioning why couldn't the oil be removed from the Selendang Ayu to another vessel, but the response was we are bringing in helicopters to bring the oil over from the Selendang Ayu to Unalaska. But, it took forever to get the larger helicopters to Unalaska.

Why is Dan Magone and his crew the only vessel over at Skan Bay placing boom across the salmon streams. Because the other vessel is still looking for the proper skiffs and a contract is not in place yet. If it weren't for Dan working on his own there would have been the potential for more oil to make it into our salmon streams.

As a tribal representative I was concerned about the traditional use areas on the island. How many sea birds were perishing from exposure to the bunker C, are there sea mammals such as sea otter swimming thru the contaminated water, what about all of the soy beans on the beaches, are they killing the invertebrates, did the soy beans bring in foreign seed and are they going to grow on that side of the island and did rats swim over from the vessel.

The Bering Sea side is still fairly pristine it is not like Unalaska Bay where there is so much commercial traffic. Our tribal members are still leery of gathering clams in Unalaska Bay and there is no shooting within City limits. Therefore, many tribal members utilize the Bering Sea side.

However, during the fuel recovery period and the vessel salvage period there was a safety zone around the ship. Only officials and clean up crew were allowed in this area. So, for almost a year and a half the area was closed for our traditional use.

I must admit that if the incident command had not included Captain Ron Morris of the United States Coast Guard, Howard Hile of Gallagher Marine, Bob Matson and Gary Foly of the Alaska State DEC feelings and frustrations could have been worse. Because we were meeting with them daily a good working relationship was formed during the fuel and salvage recovery period.

It has been almost 5 years since the Selendang Ayu incident. Why aren't all of these entities working with us now to prevent another such catastrophe?

Why isn't the State of Alaska and the United States Coast Guard working with the Community of Unalaska to get an ocean going tug stationed in our harbor? Yes there are tugs at Unalaska but they are harbor tugs. They are not built to go into the rough seas; they are not large enough to stop a vessel the size of the Selendang Ayu from going aground. I have also heard rumors that the owners of the harbor tugs are telling their crew not to respond to these types of incidents. We have heard it is because ocean going tugs are too

expensive to station here. But what is the yearly expense of one tug compared to the millions that are spent during oil clean up operations.

Why hasn't the State of Alaska put a fuel response program in place at Unalaska? During the Selendang Ayu incident there was talk by the State of placing equipment here to be on standby if such an incident should happen again. There should be skiffs, boom and skimmers suitable for our area in place in case there is another spill. Is the State still working on this?

Is there a local hazwopper trained team in place in Unalaska? So many people were brought in from outside the community to work on the clean up. The State could work with the City and the Tribe to get funding to train individuals that are based in Unalaska. This would be very beneficial as most incidents happen in bad weather which makes it difficult to bring in people or equipment.

The City of Unalaska is the number 1 fishing port in terms of pounds landed in the nation and has been for the past 10 years at least. Yet we are one of the least protected ports. Imagine the financial catastrophe that could happen if just one tar ball was sucked into one of our canneries water intake systems. Not to mention the continued loss of our traditional use areas.

February 1989 the grounding of the Swallow on Ulakta Head, November 1997 the grounding of the Kuroshima at Summer Bay, December 2004 the grounding of the Selendang Ayu at Skan Bay. This doesn't even include the many other vessels that have grounded or almost grounded throughout the years.

Something needs to be done now to protect our community and the other communities on the Aleutian Island chain.