31 March, 2010

Ms. Laurel Jennings  
Exxon Valdez Oil Spill Trustee Council  
441 West 5th Avenue, Suite 500  
Anchorage, AK  99501

Dear Exxon Valdez Trustee Council Members,

It has come to my attention that Old Harbor Native Corporation has nominated Sitkalidak Island for habitat protection within the Exxon Valdez Oil Spill Restoration Plan, and that the EVOS Trustee Council is seeking comments as part of a Supplement Environmental Impact Statement.

As archaeological resources are included in assessments of environmental impact, I provide the following information that may be relevant to your deliberations. Please understand that I am an archaeologist and faculty member at the University of Washington. My interest in Sitkalidak Island is strictly intellectual. I do not have a specific stake in the outcome of the deliberations other than that of a professional interest in the preservation of archaeological resources for future research and as a tangible source of information about the cultural heritage of contemporary residents of the region.

From eight years worth of archaeological research there, I can report that Sitkalidak Island contains a rich and irreplaceable cultural resource in the form of an archaeological record covering more than 7000 years of human settlement history distributed between more than 100 archaeological sites that encircle the island at almost every reasonable boat landing as well as along the interior streams and ponds. Collectively these sites document the earliest known evidence for the human colonization on the Kodiak archipelago roughly 7500 years ago, the emergence of salmon intensification roughly 4000 years ago, and the development of organizationally complex hunter-gatherer societies over the past 2500 years, culminating in the site of the Russian conquest of the Alutiq people at the Awa'uq refuge rock site not far from the earliest permanent settlement in Russian Alaska (at Three Saints Bay).

Sitkalidak also contains important recent archaeological evidence for population declines following initial Russian colonization and the introduction of European diseases, one of the few land-based whale oil processing facilities of the 19th century "whale rush" (Port Hobron), and the location of a pioneering cattle ranch with historical significance in the transition from Alaska
from a U.S. Territory to a State (McCord's Ranch, including old fence lines, the main ranch compound and outbuildings).

Finally Sitkalidak Island contains evidence of enduring use of the island by Alutiiq residents of the region for subsistence and recreation (e.g., Christiansen's fish camp out on Nuckin's Spit just north of the entrance to Newman Bay - where the Mary Haakanson and the other Christiansen children spent their summers as kids in the mid 20th century), as well as evidence of generations of picnicking at the beach on Ocean Bay. Less archaeologically concrete, but no less real are the uses of the island for drift-wood collection and subsistence hunting and fishing.

You can find additional information about the archaeology of Sitkalidak Island in the publications listed below, and a full inventory of archaeological sites found on Sitkalidak Island can be obtained through the Alaska State Office of History and Archaeology in Anchorage. They can be reached at the following address

Office of History and Archaeology
Alaska Division of Parks and Outdoor Recreation
550 West 7th Ave., Suite 1310
Anchorage, Alaska 99501-3565

Thank you for considering these observations about the cultural values found on Sitkalidak Island.

Sincerely,

Ben Fitzhugh, PhD
Associate Professor
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University of Washington
Seattle, WA. 98195-3100
(206) 543-9604
fitzhugh@uw.edu

Please see following page for reference list for Sitkalidak Island archaeology
Publications on the archaeological Heritage of Sitkalidak Island

Clark, Donald W.


Fitzhugh, Ben


Knecht, Richard, Sven Haakanson, Jr. and Shawn Dickenson