

# Aleutian Islands Waterways Safety Committee Meeting Summary

March 1, 2024

1:00pm – 3:00pm (AKST) via Teleconference

## Managing Board

Captain Buddy Custard (USCG, Ret.), President  
Shari Coleman, Secretary/Treasurer  
Peggy McLaughlin, Vice-President & WSC Chairwoman

## Committee Members Present

Chris Woodley – At Sea Fish Processors, Primary  
Frank Vargas – Commercial Fishing, Primary  
Steven Gabelein – Passenger Vessels, Primary  
Captain Seth Chase – Barges & Associated Tugs, Primary  
David Ridge – Barges & Associated Tugs, Alternate  
Ernie Weiss – Local Government, Primary  
Jennifer Tungul – Terminal Operators, Primary  
Matthew Odum – Oil Spill Response, Primary  
Todd Duke – Salvage, Primary  
Kyle Watson – Salvage, Alternate  
Andrew Hartsig – Conservation Organization, Primary  
Andrew Mew – Ship’s Agents, Primary  
Morgann Machalek – Ship’s Agents, Alternate  
Karen Pletnikoff – Subsistence User, Primary

## Ex Officio

CDR Scott Farr, USCG Sector Anchorage  
LT Tyler Justus, USCG Sector Anchorage  
Daniel Payne, USCG Sector Anchorage  
Ethan Nichols, ADF&G  
LT Caroline Wilkinson, NOAA  
Aaron Poe, Aleutian Bering Sea Initiative  
Jeff Williams, USFWS  
Bridget Crokus, USFWS

## Other

MST2 Elizabeth Burges, USCG Sector Anchorage  
BMC Stephen Braun, USCG Sector Anchorage  
Howard Minor, ADEC  
Patrick Bliss, City of Unalaska  
A.W. McAfee, Resolve Marine  
Sierra Fletcher, Nuka Research and Planning  
Haley Griffin, Nuka Research and Planning

The seventh meeting of the Aleutian Islands Waterways Safety Committee was called to order at 1:00 PM AKST by Chairwoman, Peggy McLaughlin.

**Motion Mr. Hartsig, Ms. Tungul to approve the agenda with one amendment involving changing the teleconference information from Zoom to Microsoft Teams. Motion passes with no objection.**

## Committee Orientation & Expectations

Ms. McLaughlin opened the meeting by thanking attendees for their continued support of the Committee and for volunteering their time to come together and participate in the first full meeting since 2020. She briefly reviewed the meeting protocols and expectations for the committee members, provided an overview of the history of the AIWSC, and introduced newly appointed members to the group.

## Opening Comments and Introductions

No actionable items arose from discussion.

## Ex-Officio Reports

Ex-Officio members took turns introducing themselves and provided a short overview of their organization and some the current work being done in the Aleutian Islands region. LT Caroline Wilkinson (NOAA) thanked the committee members for their dedication and participation. Jeff Williams (USFWS) expressed his pleasure in being reinvented in the committee and introduced his colleague Bridget Crokus who took over for Angela Matz and will be serving as the alternate ex-officio member for USFWS. Ethan Nichols (ADF&G) also introduced himself and his background, stating he was happy to be a part of the group. He provided an overview of the state managed fisheries in the region, including the importance of the Pacific cod fishery in Dutch Harbor.

## Managing Board Report

Captain Buddy Custard thanked the meeting’s participants for volunteering to remain involved on the Committee and welcomed new committee members. He spoke to the Waterways Safety Plan (WSP) and the importance of keeping it updated over the years to maintain its relevance for mariners in the region.

He spoke to the results of the Board meetings held over the past few months and detailed that the Committee is now in good standing with the State of Alaska as a 501(3)(c) organization. Captain Custard then mentioned the history of funding for the Committee, and that the Board is pursuing new routes of funding now that the Selendang Ayu settlement funds have been depleted. He told members to expect to receive a letter soliciting donations to the Committee in the next few weeks. The Board is also pursuing grants to fund the organization. He stated a priority of the Board to fill the remaining primary member vacancies and continue to have an active committee. Karen Pletnikoff thanked the Board for their good work behind the scenes.

### **Facilitator's Report**

Sierra Fletcher thanked everyone for their participation in the meeting and provided a background on the history of Nuka Research's work with the AIWSC. Haley Griffin then spoke to the coordination work Nuka Research has provided the Managing Board with over the past months and the work they will continue to do with the Committee. She asked members to visit and review the newly updated AIWSC website (<https://www.aleutianislandswsc.org>) to provide feedback on its structure or any new content ideas.

### **New Business**

#### **Waterways Safety Plan Updates**

Ms. McLaughlin began the discussion by stating the value of the WSP, and that there are components of the Plan that need to be updated. She reviewed the top priorities for review and update based on responses to an online questionnaire sent during meeting scheduling: AIS Systems (C.2), Oil Spill Response and Preparedness (B.10), and Marine Mammal Conflict Avoidance (B.12).

#### AIS Systems

Ms. McLaughlin spoke to potential updates to the AIS Systems section of the WSP, pointing out that organizations (e.g., Marine Exchange Alaska) who are implementing technological changes and improvements to their systems are going to be a valuable source of information for maintaining the usability and relevance of this section.

