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Dear Exxon Valdez Trustee Council members,

I am writing to you to strongly recommend that you continue funding long term killer whale research by the North Gulf Oceanic Society (NGOS) in Prince William Sound. They have established one of the world's best long term data sets on killer whales, very similar to what we have in British Columbia, using well recognized research methodologies (photography, acoustics, genetics, aerial images, etc.)

NGOS' efforts were crucial to understanding the impacts of the Exxon Valdez Oil Spill on killer whales in the area, and continue to provide valuable lessons on the population level impacts of such an incident, and provide us with a real appreciation of how difficult it is for long lived- slow reproducing populations to recover from disasters. It pretty much goes without saying that the killer whale lineages AT1 and the ABs have yet to recover from the 1989 spill, and indeed the AT1s, a unique population with unique dialects, are en route to extinction. This loss of biodiversity is a result of a human caused error. I am not even speaking of the tragic loss of traditional foods to the First Nations that live in the area, which is a separate issue.

Both the Prince William Sound populations and the BC populations of killer whales are biologically distinct- it isn't just a simple matter of 'mixing and matching' members as a way of promoting recovery. Their cultural/social traditions are deeply entrenched and surprisingly inflexible.

I sincerely hope that you will recognize the legacy that NGOS has developed over the past 30 + years, and maintain funding for them.

For full transparency, I receive no financial benefit by you renewing your funding for NGOS, and see the loss of their funding as a loss for science and our understanding of killer whales.

With hope,

Kathy Heise
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