

Meet Dick Prentki—Public Member of the Environmental Monitoring Committee

CIRCAC depends on the active engagement of citizen volunteers to serve on our Board, working committees, and as subject matter experts, among other things. Their active participation is crucial to our Mission. We couldn't do our work without them.



IN THE FIELD

Richard "Dick" Prentki is an exceptional volunteer. His involvement with CIRCAC began in 1994 as Ex Officio Director for the Minerals Management Service (now Bureau of Ocean Energy Management). During that time, Dick had a higher attendance rate at CIRCAC's Environmental Monitoring Committee (EMC) meetings than most committee members. (The EMC monitors for early detection of environmental effects in Cook Inlet from oil industry operations, provides the Board of Directors expert advice and recommendations, and promotes

increased communication between participating state and federal agencies, interest groups and citizens.) After he retired from BOEM in 2012, Dick didn't lose his enthusiasm. He has been seated on the EMC as a public member for nearly six years.

As Ex Officio during CIRCAC's early years, Dick saw the organization through some of its biggest growing pains. Funding was a challenge. The Exxon Valdez oil spill was still a recent memory. Projects were more emotionally driven. Project planning was difficult. Dick has noticed a lot of changes in the ensuing decades.

"Now the Science Program is led by a very strong Science Director and is more staff-driven. The organization has grown up that way. And she (Susan Saupe) has worked to nurture contacts with other agencies and organizations and leverages dollars with grant applications. These partnerships and collaborations have grown to improve the program. Initially, we hadn't yet really developed those relationships. Once funding was guaranteed, we could plan and develop longer-term programs with greater assurance," he said.

Dick said he is also impressed by how much the EMC has contributed to understanding contaminant issues and the oceanography of the Inlet. According to CIRCAC Executive Director Mike Munger, Dick can take some credit for EMC's success—especially in furthering CIRCAC's scientific work. "I know Sue admires him and greatly appreciates his wisdom and thoughtful input," he said.

Dick was born in Detroit, went to high school in New York, and completed his undergraduate work in Seattle. From 1969 to 1974, he lived in Fairbanks to work on his

Ph.D. in chemical oceanography and then moved to Wisconsin as a research associate (and to canoe) and later the University of Nevada where he worked on Lake Mead.

Before there was an EPA, Dick helped start a 10-year study of experimental spills in tundra ponds as part of an international biological program, which informed onshore development. In 1981, Dick settled in Anchorage to take a job with the BLM Outer Continental Shelf Office (predecessor to the Minerals Management Service) as an oil spill risk analysis coordinator. During his last decade and a half with MMS/BOEM, he managed environmental studies projects around Alaska, including the Shelikof Strait Sediment Quality study, which looked at environmental effects of discharge permits and marine pollution with a particular interest in oil industry operations.

For fun, Dick is an avid birder and has listed 296 species in Alaska. His bird watching travels have taken him throughout the United States and Internationally. Last year he traveled to Peru, and this year he is heading to Australia. When he was interviewed for this story, he'd just returned from the Maritimes in Maine and Nova Scotia and a visit with his daughter who lives in Boston. Dick and his wife, Kathleen, also have a son in Anchorage.

Of CIRCAC's many projects, Dick considers the ShoreZone Mapping project the most exciting and has enjoyed observing its evolution since CIRCAC first introduced coastal habitat mapping to Alaska as a pilot project.

"It's revolutionary," he said."

As a member of CIRCAC's EMC, Dick said the sudden progress of the gas pipeline is on his radar; should it come to the Kenai, he expects it will raise some interesting questions.