

Subsistence Harvesting a Concern in Mar Gun Clean Up

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Erik Wander/KMXT

As Coast Guard responders continue efforts to remove fuel from the 112-foot fishing vessel Mar-Gun, which was grounded on St. George Island last Thursday, some are concerned about subsistence harvest and the effect on the environment in the area. Approximately 23-hundred gallons of diesel were lightered from the vessel's port tanks Sunday, according to the Coast Guard, and another 15-hundred was removed Monday.

KMXT's Erik Wander has more.

No oiling has been reported on the beach as a result of the Mar-Gun going aground, and a subsistence sampling program, lead by the state, is currently in the works. Petty Officer Sara Francis of the Coast Guard said that subsistence harvesting in the area is highly discourage until further information can be gathered.

-- (Francis 1 30 sec. "There are some subsistence areas ... vicinity of the vessel.")

Gary Folley of the State Department of Conservation, and the state's coordinator of the Mar-Gun response effort, said the fuel removal operation is going well. However, he agreed that there are serious concerns about subsistence harvesting.

-- (Folley 1 35 sec. "The grounding did occur ... from that beach.")

George Pletnikoff, Alaska oceans campaigner for Greenpeace, said that the timing of the grounding of the vessel was actually relatively fortunate because of the migratory patterns of returning birds, fur seals and fish. He also expressed concerns about subsistence harvesting in the area.

-- (G Pletnikoff 1 45 sec. "It is about a month ... the impacts that can be had.")

Pletnikoff's brother Patrick Pletnikoff, who is Chairman of the St. George Fishermen's Association, said that while he is concerned about the impact on subsistence, the situation remains uncertain. He also said that the environmental impact of the grounding is alarming, given the location of the vessel.

-- (P Pletnikoff 1 45 sec. "We don't know yet ... concerned about our subsistence.")

According to the Coast Guard, the unified command recommends no subsistence harvests be conducted in the immediate area until the vessel is removed and sufficient sampling is completed. The Seattle-based Mar-Gun grounded Thursday morning 200-yards off the north end of St. George Island in the Bering Sea. All five crewmembers were rescued by the Coast Guard.

I'm Erik Wander.

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