

Draft of 6 September, 2007

FY2007 year-end Report of the Science and Technology Committee of the Oil Spill Recovery Institute; Robert T. Cooney, Chair.

The STC has been engaged in several lines of business this year supporting the OSRI mission. In October 2006, RFPs were posted for jointly funded studies with the North Pacific Research Board (NPRB) in the areas of tagging and tracking large marine animals, and for the development of a socioeconomic model of coastal ecological and other impacts. In April, the STC met with the NPRB Science Committee in Seward to review proposals responding to these RFPs and to select studies for support. An award was made to Dr. Mary Anne Bishop of the Prince William Sound Science Center for a study of Copper Rockfish distributions near an artificial reef close to Whittier, Alaska. The project cooperates with a NOAA program to evaluate artificial reef structures as restoration tools. There were no proposals received for the socioeconomic modeling. The STC decided to revise the modeling RFP for resubmission in October, 2007. A proposal to hold the OSRI annual reserve fund balance at no less than \$500 K was also discussed at this time.

In late June, some members of the STC met with the Work-Plan committee of OSRI, the Executive Director that the Research Program Manager in Cordova to work on the FY08 Work Plan. Scott Pegau distributed a draft document and suggestions were made for changes. Dr. Pegau was asked to incorporate these suggestions, and to route the document to the full STC for review following the meeting. The meeting also visited the problem of finding three new members for 3-year terms beginning in FY08. Two individuals whose terms were up this year wished to extend their service leaving one seat vacant. Dr. Tim Parsons, an internationally recognized marine scientist and Professor Emeritus at the University of British Columbia, Vancouver, was nominated for the vacancy. Later in August, following an open call for nominations, Dr. Cindy Trussell with the Department of Biology, Kodiak College, UAA was also nominated to fill the single vacant seat. The STC was polled to determine its preference for one or the other of these individuals.

Over the year, several side issues were visited in face-to-face meetings and by e-mail exchanges. A suggestion was made to continue focusing the joint NPRB/OSRI research on near-shore shallow-water habitats, a region at greatest risk to new spills in the Gulf. Most committee members favored this approach with the proviso that this decision would not restrain research in other regions/habitats if needed. The committee discussed a suggestion to extend one of its two face-to-face meetings (probably the late winter meeting) by a day or two to provide sufficient time to discuss issues that cannot be vetted effectively in a one-day business meeting or through other means. As the OSRI program matures, there will be times when questions about research direction and support require thoughtful debate and brainstorming. Questions about the fate of PWSOS, and measuring the effectiveness of Board sponsored studies over the years are additional examples of the sorts of issues that require careful consideration and discussion.

The following recommendations emerged from the work of the STC this year:

1. The STC recommends that Jeep Rice and Lee Majors be reappointed to new 3-year terms. The STC ranked Dr. Tim Parsons over Dr. Cindy Trussell (7 to 1 with two members not voting) to fill the seat vacated by Ted Cooney. Members noted that either could serve, and that Dr. Trussell should be considered when the next opening occurs if not appointed now.
2. The STC recommends a minimum reserve fund balance of \$500,000 as a prudent hedge against emergencies and unexpected expenses.
3. The STC recommends that OSRI and NPRB advertise RFPs for studies starting in FY08 to: 1) create a socioeconomic model of coastal community impacts resulting from anthropogenic and natural causes; 2) evaluate relationships between different shallow-water habitats determined by ShoreZone mapping and other means and near-shore fish distributions (an analysis of data on hand; no field work expected); and 3) undertake a one-time base-line survey of marine contaminants and toxic substances at locations in the Gulf of Alaska not being studied by the NOAA Mussel Watch or other ongoing programs.
4. The STC has reviewed and recommends that the Board accept the FY08 Draft Work Plan as a formal guideline for its activities during the coming year.

In closing, it has been my distinct pleasure to serve on the OSRI STC these past 3 years. It was exciting to come onboard when the PWS Observing System and the 5-year plan were just getting underway, and to see these activities move successfully through the birthing process. I am also pleased to see more balance now in funding and effort between the Understand and Respond aspects of the work. The recent efforts of Katey Walter, Scott Pegau, and Nancy Bird have exposed the organization to numerous new possibilities and challenges on the technology side. These are indeed exciting times for OSRI and the future looks bright. I wish you all the best in the coming year.