Final Report Form - Oil Spill Recovery Institute

An electronic copy of this report shall be submitted by mail, or e-mail to the OSRI Research Program Manager wspegau@pwssc.org and Financial Office poswalt@pwssc.org

Mailing address: P.O. Box 705 - Cordova, AK 99574 -

**Deadline for this report:** Submittal within 90 days of grant/award expiration. Also, note that a summary Financial Statement shall be submitted within 45 days of the grant expiration. The final invoice and financial statement is due within 90 days of the grant/award expiration.

**Today’s date:** January 21, 2013

**Name of awardee/grantee:** Emilie Springer

**OSRI Contract Number:** 10-10-07

**Project title:** Cultural Dimensions of Community Response Preparation and Vulnerability to Future Oil Impacts of the Copper River Region

**Dates project began and ended:** Began 6/30/2012—grant is finished but project will be complete with finalization of my dissertation, expected 12/2013.

**PART I - Outline for Final Program or Technical Report**

This report must be submitted by all grantees. However, for those whose project work resulted in a peer reviewed publication (whether in draft or final form), this report may be abbreviated and the publication attached as part of the report.

A. Non-technical Abstract or summary of project work that does not exceed 2 pages and includes an overview of the project. This abstract should describe the nature and significance of the project. It may be provided to the Advisory Board and could be used by OSRI staff to answer inquiries as to the nature and significance of the project.

B. Review objectives as described in original proposal and state whether these objectives were achieved.

C. Describe problems or roadblocks encountered in project implementation.

D. Highlight accomplishments, whether or not they were part of the original proposal.

E. Conclusions.

F. Appendix including copies of all written reports or publications completed or in progress, resulting from the project work. This also includes abstracts of papers presented at conferences. Please note the acknowledgment of OSRI support stated in Section 10.3.4 of the Grant Policy Manual.

**A. Abstract/ project summary.**

The research objectives for this project, still in very actively in progress until dissertation objectives are met, were to investigate the cultural dimensions of community meaning within the context of the physical location of Cordova and Cordova residents and the occupational community of S01A permit holders and crewmembers. The original proposal included a feature of research related to community response preparation and potential vulnerability to oil-spill related disasters such as the 1989 Exxon Valdez Oil
Spill and had a third policy/institutional community of the Prince William Sound Regional Citizen Advisory Committee. The intention was to focus on cultural connections between individuals and their communities, the knowledge systems and social-networks that people may refer to in the event of a disaster and the way that information is communicated across various boundaries.

Research methods for the project are grounded in qualitative social science and have included participant observation, focus group interviews and individual interviews. I may gather a few more interviews if the situations seem appropriate but at this time approximately 65 interviews have been completed and I don’t think it is necessary to collect to many more for the context of this project. The interviews were diverse and conducted in many different locations—business offices in the community of Cordova, public spaces/meeting locations around Cordova, the local school, fishing boats, personal homes, the Prince William Sound Science center office and on the harbor docks.

Early in the project, I started to notice a significant point of contention and real clash of interests within the fishing fleet itself. The fastest growing group of permit purchasers is the Russian Old Believer community within the state of Alaska—largely located around the community of Homer but also around Delta Junction in the interior of the state. When I visited Cordova in the summer of 2011, I had the opportunity to travel the docks with a permit broker from Homer, Alaska who lead me specifically to the dock area where the Old Believer fleet was located. This fleet is not dispersed within or interconnected with the rest of the fleet. There several reasons for this but perhaps the most obvious is that the family groups within the Old Believer fleet are very large—cousins, uncles, brothers. When you look at the Alaska Commercial Fishing Entry Commission (CFEC) permit statistics, you can find large numbers of permits in this region that belong to men with the same last name. Additionally, the vessels used by this cultural group are noticeably different in design than other boats within the fleet as a whole.

This feature of a particularly unique cultural group transitioned my project intentions to some degree. I dropped the idea to include a policy community with a focus on the PWSRCAC and created a sub-category under the S01A permit holders to specifically focus on some of the issues and new knowledge related to the growing contingent of Russian Old Believers within the fleet as a whole.

As the project developed and through the process of interviews and community observation, the role, meaning, conception and interpretation of “place” as it pertains to the Copper River ecosystem as a whole (although admittedly mostly the coastal dimension) was another feature that became unexpectedly prominent. The meaning of the physical “place” of Cordova, the Copper River, the Copper River flats and this particular region of Prince William Sound has a very integrated influence on the personality of the previously described communities as a system. I believe the same observation can be expressed regardless of the location. The expressive opportunities of the humanities create a sense of identity in relation to the scope of the environment. I know this feature of the research is a little more abstract and possibly too speculative to revise into something more practical but I will aim to do so.

To complete this project, I plan to make at least one more trip to Cordova mostly for the purpose of observation and to put some more effort into clear descriptions of the
physical environment that was mentioned throughout the interviews. I would like to see the fishery in-season again and hope to make a trip or two out to the flats to actually watch the process and not just rely on stories from the harbor.

