



MEDIA RELEASE

Alaska Department of Natural Resources

Michael L. Menge, Commissioner
550 West 7th Ave., Suite 1400
Anchorage, Alaska 99501
907-269-8431

Public Information Center
550 West 7th Ave., Suite 1260
Anchorage, Alaska 99501
907-269-8400 ext. 0

DIVISION OF: Parks and Outdoor Recreation

CONTACT: Dave McMahan

RELEASE DATE: April 19, 2006

PHONE: 907-269-8723

SUBJECT: Southeast Alaska historic shipwrecks documented under a NOAA Office of Ocean Exploration grant to DNR

The Office of History and Archaeology (OHA), Alaska Department of Natural Resources collaborated with scientists from the University of Alaska Fairbanks, University of Rhode Island, NOAA National Marine Sanctuary Program, and U.S. Minerals Management Service to collect information on several historic shipwrecks in Southeast Alaska, April 4-12. Funded with a grant from the NOAA Office of Ocean Exploration to OHA, the research team collected information on the PRINCESS KATHLEEN, PRINCESS SOPHIA, CLARA NEVADA, and ISLANDER. Archaeological and historical sites on state lands, including tidelands and submerged lands, are protected under state and federal laws. These laws allow for recreational diving on the wrecks, but not for disturbance or collection unless under state permit. No artifacts were collected from the wrecks as part of the project. During the April project, four divers including archaeologists and marine biologists collected baseline information on the condition of the shipwrecks, to be supplemented through interviews with recreational divers and historians familiar with the wrecks. These “snapshots in time” will allow future studies to better understand changes that are occurring due to natural and cultural processes. The divers also placed small markers near the sites identifying their protected status.

One aspect of the study, being undertaken by Drs. John Kelley and Sathy Naidu (UAF School of Fisheries and Ocean Sciences) will focus on trace element analyses of surrounding sediments. This will contribute to understanding coldwater deterioration and effects of the wrecks on the marine environment. Dr. Stephan Jewett, also from UAF, collected data on the marine biotic communities around the wreck sites. Participating archaeologists included Dr. John Jensen (University of Rhode Island / Sea Education Association), Dave McMahan (State Archaeologist, Alaska DNR), and Dr. Hans Van Tilburg (NOAA National Marine Sanctuary Program, Pacific Islands Region, Hawaii). Other participants included Mike Burwell (shipwrecks historian, U.S. Minerals Management Service) and Ed Grossman (former U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Dive Safety Officer). Work was conducted off the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service vessel CURLEW, skippered by Joe McClung.

In addition to scientific research, the project had a public component. Public talks in Haines and Juneau addressed topics of recent OHA maritime collaborations, Alaska’s coastal dynamics, the steamer PORTLAND, submerged resources at Pearl Harbor and the Pacific Islands, and the former Russian American Company steamer POLITKOFYSY. The researchers hope to nominate the wrecks to the

National Register of Historic Places. This is a small step towards inventorying and documenting Alaska's maritime heritage. Alaska has almost half the nation's coastline and several thousand known shipwrecks, but has no dedicated program for managing maritime heritage sites either in government or academia.



Southeast Alaska shipwrecks project scientists. L to R: Dave McMahan, John Kelley, John Jensen, Hans Van Tilburg, Stephen Jewett, and Michael Burwell (photo by Joe McClung).

END #