#### Oil Spill Response and Preparedness

Captain Custard described a Coast Guard Request for Information (RFI) open through March 4. (Link: <https://www.regulations.gov/document/USCG-2023-0824-0001>). He touched on the recent incident with the M/V GENIUS STAR XI and spoke about the need to consider overall emergency response issues and how incidents may evolve past just oil spill response (e.g., salvage issues).

Ms. Pletnikoff stated that the Aleutian Pribilof Islands Association (APIA). She underscored the RFI opportunity as an important chance to highlight the growth of capacity throughout the region where a lot of approved plans previously had lower response standards and longer response times. Andrew Hartsig added that the new standards to be issued by the Coast Guard will be helpful to mariners in the region for years to come.

Chris Woodley stated that he wasn't aware of the RFI opportunity and doesn't know if many fishermen in the region know about it either. He asked to extend the deadline of the comment period. With a number of boats in the Aleutian Islands (58 footers with a large fuel capacity), he asked if this list of vessels was public information so the Committee can understand if the current vessel fleet poses a different risk than vessels that used to be active in the region. Ethan Nichols shared the following list of the vessel fleet that operates in the Pacific cod fishery in Dutch Harbor.

Vessel Name	ADFG Number	Vessel Length (ft)	Vessel Type
Afognak Strait	76858	58	Catcher Vessel
Alaskan Star	76584	58	Catcher Vessel
Aleutian Endurance	79091	58	Catcher Vessel
Aleutian Spirit	40128	58	Catcher Vessel
April Lane	77934	56	Catcher Vessel
Bruin (was Exceller)	47952	58	Catcher Vessel
Cape Reliant (was Chasina Bay)	65119	58	Catcher Vessel
Cerulean	77211	56	Catcher Vessel
Commitment	24592	58	Catcher Vessel
Cynosure	76034	57	Catcher Vessel
Halcyon	78919	58	Catcher Vessel
Icy Mist	75998	58	Catcher Vessel
Insatiable	78238	57	Catcher Vessel
Kaia	76787	58	Catcher Vessel
Magnus Martens	77144	58	Catcher Vessel
Ocean Bay	68008	58	Catcher Vessel
Oracle	77897	57	Catcher Vessel
Raven Bay	47511	56	Catcher Vessel
Saint Paul	75473	58	Catcher Vessel
Saint Peter	76769	58	Catcher Vessel
Vigilant	77747	58	Catcher Vessel
Winter Bay	78286	57	Catcher Vessel

CDR Scott Farr indicated that he would check on whether there would be a deadline extension for comments in response to the RFI. Another organization has requested an extension and the USCG is also still in the process of completing Tribal consultations. It is believed that a deadline extension has been successfully approved (not 100% confirmed), which extends the current deadline from March 4<sup>th</sup> to May 3, 2024.

Ms. Pletnikoff pointed out that input from the fishing community is valuable when the Coast Guard is looking to upgrade or expand their planning criteria. The dangers of new types of cargo and vessel propulsions systems transiting via innocent passage in the region is one of the reasons the Committee should be considering the bigger picture and not just oil spill response. Ms. McLaughlin concurred and suggested that the Committee consider adding a section in the WSP on other environmental impacts as things continue to change. She stated that on the map, certain passes along the chain are particularly vulnerable areas the Committee will want to consider.

Kyle Watson suggested that the WSP should include information on the Remediation of Legacy Underwater Threats. Although there is only 1 roulette wreck (John Straub) in the Aleutian Islands region, it is a medium risk threat that had 9,000 tons of heavy fuel oil on board when it sank. He recommended it as something the Committee should have on their radar for inclusion into the plan, as it is located south and just east of Unalaska. Ms. McLaughlin thanked Mr. Watson and asked if the Committee could also identify that and other underwater hazards (e.g., live water mines) for inclusion in the WSP. LT Caroline Wilkinson stated that she has been working with the Navy to update the charts around Dutch Harbor with more locations on unexploded ordinances in and around Unalaska, which will hopefully come out within a month or so.

#### Marine Mammal Conflict Avoidance

Ms. McLaughlin stated that the Committee looked at restricted/awareness areas related to marine mammals when forming the WSP, and should now consider if certain zones, species, or maps have been excluded that are important to minimizing conflicts. Captain Seth Chase voiced his concern with the dissemination of this information, as it is covered in 50 CFR and a lot of commercial vessels use 33 CFR, where there is limited reference to exclusion zones. He asked if NOAA could add these zones into their new electronic navigational charts (ENCs). Ernie Weiss replied that NOAA is entertaining a petition to expand the right whale critical habitat where it would connect the Bering Sea waters to Kodiak Island and in waters around the Aleutians. A 12-month determination was announced in September and the Aleutians East Borough plans to submit comments because the decision will have an impact on local maritime operations.