B. Review Objectives

The objectives for this project can be described by referring to the research questions in my original proposal submission. These questions guided my interviews and findings. The only question that seems less significant than the others is research question 3.

**Springer Original Research Questions:**

1. What does each community contribute to real-time ocean observing and disaster response preparation? Are there potential contributions that are not documented at this time?
2. What knowledge does the community have about the current status of the Copper River that could be useful to resource management and protective measures in the future?
3. Do community members recognize and accept measures that policy and management entities take in an effort to ensure sustainability?
4. How closely tied (culturally/emotionally/financially/symbolically/other) are the human communities and the natural resources in the proximate marine and estuarine environment of the Copper River?
5. What is the perceived relationship between the Wrangell-St. Elias glaciers, the Copper River, coastal wetlands/delta of the Copper River and the marine waters of Prince William Sound and the larger North Pacific Ocean? What causes variation in perception?
6. What is the current attitude of community members related to potential for oil-related environmental threats to the region?
7. As a major point of interaction between various human groups, is the Copper River system referred to with an all-encompassing identity described consistently across user groups and management organizations?

C. Problems or Roadblocks

The only real difficulties I encountered with this project were personal family and health issues that were unavoidable. If you need additional information or would like me to specify what the issues were/are, I can. These issues made it difficult to travel to Cordova and spend as much time in the community as I originally intended but I am happy with the quantity and quality of the interviews completed so far. The project has taken slightly longer than I expected, but my academic advisors and I am on a determined track to finish the project and defend my UAF dissertation no later than the Fall semester of 2013.

The title of the proposal will probably not be the title of the dissertation and the concept of oil, past issues with oil and future concerns related to oil will have less emphasis to the final conclusion than I originally expected.

D. Accomplishments

Additional accomplishments to this project that I did not originally expect:

1) This project generated many opportunities related to my interests in environmental humanities. Several of the conferences I have attended over the past few years have been at events such as the annual American Society for Literature and the Environment (ASLE) conference and the Under Western Skies: Environment, Community and Culture in North America conference in Calgary, Canada have
resulted in likely publications. I plan to attend the 2013 ASLE conference and am on
a panel within the conference that has a pre-approved book proposal through the
University of Alaska Press. The paper I am presenting at the event is entitled: “Flow:
Human Memories and Historic Transitions in the Copper River Eco-system.” The
Under Western Skies conference also has a book publication planned and although
the paper I presented there was not based on my Cordova research some of themes
from that paper, namely the role of creative story-telling or creative descriptions of
place, will likely appear in my dissertation work. I will reference these conferences
and presentations in the appendix to this report.

2) I am starting an internship at a local arts facility (Bunnell Street Gallery) in Homer,
Alaska to utilize some of my remaining academic funding with the National Science
Foundation and am organizing a performance event related to several of the oral
history stories I encountered in my interviews in Cordova. With a background in
literature and creative writing, it has been so inspiring to be able to combine my
research interests in fisheries and community identity and work into more
creative/artistic modes of community interactions. I refer to these writings as
“fiction” because significant details within the personal stories have been changed so
that the identity of the individuals is protected (as per my IRB requirements). In some
cases, I will combine the stories of several individuals to establish a generic picture of
an industry member. For example, as I mentioned I have interviewed several
members of the Russian Old Believer fleet and have turned approximately 7 of these
interviews into an all-encompassing fictional piece related to what it’s like to be a part
of that industry. I will give this performance in Homer (where I live) and then again
on the UAF campus at the end of the semester. I would be happy to look into the
possibility of doing it in Cordova as well and I think it might be an excellent way to
present back to the community what it is I’m doing with the work I’ve compiled.

3) I recently accepted a two-year appointment as a member to the Exxon Valdez Oil
Spill Public Advisory Committee.

4) I submitted a research proposal as an independent researcher to the North Pacific
Research Board with two anthropologists from the Alaska Department of Fish and
Game, Division of Subsistence. The proposal is titled: “The Intersection of
Commercial Fisheries and the Subsistence Way of Life: Adaptations to changing
socio-economic conditions.” If funded, we will compare the communities of Cordova
and Haines and it will be an excellent follow-up to my dissertation work.

E. Conclusions
This project is not finished and I cannot submit appropriate conclusions at this point. If
interested, I can submit a draft out-line of my dissertation if interested but the writing is
not available at this time.
F. Appendix Reports/ Publications:
   Conference Presentations:

Volunteer Positions/ Board Membership Related to OSRI Research:
- Exxon Valdez Oil Spill Trustee Council (EVOSTC). Public Advisory Committee. September 2012. Two year position. [http://www.evostc.state.ak.us/people/pac.cfm](http://www.evostc.state.ak.us/people/pac.cfm)
- Internship with Bunnell Street Art Gallery. Homer, AK. Will conduct local arts presentation related to oral history compiled through OSRI research (scheduled for February 24, 2013). Presentation to take place on UAF campus in late April or early May 2013 (still unscheduled).

Part II - Final Financial Statement

Please complete the attached Excel spreadsheet (GPM-appendix I – Fin Rpt Form).