

# ECOTRUST CASE STUDY: PRINCE WILLIAM SOUND & COPPER RIVER, ALASKA

## PROBLEM:

On March 24, 1989 the Exxon Valdez spilled 11 million gallons of crude oil in Prince William Sound. How could local fisherman and conservationists help settle the lawsuit and steer funding to permanent protections for salmon and the environment as well as the prevention of future spills?

## ACTIONS:

- Discussions commence between Spencer Beebe and Cordova fisherman/biologist Rick Steiner on the structuring of a settlement with Exxon to generate funds for the protection of threatened lands.
  - Nourishment of the nascent Prince William Sound Science Center. Ecotrust raises early grants for professional staff and establishes its GIS capacity. Three Ecotrust staff members serve at various times on board of directors.
  - Ecotrust engages Steiner with a twelve-month, \$40,000 fellowship to build grass-roots and governmental support for the settlement. Steiner recruits a coalition of commercial fisherman, Native communities, and environmental organizations to advocate with the government for a \$2 billion settlement proposal.
  - Cooperative agreement with USGS places Ecotrust scientist/GIS specialist Randy Hagenstein in their Anchorage field office on a three-year program to assemble the first comprehensive GIS for the 30 million acre Prince William Sound/Copper River Watershed region.
    - Settlement between Exxon and federal and state governments creates a Settlement Council to allocate \$1.1 billion in funds over ten years.
    - *Prince William Sound – Copper River – North Gulf of Alaska Ecosystem* (Prince William Sound Science Center, Copper River Delta Institute, and CI/Ecotrust) outlines an ecosystem-scale approach to conservation and includes an introduction by Alaska Governor Wally Hickel.
    - The Oil Spill Recovery Act of 1990, advocated by Steiner and local fishermen, yields a \$23 million endowment for the Oil Spill Recovery Institute, housed at the Prince William Sound Science Center.



## PRINCIPLES & TOOLS:

- Support of local leadership.
- Capacity-building within local NGOs.
- Strengthening of a regional perspective among stakeholders through scientific and technical analysis.
- Capture of significant funding through careful private-funding leverage.

- Chugach National Forest acquisition of fee title and easements to virtually 100% of the undeveloped and threatened rain forest lands around Prince William Sound, 650,000 acres in total, made possible through the investment of \$400 million in settlement funds.
- Ecotrust hires RJ Kopchak, first President of the Prince William Sound Science Center, as Director of our Copper River Ecosystem Program to work with local organizations in extending similar tactics to the Copper River Watershed.

## OUTCOMES:

- Prince William Sound coalition achieves the protection of 650,000 acres of temperate rain forest and coastal wetlands.
- Establishment of Prince William Sound Science Center, which maintains collaborative relationships with wide range of university and government organizations, provides educational outreach to local schools and remote villages, and has influence on Alaska Department of Fish & Game fisheries regulations.
- \$1.6 million annual funding of oil spill-related research, education and assessment through the Oil Spill Recovery Institute endowment.
- Delay of major road building plans on Copper River with permanent halt as a goal.