



Pribilof Project Office

When the United States purchased Alaska from Russia in 1867, it acquired the Pribilof Islands, located in the Bering Sea 800 miles southwest of Anchorage, Alaska. From 1870 to 1910, the United States granted contracts to private companies to harvest northern fur seals on St. George and St. Paul Islands and process their pelts. Beginning in 1910 and continuing to 1983, the U.S. Government became the sole operator and administrator of the Pribilof Islands. The seal harvesting industry was managed by various federal agencies, including the Department of Treasury, Department of Commerce and Labor, Department of the Interior, and finally, the Department of Commerce's National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA).

NOAA's Role Today

As the final federal operator of sealing activities on the Pribilof Islands, NOAA assumed responsibility for cleanup of debris and contamination left from the government's management period. NOAA's Office of Response and Restoration created the Pribilof Islands Environmental Restoration Project Office (PPO) to characterize, remediate, and restore sites on the islands as mandated by the Pribilof Islands Environmental Restoration Act of 1996 and the Pribilof Islands Transition Act of 2000.

Nature of the Problem

During the federal government's management of the Pribilofs, the islands' environments suffered from improper handling and disposal of petroleum hydrocarbons, hazardous materials, and solid waste at more than 90 sites. In 1996, NOAA and the Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation signed the Pribilof Islands Environmental Restoration Agreement, known as the Two Party Agreement, which describes specific environmental restoration requirements.



Innovative Approaches

The remoteness and harsh climate of the Pribilof Islands necessitates innovative approaches. Hurdles include the challenging relationships between the federal government and island entities, the lack of geo-rectified and large-scale topographic maps, and a paucity of heavy equipment, analytical laboratories, field sampling gear, dependable personnel air carriers, and air and sea freight service to the islands. PPO's approaches include

- Collaborating with NOAA's Coast Survey and the U.S. Geological Survey to produce geo-rectified charts and relatively small-scale topographic maps for the islands. To achieve even greater detail, PPO staff were trained and provided with mapping and survey grade GPS equipment, which required installation of control and repeater stations.
- Treating contaminated soils on site, instead of shipping them off the islands. PPO purchased two enhanced thermal conduction systems. These systems heat soils to temperatures high enough to volatilize the primary contaminants of concern—diesel range organics and gasoline range organics.
- Purchasing equipment to overcome many operational problems—an excavator, backhoe, drill rig, dump trucks, bulldozers, pickup trucks, all-terrain vehicles, snowmobiles, direct-push soil samplers, survey grade GPS, and water and sediment samplers—and maintaining the equipment on the islands. Despite a lack of readily available parts and solid maintenance capability, PPO staff respond to equipment breakdowns by directly purchasing parts and arranging for alternative means of repair.

- Training or hiring in house staff and contractors to write corrective action and site characterization plans and reports, and conduct mapping, GPS surveying, hazardous waste operations, asbestos abatement, equipment operations, photography, and videography.
- Communicating cleanup plans and results to local residents and businesses using multimedia techniques, such as 2-D and 3-D data visualization and video.

NOAA hires local residents and businesses to assist in cleanup efforts to the extent practicable. NOAA also engages locals in dialogue regarding cleanup and restoration through periodic Restoration Advisory Board meetings.

Progress to Date

So far, NOAA has

- Removed over 14 million pounds of debris from the islands for disposal or recycling.
- Installed over 100 groundwater monitoring wells.
- Analyzed and mapped several thousand soil, water, and sediment samples.
- Shipped several hundred barrels of petroleum wastes, asbestos-containing materials, and hundreds of packaged hazardous chemicals off-island for treatment and disposal.
- Destroyed several hundred pounds of explosives and thousands of detonators.
- Cleaned up more than 70 sites and received “No Further Action” designations from the Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation for 42 sites.
- Excavated approximately 60,000 cubic yards of petroleum-contaminated soil and lesser amounts of lead- and mercury-contaminated soils.
- Thermally treated 20,000 cubic yards of petroleum-contaminated soil.
- Initiated a Restoration Advisory Board, where representatives of the community, native corporations, regulatory agencies, and NOAA can discuss and exchange information about cleanup and restoration.



More Work Remains

NOAA plans to complete cleanup and restoration efforts on the Pribilof Islands in 2004 and 2005. Long-term monitoring to ensure regulatory compliance may be required until 2028. Additionally, in compliance with the National Historic Preservation Act, NOAA is contributing to the preservation of the Pribilof Islands’ cultural heritage, which played such an important role in the history of the fur seal industry, Alaska, and the U.S. Finally, the Office of Response and Restoration is assisting NOAA’s Office of Finance and Administration with the transfer of island government properties to Aleut Native-American groups.

For additional information:
<http://response.restoration.noaa.gov/pribilof>
john.lindsay@noaa.gov
 (206) 526-4560

NOAA’s Office of Response & Restoration—Protecting our Coastal Environment

**For further information about NOAA’s Office of Response and Restoration,
 please visit our Web site at**

<http://response.restoration.noaa.gov> or call (301) 713-2989.

