

Alaska State Senate

Senator Forrest Dunbar

Session:

Alaska State Capitol
Juneau, Alaska 99801
(907) 465-6944



Interim:

1500 W. Benson Blvd.
Anchorage, Alaska 99503
(907) 269-0246

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SJR 12: NOAA BUOY OUTAGES

SJR 12 calls attention to a small but important piece of federal infrastructure: National Data Buoy Center meteorological stations. Weather buoys provide important data points for forecasting models and real time observations that are critical to safe fishing and navigation in coastal Alaska. They inform mariners decisions on when to leave harbor and when to return.

Of particular concern is the Seal Rocks Buoy in Prince William Sound. The Coast Guard relies on this station to determine if conditions in Hinchinbrook Entrance are safe for the transit of laden oil tankers departing the Alyeska Terminal in Valdez. Like many other NDBC meteorological stations in Alaska, the Seal Rocks Buoy has experienced lengthy service outages in the last few years, including the entirety of last winter. Currently, it has been non-functional since October 2024. Without this station, the Coast Guard must rely on spot reports from passing ships and data from more distant stations to estimate conditions in Hinchinbrook Entrance.

This situation is dangerous. Hinchinbrook Entrance is narrow; if a tanker were to lose control there would be very little time to prevent it from grounding. Attaching a tow line or performing any other rescue operations is very difficult in high winds and waves. If a tanker did ground in bad weather, Prince William Sound would experience a repeat of the *Exxon Valdez* disaster. This would be devastating for the local environment, fisheries, and tourism. It would cost the state and federal government tens of billions of dollars to clean up. When the stakes are this high, it is essential that safety equipment like the Seal Rocks Buoy kept in service.

SJR 12 will convey this information to Alaska's Congressional delegation and the National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration, the parent agency of NDBC. It will ask NOAA to restore reliability to NDBC and Seal Rocks Buoy service and ask Congress to ensure NOAA has the resources to do so. At a time when federal agencies and services are under threat, it is important to remind decision-makers that these functions are critical to Alaska.