

City

State says Hammer Slough no longer impaired waterway

By JERRY BLAIR
Pilot writer

Hammer Slough is being taken off a list of impaired waterways following a visit by inspectors from the Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation to Petersburg last week.

Leo Luczak, Petersburg's building official and community development officer, and other city officials sought to have the slough "delisted" since being declared an impaired waterway two years ago.

Luczak said the slough was declared impaired because of siltation. Because Hammer Slough is an anadromous fish stream for salmon, siltation in its waterway is considered by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and DEC to be a serious problem, Luczak said.

According to Luczak, the evidence provided by the Alaska Department of Fish and Game to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency had been rather slim. The initial report basically said the "stream appears to have sediment in it," Luczak said.

"It was based on three on-page field evaluations," Luczak said, noting what he said were errors in the reports and a total

lack of any samples of the waterway. "It was pretty subjective."

Luczak said the city was becoming more concerned because despite any real evidence there was a problem with Hammer Slough to begin with, it somehow was becoming more impaired just through the yearly review process.

One report attributed the cause behind the stream's siltation was timber harvest.

"I couldn't document any timber harvest along Hammer Slough. They thought that was a little mistake," Luczak wryly noted.

While having the slough on the impaired list apparently didn't impact the city negatively, there was a fear that the longer it was on the list, the harder it would be to remove, Luczak explained.

Luczak said eventually any development along Hammer Slough could have become difficult as the listing may have caused permit delays or denials from the U.S. Corps of Engineers or other agencies.

Luczak said he was aware of one case where a community in the Aleutians almost lost the ability to process fish because of an impaired waterway.

"We didn't want to (have to) prove we weren't guilty and the state has been very cooperative

to come down here," Luczak said, adding that DEC's Southeast officials were never happy about the impaired waterway designation.

Luczak asked DEC to look at Hammer Slough again as a follow-up to a March visit.

On Oct. 23, Doug Redburn, DEC coastal watershed team leader, and Eric Decker, DEC environmental specialist, took another tour of Hammer Slough and determined that the stream should be removed from the impaired list.

"The listing two years ago on Hammer Slough... was based on some pretty meager data," said Redburn. "Our intention was to walk the site together to see if there was a problem."

Redburn and Decker both stressed they received a lot of cooperation from Petersburg city officials, including water superintendent Bruce Jones, as well as from other state agencies such as Fish and Game and the Department of Transportation.

Redburn said one of the sources that may have been causing sedimentation in the stream was from a rock quarry used by both the city and DOT. There also was a stockpile of gravel kept nearby that may have been a source.

Redburn and Decker said the stockpile was removed and hay bales were placed near the rock

quarry and grass planted at both sites.

According to the two DEC officials, how the problem was taken care of in Petersburg is how the department would like to deal with similar situations in other communities.

"The city, DOT and everyone involved had an outstanding effort. We're trying to provide an inter-agency effort. This was a real good model," Redburn

said.

"Other water bodies have been taken off the list," Decker said, "but this was kind of a cooperative effort instead of a regulatory effort."

Redburn and Decker said they were headed for Wrangell and Sika following last week's Petersburg visit and hoped to use their experience here to correct problems in those communities.

Rod & Gun Club Gun Show

Buy, sell & trade

Nov. 23rd at the Moose Lodge

For table reservation

Call 772-4711

