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Mr. Speaker

Members of Council

Break in U.S. Army Pipeline

News of a leak in the U.S. Army pipeline was received on May 17th when oil was observed on the surface of Dezadeash Lake by the pipeline patrol plane. At the time of this discovery the pipeline was carrying jet fuel. The exact number of gallons lost is considered classified information by the U.S. Army and these authorities were not pressed for this information. Mr. John Summers, Officer in charge of the Department of Fisheries in the Yukon and a portion of northern British Columbia, was in the area supervising culvert installations at Klukshu and Marshall Creeks.

← Type: Jet fuel

The leak was approximately at Mile 129.1 on the Haines Road and about one mile of the shore line was examined by Mr. Summers. He immediately returned to Whitehorse where he informed Forestry and Game Officials of the situation and returned to Dezadeash on the 19th.

There he met with Mr. R. Watson and they had the D.P.W. divert a stream which was flushing a major portion of the saturated hillside into the lake.

On the 20th of May the maintenance crew from Haines arrived with their heavy equipment and Mr. Summers arranged for them to commence work immediately.

Mr. Summers returned to Dezadeash Lake again on the 22nd of May with a representative of the Game Branch and an inspection of the shoreline revealed about one and one half miles of oil contaminated beach. Fortunately, drifting packs of needle ice and a prevailing south wind had concentrated the oil leakage in narrow pools along the edge of the ice.

Due to the slow response of the American Army in attempting to clean up the oil seepage on the lake, permission was obtained on the 24th of May by mobile radio from Col. Johnston, Commander of the Alaska Support Command, to bring in a number of local natives and set up our own camp to begin collecting and burning the oil.

Camping gear was obtained from Mr. T. Kennedy, Yukon Forest Service, at Haines Junction and 12 local men were hired and camped south of Cortino's property on the edge of the lake.

The maintenance crew from Haines were put to work digging pits and collection trenches along the hillside to act as catch basins for the oil seeping from the saturated hillside. This oil was skimmed from the surface by hand and collected in 45 gallon drums.

In the evening of the 24th the Game representative and Mr. Summers returned to Whitehorse where camping gear and flame throwers were obtained from the Yukon Central Stores at Forestry Headquarters. In addition enough food and hip rubber boots was purchased to last a week or more for 20 men. The Game representative returned to Dezadeash in the evening with the camping gear and food.

That afternoon baled straw was obtained from the Experimental Station at Haines Junction to be used while straw was being trucked in from Alaska. The crew began spreading this on the shallow north end of the lake where a prevailing south wind had concentrated the oil. This was directly adjacent to Mr. J. Cortino's property and he allowed us access and offered his help in any way he could be of assistance.

On the 25th the oil was found to be still accumulating at a fairly rapid rate so Mr. Kennedy brought down three forestry fire pumps plus a number of manure and hay forks and garden rakes he managed to borrow from Haines Junction residents.

The pumps were employed to maintain the water level below the top of the catch basins and dyke at the lake. A P.T. boom and two army boats arrived and the boom was set up around the leakage area.

The straw collection system worked very well and burned readily enabling the extraction of most of the surface oil from the lake.

On the 26th it was decided to split up the crews and keep a night shift on the oil skimming at the seepage site so a portable generator was rented in town and some lighting supplies purchased. A long main collection trench was dug along the bottom of the hill with the shovel to catch any seepage escaping below the pits.

Dr. A. Pearson was using a helicopter out of Haines Junction in his study area and slightly over seven hours were flown in inspections of the lake by Dr. Pearson of the Canadian Wildlife Service, Game and Fisheries representatives, plus Mr. M. Monson and Col. Johnston and Capt. Spencer.

Mr. G. Swanson, fire inspector, made use of the machine as well when the idea of burning the entire saturated hillside was discussed, and Mr. Don Merrill drove out to inspect the site.

Representatives from the Bureau of Sport Fisheries in Juneau and the Federal Water Pollution Office in Fairbanks were on hand for a few days and stated they would submit reports containing recommendation for emergency kits to be installed at pumping stations for future use.

On the 29th of May all but six men were released who were kept on to maintain the pumps and oil skimming at the seepage site.

The largest fish kill took place between the island and the shore in a large shallow area. The south wind carried the oil over the shallows and the wave action there allowed a mixing of the oil and a number of ling cod and whitefish were killed.

Between 600 and 800 fish were found along a 3/4 mile stretch of beach north of the shallows, but in three days these were cleaned up by eagles and gulls and perhaps a few land scavengers, with the exception of about twenty ling cod which were too heavy to be moved. Very little bird mortality was observed as most of the migratory water birds were at the south end of the lake in the lee of the wind.

The remaining six men were released on the 3rd of June at noon by Col. Ruganni as our man hours on the original agreement had expired. Haines maintenance crews were employed from the 3rd of June on.

Floyd Powers, Sanitary Engineer from the Office of the Engineer in Anchorage, arrived on May 31st and reviewed the situation. He promised he would see that the army supplied the necessary camping gear to look after the maintenance crew. Mel Monson flew in with a Gruman Goose the same afternoon to have another look and expressed his satisfaction in the manner that the oil had been cleaned up.

On the first of June the dyke was enlarged at the bottom of the hill and the P.T. boom had to be changed several times due to changes in wind direction. Two more P.T. booms were ordered but have to be manufactured and delivery date was at least two weeks from the placement of the order.

On Friday, June 7th, Col. Ruganni and Ron Watson flew into Whitehorse to meet the Commissioner and discuss with heads of Treasury, Game, Fisheries and Forestry the procedure for handling the reimbursement and billing of the work carried out by the Territorial Government on behalf of the American Army.

Upon being advised officially by the U.S. Army to the effect the Territory would be reimbursed for all expenses incurred in cleaning up the lake in question, the Game Branch proceeded with processing accounts in conjunction with our Treasury Branch. Total expenditure is very close to the \$6,500.00 mark.

A further inspection of the lake by Fisheries and Game personnel on the second weekend in June indicated very satisfactory results were obtained. At last report about two barrels a day were still being collected from the collection pits.

One of the most significant and satisfying factors in this incident was the excellent co-operation between the three agencies concerned with renewable resources in the Yukon, i.e.; the Department of Fisheries, the Yukon Forest Service and the Territorial Game Branch. The pooling of equipment and personnel with these three agencies plus the quick action of the Department of Public Works prevented what may easily have been a catastrophe to one of the finest lakes in the Yukon.

The foregoing is submitted for the information of the Council.

James Smith,
Commissioner.