



ALASKA DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL CONSERVATION
Division of Spill Prevention and Response
Prevention Preparedness and Response Program
SITUATION REPORT (SITREP)

Tug *Francis Snow* **Sinking Steamboat Slough**



SITREP #: 1 and Final

SPILL #: 23479930301

DATE/TIME OF DISTRIBUTION: November 1, 2023, at 4:00 p.m.
Information current as of November 1, 2023, at 3:45 p.m.

POTENTIAL RESPONSIBLE PARTY (PRP): Vitus Energy LLC (Vitus)

INCIDENT LOCATION: Steamboat Slough, approximately 2.37 miles southeast of Bethel (Lat/Long: 60.786297, -161.699381)

DATE/TIME OF SPILL: Undetermined at this time.

HOW/WHEN SPILL WAS DISCOVERED AND REPORTED: On October 30, 2023, at approximately 3:00 p.m., a sheen was reported on the Kuskokwim River by a Bethel Search and Rescue team member. Photos provided by Bethel Search and Rescue indicated that the sheen was coming from the Steamboat Slough. On October 30, 2023, at 5:36 p.m., ADEC reported a sunken vessel and oil sheen to the National Response Center and coordinated with US Coast Guard Sector Anchorage personnel.

TYPE/AMOUNT OF PRODUCT SPILLED: An unknown quantity of diesel fuel, engine oil, and hydraulic fluid was spilled. The vessel has a maximum fuel capacity of 2,500 gallons. Vitus estimates that 250-300 gallons of diesel and 10 gallons of hydraulic fluid were onboard at the time of the vessel sinking. A broken silver and rainbow sheen was observed extending from Steamboat Slough into the main channel of the Kuskokwim River. A diesel fuel smell was reported by local citizens in Bethel and as far downriver as Napaskiak.

CAUSE OF SPILL: The 61.6 ft. tug vessel, *Francis Snow*, was moored alongside a grounded barge in the Steamboat Slough. Following discovery of the oil sheen, the *Francis Snow* was found to be partially sunken, with the stern of the boat beneath the water. The cause of the vessel sinking was reported by Vitus to be a 1.5-inch crack in the hull at frame 1 starboard side.

SOURCE CONTROL: The source has been controlled. Vitus crew used dewatering pumps to refloat the vessel at approximately 6:00 p.m. on Tuesday evening, October 31st. Additionally, the crack in the hull was partially plugged, using a soft patch and plywood, to keep the vessel afloat.

RESPONSE ACTION: Vitus crew initially deployed oil absorbent boom around the sunken vessel. A pocket of diesel discovered within the vessel was recovered with oil absorbent pads. Oil absorbent sweeps were used to recover oil sheen in Steamboat Slough. Vitus has successfully towed the Tug *Francis Snow* out of Steamboat Slough to the Bethel City Dock. Vitus crew is monitoring Steamboat Slough for additional recoverable product.

RESOURCES AT RISK OR AFFECTED:

Steamboat Slough and the Kuskokwim River are anadromous water bodies known to support chum, coho, Chinook, pink, and sockeye salmon, Arctic lamprey, broad whitefish, humpback whitefish, Bering cisco, least cisco, rainbow smelt, Pacific lamprey, sheefish, and resident fish such as northern pike, burbot, round whitefish, and Alaska blackfish.

Subsistence fishing with participants from multiple communities may be occurring along the Kuskokwim River. Subsistence-caught fish is shared widely throughout the region. At this time of year, subsistence fishing is primarily done with set gillnets targeting humpback whitefish, broad whitefish, and burbot, but other species, such as coho salmon, least cisco, and northern pike, will also be retained. Set gillnets for these species are typically set in slow water such as back eddies, sloughs, and side channels. Alaska blackfish will be harvested with fish traps set in ponds and tundra streams. Fishing efforts are commonly limited until the river freezes completely and is safe to travel on.

Portions of the uplands adjacent to the Kuskokwim River are part of the Yukon Delta National Wildlife Refuge. The spill site is located within the Refuge boundaries and many of the shorelines are native allotments. Waterfowl have already migrated out of the area, but passerines, such as the American dipper, and upland birds may be present.

FUTURE PLANS AND RECOMMENDATIONS: Vitus will haul out the Tug *Francis Snow* at the Bethel City Dock where they will assess the remaining diesel fuel, engine oil, and hydraulic fluid by gauging the tanks. This will provide a more accurate estimate on the total amount of each spilled substance. Vitus also intends to continue cleanup efforts in Steamboat Slough and the surrounding area.

ADEC will continue to monitor the response actions and review plans being developed for ongoing clean up.

WEATHER: November 1, 2023: High of 39° F / Low of 33° F. Winds NE at 15 to 25 mph. High tide was at 8:11 a.m. and low tide will be at 5:52 p.m. this evening.

DATE/TIME OF THE NEXT REPORT DISTRIBUTION: This is the first and final SITREP.

FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION CONTACT: Bernie Nowicki, Western Region Manager, ADEC (907) 269-8149

[<https://dec.alaska.gov/spar/ppr/spill-information/response/>]



Figure 1. Tug *Francis Snow* in Steamboat Slough on October 31, 2023. Photo provided by Charles Guest with Bethel Search and Rescue.



Figure 2. Tug *Francis Snow* floated on October 31, 2023. Photo provided by Vitus Energy LLC.



Figure 3. Approximate location of where the vessel was submerged.

AGENCY/STAKEHOLDER NOTIFICATION LIST: This situation report was distributed to the agencies listed on the standard distribution list, which includes the governor’s office, State Emergency Operations Center, U.S. Department of the Interior, National Marine Fisheries Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and other state agencies. This situation report was also distributed to the following agencies and stakeholders:

AGENCY / STAKEHOLDER	NAME	SENT VIA	ADDITIONAL INFORMATION	TELEPHONE	FAX
Vitus Energy, LLC	Kevin O'Shea	Email	Kevin.OShea@vitusmarine.com	278-6700	278-6701
Senate S- Bethel	Senator Lyman Hoffman	Fax	senator.lyman.hoffman@akleg.gov Juneau (1/18-4/15) Bethel (4/20-1/15)	465-4453 543-3541	465-4523 543-3542
House 38- Bethel	Representative CJ McCormick	Fax	representative.CJ.McCormick@akleg.gov Juneau (1/18-4/15) Bethel (4/20-1/15)	465-4942 465-4942	465-4942 543-5892
ADNR	Samantha Carroll	Email	samantha.carroll@alaska.gov	269-7470	269-8913
ADF&G	Jeanette Alas	Email	Jeanette.alas@alaska.gov	267-2805	267-2499
USCG-Sector /ANC	USCG-Anchorage	Fax	sectoranchorageimd@uscg.mil sector.anchorage@uscg.mil	428-4100	428-4114 (24 hr)
US EPA	Bob Whittier	Email	whittier.robert@epa.gov	206-553-1263 or 206-553-1264	271-3424
City of Bethel	Mark Springer, Mayor	Fax/Email	mspringer@cityofbethel.net	545-8819	543-4186
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