

WWF/CSE/NOAA ERMA Workshop

April 16-19, 2018

As Arctic summer sea ice decreases and shipping traffic increases, the Bering Strait, which sustains an extraordinary abundance of marine wildlife, is being threatened by the impacts of increasing industrial activity. Currently existing measures, including bilateral legal instruments, are not adequate—or simply not being implemented—to protect this special place. WWF began work with US and Russian authorities to strengthen the mechanisms and planning required to ensure clean and productive waters of the Bering Strait so that they continue to sustain abundant wildlife and indigenous communities in both countries.

The goal of this workshop was to strengthen capacity in oil spill response by introducing a tool called the Environmental Response Management Application (ERMA), which is currently used in U.S. waters, to Russian agencies to plan timely and efficient responses to oil spills. Bilateral application of this tool would allow for joint planning, information sharing, and joint response in the event of an accident in this transboundary region. Customizing this tool for the Bering Strait would also be an opportunity for technical experts from the US and Russia to work together more closely and strengthen relationships within the scientific community.

During a workshop held at the University of New Hampshire hosted by the Center for Spills and Environmental Hazards, the U.S. and Russian experts discussed:

- how ERMA works and is used by U.S. federal responders;
- relevant incidents where ERMA has been used;
- the data that exists in ERMA; and
- data that can be added for the Bering Strait application.

Among the challenges that the participants noted were:

- data gaps that need to be filled, including access to better ship location satellite data;
- foreign access to potentially sensitive/protected data;
- incorporation of ERMA into the Russian system of emergency response, including having ERMA-trained personnel in relevant Russian agencies, and data translations (Cyrillic encoding to English).

Participants came to a conclusion that ERMA could be a useful tool for bilateral response in the Bering Strait, and recommended several possible steps:

- Incorporating ERMA into the official bilateral US-Russia meeting planned for November 2018 in the Russian Far East, as part of the tabletop exercise.
- Reviewing US-Canada documents (MOUs) on using ERMA in cooperative transboundary emergency response operations.
- Solving barriers to access in the long-term by creating an additional instance of ERMA (e.g., Bering-Chukchi ERMA) with account privileges for Russian officials; potentially hosted on the UNH network.
 - Solving access problems during the November meeting by using a “stand alone” exercise-only version of ERMA developed for the scenario and hosting this version on a UNH server available to the U.S. and Russian meeting participants.
- Using U.S. and Russian trajectory models during a joint exercise.

Workshop materials are available at <https://crrc.unh.edu/erma-seminar>

List of Participants

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