

June 26, 2014

Office of U.S. Senator Cantwell
311 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Cantwell,

On behalf of the Pacific States/British Columbia Oil Spill Task Force, I am submitting this letter requesting funding for the removal of all derelict and sunken vessels in marine and inland waters. Across the West Coast, derelict vessels are a growing problem. Not only are such vessels a pollution hazard, they also pose a significant safety and navigation risk. Many are decommissioned military vessels, fishing boats and pleasure craft that have been damaged and abandoned, and the majority of these vessels are privately owned. Often vessel registration has expired or is non-existent, making it difficult to track or even contact vessel owners.

Most states have little or no funding available to preemptively manage and remove derelict and sunken vessels. At present, the Oil Spill Liability Trust Fund (OSLTF) covers the cost of clean up and removal of these vessels once they become a source of pollution. We urge that the OSLTF be made available to remove and dismantle such vessels *before* they reach the state of disintegration and deterioration to the point where they leak, sink and threaten waterways and the environment.

There are unique and significant challenges across the west coast with regards to derelict vessels, and a few examples from the Task Force jurisdictions are provided here:

- In Washington state, nearly \$3 million was spent on abatement, removal and disposal of the *Deep Sea*, an abandoned fishing vessel that caught fire in Penn Cove in 2012, an important shellfish growing area in Puget Sound.
- The *Davey Crockett*, a former WWII military ship, cost Washington and Oregon states \$24 million in public funds for abatement, clean up and removal costs after the ship sank in the Columbia River.
- Alaska has an ever-aging fleet of vessels, which form an increasing number of derelict and abandoned vessels throughout Alaska's coast and rivers. On December 24, 2012, the fishing vessels *Leading Lady* and *Kupreanof* sank in Kachemak Bay Critical Habitat area. The cost to the US Coast Guard to refloat and remove the pollution from these vessels was well over \$200,000. The cost to date for the State of Alaska Department of Natural Resources to take possession of these vessels, transport them to Homer, Alaska and store them has been over \$23,500.

- California – There are hundreds of abandoned and derelict vessels in California’s ports and waterways. California can abate the imminent threat of an oil release, but has no jurisdiction or funding to abate navigational hazards or remove vessels before they become an imminent threat or cause an oil spill.
- Hawaii – In Hawaii abandoned vessels pose a special concern for coral reef damage. Vessel removal or salvage is costly due distance and remoteness especially for the Hawaii Marine National Monument Papahānaumokuākea.

In December 2013, the Governors of Washington (Jay Inslee) and Oregon (John A. Kitzhaber) submitted a letter to the members of the Washington and Oregon Congressional Delegation requesting that the OLTF be made available to states for recovering the cost of managing decommissioned military vessels. The Task Force supports Governor Inslee and Kitzhaber’s request but would ask that Congress consider expanding the eligibility of the Oil Spill Liability Trust Fund to address *all* vessels that pose a pollution or hazard threat to waterways and marine coastlines. As mentioned above, the variety of conditions leading to abandoned vessels and expansive shorelines and remote waterways across most of the Western states has created a situation where the states are unable to keep up with the financial drains responding to spills, fires, leaks and other derelict vessel-related incidents.

Successfully preventing abandoned vessels from becoming environmental and pollution hazards requires an up-front investment. On behalf of the Task Force Member states (Alaska, California, Hawaii, Oregon and Washington), I urge you to consider making such funds available through the Oil Spill Liability Trust Fund.

With best regards,



Sarah Brace
Executive Coordinator
Pacific States/British Columbia Oil Spill Task Force