TECHNICAL MEMORANDUM

MONTGOMERY WATSON

To: U.S. Army Corps of Engineers **Date:** July 29, 1999

From: Gary Busse

Subject: Public Comment on Biological Sampling Plan
1999 Phase II Remedial Investigation

On July 22, 1999, representatives from Montgomery Watson, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Alaska District (Alaska District) and the Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation (ADEC) conducted a public meeting at Savoonga, Alaska. On the following day, July 23, 1999, Montgomery Watson and ADEC conducted a similar meeting at Gambell, Alaska, which the Alaska District was unable to attend due to poor weather.

The purposes of the meetings were to inform residents in these two St. Lawrence Island communities about recent remedial investigations at Northeast Cape and Gambell, and to brief residents on upcoming activities. One of the activities planned at Northeast Cape is to conduct biological sampling at the contaminated Drainage Basin, Suqitughneq River, and a control stream. Sampling results and field observations will be used to evaluate the current ecological health of these waterways, which were contaminated with diesel fuel.

This work is scheduled to begin on July 31, 1999 and will last about six days. The attendees of both public meetings were asked to comment on the proposed biological sampling plan and offer any suggestions. A detailed description of the biological sampling program is included in the *Work Plan Addendum, 1999 Phase II Remedial Investigation, Northeast Cape, St. Lawrence Island, Alaska* (Montgomery Watson, July 1999).

This technical memorandum was prepared to fulfill a requirement in the scope of work for Modification No. 002, Delivery Order No. 005, Contract No. DACA85-98-D-0007. The purpose of this memorandum is to summarize the communities' opinions and ideas regarding the biological sampling activities planned for 1999. Community input received at these meetings is presented below:

Savoonga Comments. The consensus of the attendees at the Savoonga public meeting was that no fish would be found in the Suqitughneq River as a result of the fuel spill. Several commented that the river formerly supported Dolly Varden and salmon populations that are no longer found there. The former presence of some species of trout was also mentioned. In addition, one person said that spotted seals, which once frequented the mouth of Suqitughneq River, had disappeared after the spill, but have now returned.

Montgomery Watson described the proposed control stream, located about 1,500 feet to the west of the site, and asked the community members if this stream was comparable to the pre-spill Suqitughneq River. One person responded that this stream (name unknown) contains no fish. He suggested that a better stream to use for control was 4 to 5 miles east; this stream was later found to be the Tapiisak River. The Tapiisak River apparently has a fish population comparable to the Suqitughneq River prior to the fuel spill.

Gambell Comments. One person asked if reindeer were included in the biological study. Montgomery Watson responded that there were no plans to study reindeer directly, but findings regarding the health of the contaminated Drainage Basin and Suqitughneq River could be used to evaluate risk to reindeer in the area. The person who asked the question was not aware of any specific problems with reindeer, but was aware that some people in Savoonga were concerned.

Attendees were asked if they were familiar with the Suqitughneq River or Tapiisak River, and if there were any comments on aquatic life and similarity of the rivers to each other. The responses were similar to those of Savoonga residents, that Dolly Varden and salmon are currently found in the Tapiisak River, and were formerly present in the Suqitughneq River.

Discussion. The comments received from the communities of Savoonga and Gambell will be useful in conducting the proposed biological sampling. Of particular interest is their input regarding the choice of a control stream. The Tapiisak River may indeed support aquatic life that is similar to what once existed in the Suqitughneq River, but comparable fish populations is not the only criterion that will be used to select the control stream. Additional factors will include comparable size, gradient, river-bottom composition, orientation, and other stream-flow characteristics.

The unnamed river to the west, Tapiisak River, and possibly other rivers in the vicinity will be inspected by the on-site biologists representing Montgomery Watson and the Alaska District. The choice of the appropriate control stream will be made based on their professional opinions.