Ms. McLaughlin restated the AIWSC tasks of representing safety, navigation, and the environment, and that it is appropriate for stakeholders with vested interest to take action and then the Committee will work with the results. Ms. Pletnikoff added that the region's fisheries are highly depended on, but people don't want to see

the whale's population decline as they were once depended on for subsistence. As electronic communications grow they will better address problems in the region, including providing better information on migration patterns that might involve closures that are justified through a more-timely electronic reporting system. This is an opportunity to leverage technologies to continue to improve safety for both people and animals. Mr. Hartsig agreed and commented that Marine Exchange (MXAK) is piloting a bunch of great tools that could help minimize impacts to marine mammals. It will be important to involve MXAK's tracking capabilities.

Although the USFWS works with NOAA but doesn't represent the marine mammals in question, Mr. Williams suggested the committee to consider having a representative from the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) on these calls. A good contact for the NMFS and marine mammal avoidance is Sadie Wright ([sadie.wright@noaa.gov](mailto:sadie.wright@noaa.gov)). There are also updated Wildlife Protection Guidelines that should be reviewed in alignment with the updated WSP. The Committee will stay in front of the issue on the decision to increase protections of the right whale because it has the potential to affect maritime operations and will be important to keep updated in the WSP.

#### Other Plan Issues

Todd Duke shared that he was one of the salvage master's on the M/V GENUIS STAR XI and thanked Ms. McLaughlin, the City of Unalaska, pilots, and Coast Guard for their help in the incident. He stated some issues were experienced with the mooring buoy during the incident and emphasized the importance of maintaining the mooring buoy since it is a place of refuge. Ms. McLaughlin stated the intent of forming a sub-committee to identify potential places of refuge (PPORs) for response and ports of refuge by factoring in the requirements for a PPOR. Mr. Duke volunteered to chair the sub-committee, and Mr. Watson, Dan Payne, Captain Custard, and David Ridge volunteered to participate. Mr. Ridge added that there are concerns around the failure of mooring systems, and it would be beneficial to compile guidelines and best practices to include in the Plan.

Ms. Crokus informed the Committee of efforts within the Oil Spill Recovery Institute (OSRI) to evaluate places of refuge for deep-draft vessels in the Northwest Arctic, North Slope, and Aleutian Island regions (<https://osri.us/projects/past-awards/entry/3391/>). They are holding a meeting soon to discuss the results of the evaluation – Mr. Williams will forward the information to the Committee. Ms. McLaughlin asked if anyone in the region was contacted for the study, and if a presentation from this group would be possible.

#### **SWIFR Grant**

Ms. Pletnikoff provided an overview of the Solid Waste Infrastructure for Recycling grant APIA had been awarded by the EPA. APIA is interested in seeing recycling operations improved in the region as there is currently open burning on some of the islands, which is very dangerous and does not completely eliminate the waste problem. APIA's program is focused on developing a recycling plan for the region using the regularly scheduled vessels that come through. Ms. Pletnikoff stated that APIA would like to support the convening of the AIWSC for the next three years (starting in May), and bring the expertise of the committee, such as the knowledge of vessel schedules, to support APIA's project.

Captain Custard stated that he can work with Ms. Pletnikoff on the mechanics and bring it to the Managing Board to move this opportunity forward. The Managing Board will convene during the week of March 4<sup>th</sup> to discuss this further.

#### **Next Steps**

##### **Review and Discussion of Committee Priorities**

Ms. McLaughlin charged the committee members with reviewing the WSP, making notes on specific interests or places they can provide review on, and to come to the next meeting with the intent of establishing work groups to revise and rework sections of the Plan. At the Fall AIWSC meeting, the Committee will review the changes to the Plan and finalize updates.

##### **Review Action Items**

- Ms. Griffin will send the RFI on the Coast Guard Implementation of a Western Alaska Oil Spill Planning Criteria Program to the committee members.
- Ms. Griffin will forward the emails of the new subcommittee to Todd Duke.
- Ms. Griffin will send the Zoom information for the PPOR debrief in March 2024 from Mr. Williams and Ms. Crokus to the committee members.

- Committee members will review the WSP, make notes on specific interests or places they can provide a review, and come to the next meeting with the intent of establishing work groups to revise the Plan.
- The Managing Board will follow-up with Ms. Pletnikoff in a special meeting to discuss possible funding through the APIA SWIFR grant program.
- Ms. Griffin will send a poll to the Committee to determine dates for the next meeting.

### **Closing Comments**

Ms. McLaughlin thanked Ms. Pletnikoff for the funding opportunity and everyone on the call for taking the time to participate in the meeting. Ms. Pletnikoff stated her excitement in participating in this group and provided a bit of background on her role as the Head of Delegation for the Permanent Participant Aleut International Association (AIA) on the Arctic Council as a resource if the AIWSC is ever considering something that will benefit from international perspectives. She also offered to host the Fall AIWSC meeting if the body would like to have an in-person meeting. Captain Custard also thanked everyone for participating in the call.

### **Next Meeting Date**

The next meeting will take place in May. A doodle poll will be sent out to determine member availability.

<b>Motion Mr. Woodley, Ms. Tungul to adjourn the meeting at 2:40pm AKST.</b>
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### **Meeting Materials:**

1. Meeting Protocols
2. Current Roster
3. Waterways Safety Plan