



Audubon | ALASKA

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VIA ONLINE SUBMISSION

<http://alaskadec.commentinput.com/?id=fdLgJY2gM>

Seth Robinson
Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation
Division of Spill Prevention and Response – Prevention, Preparedness, and Response Program
610 University Avenue
Fairbanks, AK 99709

Re: Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation’s Oil Discharge Prevention and Contingency Plan Public Scoping

March 16, 2020

Dear Mr. Robinson,

Thank you for the opportunity to comment during this scoping period on the rules and laws regarding the Oil Discharge Prevention and Contingency Plan. The statutory and regulatory authorities at 18 AAC 75, Article 4 and AS 46.04 comprise the state’s discharge prevention and contingency plan and are designed to prevent oil spills and ensure a trained response if preventive measures fail. We are strongly opposed to any changes that erode these standards or that would increase a risk of a catastrophic oil spill within our state’s waters. We urge Alaska’s Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) to retain these strong rules and laws.

Oil spills are catastrophic for coastal and marine birds and surrounding ecosystems. Some birds will die from direct toxicity from the oil, which causes internal organ failure. Other birds will die from cold and exposure because oil harms their protective layer of feathers, allowing frigid water to seep in close to their skin. Still other birds may experience lingering effects to health and reproductivity, when nesting and chick rearing success are reduced. Both resident birds and migratory birds passing through an oil spill area may be affected. According to the National Park Service, the best estimates of wildlife deaths from the Exxon Valdez oil spill are “250,000 seabirds, 2,800 sea otters, 300 harbor seals, 250 bald eagles, up to 22 killer whales, and billions of salmon and herring eggs.”¹ The current regulatory regime are designed to prevent this type of disaster and protect Alaska’s ecosystems and

¹ National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior, *20 Years Later . . . Exxon Valdez Oil Spill* (Fact Sheet), March 1, 2009, available at https://www.nps.gov/kefi/learn/nature/upload/kefi_evos_1989-2009_qa.pdf

wildlife, as well as the communities that depend on these resources. The current rules and laws on oil spill prevention and response should remain in force.

Important bird areas (IBAs) are sites that are important at a global, continental, or state scale, evidenced by containing a significant percentage of the global, continental, or state population of one or more bird species. Alaska's coastal and marine waters are especially important as bird habitat. There are over 200 IBAs in Alaska, of which more than 150 are globally important coastal or marine IBAs.² We attach a map depicting these areas to these comments. These are the areas where birds would be particularly hard-hit by an oil spill. The sheer number of IBAs along Alaska's coastline and in our marine waters demonstrate the critical importance of maintaining strong oil spill regulations, such as the laws and rules in place at 18 AAC 75, Article 4 and AS 46.04.

Thank you again for the opportunity to comment on this important matter. While we have focused in this letter on the value of current state oil spill regulations for Alaska's bird life, we also support the numerous comments sent in highlighting impacts to our Alaska communities, fishing, tourism, local economies, public health, and Alaska Native interests. We urge DEC to maintain the strong regulatory regime that is already on the books in Alaska. Please feel free to contact us with any questions, clarifications, or requests for additional information.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Natalie Dawson', is positioned above the typed name and title.

Natalie Dawson
Executive Director
natalie.dawson@audubon.org

² Audubon Alaska, *Important Bird Areas* (map), produced August 20, 2014, available at http://docs.audubon.org/sites/default/files/documents/alaska_ibas_type_20aug2014.pdf



Important Bird Areas

- Colony Groups
- Marine Areas
- Coastal/Nearshore Areas
- Interior Areas

Areas shown are of global, continental, or statewide significance.

Map produced 20 Aug 2014

For more information visit <http://nctappaudubon.org/IBA/State/US-AK>.

