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Executive Director's Report

By Nancy Bird

It's been a very busy fall and winter. Overall, I'm very pleased with our progress in program delivery and believe we're moving in the right directions. Scott Pegau's able leadership and enthusiastic work is proving to be a great asset for OSRI. You'll find more detailed program updates in his report. In this report, I highlight my activities since our last meeting.

1. In October, I attended the Advisory Committee meeting for the Coastal Research Response Center (CRRC) in New Hampshire. CRRC has supported some excellent projects and has a good website (www.crrc.unh.edu). It's unfortunate that its funding has always been through line-item appropriations; with the change in Congressional party leadership and the cuts to line-item appropriations, continued support for CRRC was deemed doubtful. Unless new appropriations are secured, CRRC's current budgets will provide for its programs into 2009 but not thereafter.
2. In conjunction with the CRRC trip, I stopped in Washington, D.C. and met with Congressional staffers in about four offices to update them on OSRI's programs and discuss the need for further oil pollution R&D in Arctic/ sub-Arctic environments. I returned in December (on Christmas vacation since I have family in DC) and met additional staff, primarily on the House side, to discuss the amendment pending in the Coast Guard re-authorization bill. This amendment will inflation-adjust funds designated for OSRI in the Oil Spill Liability Trust Fund.

Staffers on both the Senate and House side expressed concern about the need for oil pollution R&D, particularly after the San Francisco oil spill. It was suggested that we meet with Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi's staff to discuss broader changes to oil pollution legislation (related to R&D). I ran out of time to do that but plan to follow up in coming months.

I received word last week that the Coast Guard bill may be brought to the floor for a vote this month. It appears that our amendment will be non-controversial if the bill can be moved. It's apparently difficult in an election year, however, to predict which bills will be acted on. The status on this issue impacts OSRI's plans for future spending and programs. While I'm still hopeful that this will be resolved in 2008, it can be re-introduced in legislation next year if passage does not occur this year.

3. I attended two workshops partially sponsored by OSRI. The first, the Oil and Ice workshop held in Anchorage in October, was very informative and well attended. The second was the January Alaska Marine Symposium, also held in Anchorage.
4. A planning committee has recently formed for the 20th anniversary of the EVOS event (March 24, 2009 is the 20th anniversary), and both Scott and I are on the committee. Michael Baffrey, Executive Director of the EVOS Trustee Council is chairing the group and PWS Regional Citizens' Advisory Council staff and others including the Alaska Forum on the Environment are participating. The Forum is being re-scheduled (from its normal February date) to late March in order to coincide with the 20th anniversary.

5. I am happy to report that the Governor's appointments were made in December. Ujioka, Kompkoff, Levasseur, Lindow, and Lentsch were re-appointed to serve until May 2009, and the three state representatives will continue to be Pearson, Fries and Fink. While the commissioners for ADF&G and DRN are listed as the Governor's official appointees, Fries and Fink have been delegated by their commissioners to be their OSRI representatives.
 - o There remains one vacancy for an oil and gas representative. I will check with the Governor's office this week on its status.
6. We're finally on schedule for publishing the OSRI annual report, thanks to Scott's diligence! The 2007 Annual Report will be distributed at the meeting.
7. Scott has been working on revisions to the Grant Policy Manual and we expect to have these to you for review and approval by the next meeting.
8. Now that we're catching up in some areas, Scott and I will be working to improve our informational materials. Scott is drafting project summary descriptions and I'd like to develop a table display for OSRI for use at meetings and conferences.