

GEOGRAPHIC RESPONSE STRATEGIES FOR SOUTHEAST ALASKA

Overview

Geographic Response Strategies (GRS) are site-specific response plans tailored to protect sensitive areas threatened by an oil spill. GRS are map-based strategies that can save time during the critical first few hours of an oil spill response. They show responders where sensitive areas are located and where to place oil spill protection resources.

The objective of the GRS project for Southeast Alaska is to:

- Identify 60 of the most highly sensitive areas in the region that can be protected by traditional oil spill protection methods,
- Develop strategies specific to the unique features of each area, and
- Test as many sites as time and resources allow.

GRS provide response strategies for the protection of selected sensitive areas to aid first responders to an oil spill. The strategies serve as the federal and state on-scene coordinators' "orders" during an oil spill in the area covered by the GRS. As such, they are approved by the U.S. Coast Guard Marine Safety Office and the Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation.

This project is being funded through a \$250,000 court settlement paid to the State by Royal Caribbean Cruise Lines as the result of cruise ship pollution that occurred during the summer of 1999. The project is being facilitated by Tim L. Robertson Consulting and is scheduled for completion in April 2003.

Southeast Alaska GRS Development Process

Step One: From May 2000 through November 2001, a workgroup comprised of federal, state, and local resource agencies identified nearly 200 sites especially vulnerable to oil spills. These sensitive areas were selected based on the following criteria of environmental sensitivity:

<p>Human Use High Use Commercial Wildlife Viewing Salmon Hatcheries and Ocean Pens Shore-Based Fish Processing Plants Subsistence Harvest Areas (Fish and Invertebrates) Commercial Fishing Areas Cultural/Historic Sites Recreational Use Harbors and Human Use Marine Areas/Buildings</p> <p>Geographic features Sheltered Tidal Flats Kelp Beds Sheltered Rocky Shores Estuaries and Marsh Areas</p>	<p>Fish & Wildlife Sea Otter Concentrations Sea Lion Concentrations Harbor Seal Concentrations Seabird Colonies Marbled Murrelet Nearshore Feeding Concentrations Waterfowl/Shorebird Migratory, Molting, and Winter Concentrations Threatened and Endangered Species/Habitats Anadromous Fish Streams Fish Spawning Concentrations</p>
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Step Two: These potential sites were evaluated based the probability of oil spill impact and the feasibility of successfully protecting the site with traditional spill response methods.

Step Three: Using this process, the workgroup selected a preliminary list of fifty-one **candidate sites**. Between December 2001 and March 2002, the work group will solicit public input regarding the suitability of these sites for develop of geographic response strategies. Feedback on site selection will be solicited from tribal representatives, user groups, environmental organizations and the general public through public meetings, the GRS web site and one-on-one interviews.

Step Four: Based on the feedback received, the workgroup will then make the final site selections for each response zone. A total of 60 sites will be selected.

Step Five: An Operations/Tactics workgroup, composed of spill response professionals, will be formed to develop draft strategies for each site selected.

Step Six: As time and resources allow, the strategies will be field-tested at as many sites as possible from April to September 2002.

Step Seven: Based on the fieldwork, the workgroup will revise strategies as necessary. Sixty site-specific geographic response strategies will be completed and delivered for inclusion in the *Southeast Alaska Subarea Contingency Plan* by April 2003.