

A Resolution of the Alaska Wilderness Recreation & Tourism Association Supporting the Creation of a Trans-Alaska Pipeline Citizen Advisory Council

The Alaska Wilderness Recreation & Tourism Association (AWRTA) is a member-led association that represents nature-based tourism businesses, individuals, and organizations throughout Alaska. AWRTA advocates for the sustainability of Alaska's natural and cultural resources, responsible tourism, and tourism planning for communities. Member businesses and partners work to protect and enhance quality of life, provide jobs and business opportunities, and create incentives to protect Alaska's wildlife, wilderness, and special places.

In 1989, the *Exxon Valdez* slammed into Bligh Reef releasing more than 11 million gallons of crude oil into Prince William Sound and causing the most notorious oil spill in recent times. In addition to widespread environmental harm, the spill disrupted the lives of thousands of people. The oil spill required the State of Alaska to close fishing seasons in 1989, reduced harvests in later years, and caused fish prices to drop. It damaged approximately 1,300 miles of shoreline, much of it privately owned. The spill also destroyed the subsistence activities of many Alaska Natives who rely on subsistence fishing and gathering for food and cultural identity.

Recreation and tourism was profoundly affected by the oil spill. Visitation declined in 1989 and resource managers were forced to limit access to hunting and fishing areas. Other recreational users, such as kayakers, avoided the many beaches visibly degraded by oil. Today, more than 20 years after the spill, recreation and tourism is still considered only a "recovering" human service by the *Exxon Valdez* Oil Spill Trustee Council.

The conveyance of oil from the North Slope of Alaska continues to pose a threat to the people and environment of Alaska. Oil spills occur regularly and the Trans-Alaska Pipeline System is an aging facility demanding increased maintenance. A break in the pipeline near a strategic river system such as the Copper, Tanana, Delta, or Yukon rivers could have devastating effects on fragile down-river ecosystems.

One means of addressing this risk is to create a Regional Citizens Advisory Council (RCAC) to help oversee pipeline operations. RCACs created for Prince William Sound and Cook Inlet have successfully developed and supported programs that have improved environmental quality and helped ensure the safe transport of oil. To build upon these models of citizen participation and guard against future oil spills, the Alaska Wilderness Recreation & Tourism Association finds and resolves that:

WHEREAS, safe transportation of oil through pipelines requires diligent oversight on the part of the three principal interests: operators, regulators, and regional stakeholders; and

WHEREAS, the interests of the operators in the Trans-Alaska Pipeline System is represented by the Alyeska Pipeline Service Company; and

WHEREAS, the interests of the state and federal regulators are represented by the Joint Pipeline Office, which is responsible for providing permitting services to pipeline operators; and

WHEREAS, regional stakeholders and local citizens dependent on wildlife, wilderness, and recreational resources at risk from pipeline spills are not formally represented in the pipeline oversight process; and

WHEREAS, local citizen involvement in oil pipeline oversight requires formal authority and organization, funding, and independence to be a relevant and meaningful component of the process to monitor safe operations of oil pipeline systems; and

WHEREAS, residents of Alaska have the most at stake in safe pipeline operations because their lifestyles and livelihoods depend upon a productive natural environment and resources for fishing, recreation, and tourism; and

WHEREAS, citizen oversight is already provided for oil tanker and tanker operations through the legislatively-established RCACs in Prince William Sound and Cook Inlet; and

WHEREAS, those councils have become an integral part of safe oil transport operations and have helped develop what is regarded by many as the safest marine oil transportation system in the world; and

WHEREAS, the same type of long-term partnership between industry, government, and local residents and communities should be established to address environmental concerns and oversee operation and continued maintenance of TAPs and the oil transportation system that feeds it.

NOW THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Alaska Wilderness Recreation & Tourism Association requests that the United States government and State of Alaska create and fund a Trans-Alaska Pipeline Citizen Advisory Council to provide for environmental oversight and monitoring of pipeline operations; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the membership of the Trans-Alaska Pipeline Citizen Advisory Council should reflect the diverse interests of the communities and residents of the areas exposed to potential catastrophic or chronic pipeline failures and oil spills.

Adopted this 14 day of August, 2009.

Alaska Wilderness Recreation & Tourism Association
Board of Directors