

oil settles in the fine, muddy sediments, as well as on the geographic distribution of such sediments. In other spills, the most persistent effects have been in the intertidal and subtidal benthic communities. At rocky beaches, of which there are many on the Sound, the effects will be much shorter lived.

As the oil coats particulate matter in the water column, it will be ingested by zooplankton and then excreted. This "rain of fecal pellets," says Sanders, is a major route of oil to the bottom. As oil accumulates on the bottom, the benthos could then become anaerobic, he adds, making it unfit for marine fauna and for some marine flora.

Oil accumulation in the sediments is likely to bring a shift in species composition, as benthic fauna are killed off and are replaced by opportunistic species that can tolerate pollution. The net effects on the ecosystem, however, are unclear. Benthic plants and animals form the basis of the food chain; thus, a change in species composition could affect fish. Moreover, some benthic organisms, like clams, are valuable in their own right.

Herring could be particularly at risk, since they deposit their eggs in the bottom sediments, predicts Sanders. If the eggs are coated with toxic oil compounds, he adds, they almost certainly will not hatch. "It could kill the entire stock of herring," Herring spawning in the Sound has just begun. On Monday, Alaska's Fish and Game Department banned this year's catch.

Ted Cooney, a biological oceanographer at the University of Alaska at Fairbanks, is far more optimistic. Because the Sound exchanges water with the Gulf of Alaska, the organisms killed off in the water column will be replaced by new seed stock carried in from the ocean. "It is not a situation in which all the recovery and growth has to come from the survivors," he says. "The salmon will be feeding on a new batch of plankton next month."

Cooney is one of a team of University of Alaska researchers gearing up to study the spill. They have already begun collecting water samples and this week will launch their research vessel for 7 days. They intend to measure hydrocarbon in the water column and to monitor the status of the plankton. They will also assess the spill's impact on benthic communities, monitor microbial degradation, and, in coordination with state and federal agencies, monitor the effects on birds and marine mammals.

All agree that the rich ecosystem of Prince William Sound will eventually recover. The only question is when. ■ **LESLIE ROBERTS**

Eliot Marshall contributed to this article.

Bevill Wants Foreign SSC Funding Up Front

If Representative Tom Bevill (D-AL) has his way, no money will be spent to build the Superconducting Super Collider (SSC) until firm commitments from foreign participants are secured. Bevill, who chairs the House Appropriations Committee's energy and water subcommittee, is concerned that the United States will not have much bargaining leverage if Congress allows construction to go forward without written agreements.

Bevill told Energy Secretary James Watkins at a recent hearing on the Department of Energy's budget that he did not want to fund the SSC at the expense of other projects and that he did not want the project to add to the federal deficit. Bevill said he would like to see foreign funding cover as much as 40% of the project's cost. So far, DOE has indicated that contributions from other countries might be on the order of \$1 billion, out of a total of \$6 billion.

Watkins, urging the committee to allocate \$160 million to construction, sought to convince Bevill that foreign governments wanted the United States to start to build the SSC before they would enter into formal pacts. Bevill, however, contends that the Congress' commitment of \$100 million for research in the current fiscal year should be read as a sign that the country is serious about the project. The appropriations subcommittee, Bevill told *Science*, will likely hold the SSC budget to around \$100 million for R&D in fiscal year 1990.

■ **MARK CRAWFORD**

DOE Boosts Research for Defense Cleanup

The Department of Energy (DOE) is launching a new R&D program to develop new technologies to clean up chemical and radioactive contamination produced by the government's nuclear weapons complex.

Energy Secretary James D. Watkins, in a four-page letter to John D. Dingell, chairman of the House Energy and Commerce Committee, said the R&D program would focus on four areas: waste minimization, biological remediation to neutralize wastes in place, robotics, and the application of advanced technologies now used for other industrial processes.

The research effort, which will be conducted by the national labs, is part of Watkins' overall plan for managing wastes at

government facilities that process radioactive materials used to make nuclear warheads. Watkins told Dingell that he will have a 5-year plan ready in August for tackling the cleanup.

For now, he says, the department's "immediate goal . . . is to confine and contain the present wastes and reduce further contamination." Watkins has named Leo Duffy as his defense waste cleanup czar. Duffy previously served as a vice president of Roy F. Weston, Inc., a company that provides nuclear waste cleanup services.

■ **MARK CRAWFORD**

Somali Scientists Freed

Somalia, as promised, has released 12 scientists, engineers, and physicians imprisoned for political reasons. The release of political prisoners is part of a series of human rights initiatives the government announced earlier this year, following sustained pressure by international human rights groups as well as the U.S. Congress, which put a hold on general economic assistance to the country.

The release of the scientists was confirmed on 22 March by the human rights committees of the National Academy of Sciences and the National Institute of Medicine.

■ **CONSTANCE HOLDEN**

Truly in Line for NASA Post

Rear Admiral Richard Truly is reportedly in line to take command of the U.S. civilian space program—if the White House can find a way to protect his military pension.

Truly is now associate administrator of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) in charge of space flight, and as such was responsible for bringing the shuttle program back to life after its January 1986 disaster. The President's staff apparently has put his name at the top of the list of candidates to succeed NASA Administrator James Fletcher, who departs on 8 April. Among Capitol Hill space experts, Truly is regarded as a solid manager and a frank spokesman.

In an attempt to keep military and civil functions in space separate, the law creating NASA requires that the agency be directed by a person not on active military duty. Truly is a Navy employee on loan to NASA. He is said to be ready to accept the new job, but would like to take his pension with him.

■ **ELIOT MARSHALL**