

Community Workshop Summary: Exploring Marine Carbon Research in Prince William Sound

Cordova, Alaska | December 4

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On December 4, community members in Cordova gathered for a facilitated workshop to discuss emerging ideas around marine carbon dioxide removal (mCDR) research and what it could mean for Prince William Sound. Participants included commercial fishermen, Alaska Native representatives, local residents, ocean users, and regional organizations.

The purpose of the workshop was not to promote or advance any specific project. Instead, it was designed as an early, exploratory conversation to understand local values, concerns, and expectations, before any proposals are developed or decisions are made.

Overall, the discussion reflected a community that is deeply engaged, informed about climate change, and cautious about new ocean-based activities. Participants emphasized that how decisions are made, who is involved, and how risks are addressed are just as important as any scientific or technical considerations.



What Makes Cordova and Prince William Sound Distinct

Participants repeatedly emphasized that Cordova's identity, economy, and culture are inseparable from the surrounding marine environment. Places such as the working harbor, fishing fleet, processing facilities, Copper River Delta, and nearby bays and islands were highlighted not as scenery, but as living systems that support livelihoods, food security, and community well-being.

Many noted that Prince William Sound's relatively small population does not mean low risk. Instead, the health of the ecosystem is precisely what makes the region both valuable and vulnerable.

Fishing, Livelihoods, and the Local Economy

Commercial fishing emerged as the primary lens through which any future marine research or activity would be evaluated. Participants stressed that fishing supports far more than individual income and that it underpins local jobs, municipal services, infrastructure, and schools.

Even temporary disruptions, such as increased vessel traffic, gear conflicts, or uncertainty about seafood quality or markets, were seen as potentially having significant economic consequences. As a result, participants emphasized that any future research would need to clearly demonstrate no interference with fishing access, safety, or seafood integrity, and include meaningful safeguards if harm were to occur.

History, Trust, and Community Memory

Discussions were strongly shaped by local history, particularly the legacy of the Exxon Valdez oil spill. Participants described lasting ecological, economic, and emotional impacts that continue to influence how new activities in local waters are viewed.

This history was not framed as opposition to science or research, but as a reason for high expectations around transparency, accountability, and long-term responsibility. Participants also emphasized the importance of centering Alaska Native communities—especially the Native Village of Eyak—not only as stakeholders, but as rights-holders with deep and enduring connections to the region.

Perspectives on Climate Change and Carbon Approaches

There was broad agreement that climate change is already affecting marine ecosystems and fisheries in the region. At the same time, many participants expressed skepticism about carbon markets and credit-based approaches, questioning whether they lead to real global emissions reductions or allow continued pollution elsewhere.

Interest in marine carbon research was described as cautious and conditional, with greater openness to small-scale, research-focused efforts than to large or commercial projects. Participants emphasized that scale, pace, and purpose matter greatly.

Governance and Decision-Making Matter

Across all discussions, governance emerged as a central concern. Participants emphasized that decisions about potential marine research should involve local and regional voices, including tribes, fishing organizations, municipalities, scientific institutions, and state agencies.

There was also concern about whether communities would have meaningful authority if projects were proposed from outside the region. This led to interest in proactive planning—such as regional or statewide frameworks—that could clarify expectations and protections before proposals arise.

Expectations for Transparency and Accountability

Participants articulated clear expectations for any future engagement, including:

- Clear and accessible information about proposed activities
- Strong baseline data and independent monitoring
- Regular updates in plain language
- Defined limits, safeguards, and exit strategies
- Financial responsibility for potential harm



Overall Community Sentiment

Facilitators consistently described the tone of the workshop as thoughtful, respectful, and non-polarized. While participants were curious and willing to engage, enthusiasm was tempered by caution and high standards.

Many declined to take a clear position for or against marine carbon research, reflecting the early stage of discussion. The prevailing sentiment was a willingness to engage as long as engagement is slow, transparent, accountable, and grounded in local values and governance. There was strong resistance to short-term or extractive research approaches, and a preference for long-term partnerships that build local capacity and trust.

Looking Ahead

This workshop represents an early step in an ongoing conversation. Community input will help inform how future outreach, research planning, and policy discussions are approached, with an emphasis on trust, inclusion, and respect for the people and ecosystems of Prince William Sound.