

Video surveillance may be on the way for Kenai dipnetters

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A camera installed to watch winter ice build-up in Cook Inlet could also be used to monitor the City of Kenai's busy dipnet beaches.

While a final agreement has not yet been signed, representatives from the Cook Inlet Regional Citizens Advisory Council and the City of Kenai were optimistic that the project would move forward.

"The tentative agreement is that the city will provide power and internet to them at no cost and they will provide all of the equipment and everything it takes to get it installed," said Information Technology manager for Kenai Dan Castimore. "At the end of the day it'll benefit the city as well because they have offered to share the use of that camera in the summer ... when our dipnet fishery is going on which will be very beneficial for us."

Currently the city has video cameras that are trained on the road leading into the North Beach of the Kenai River and one at the sewer treatment plant looking at the parking lot near the same beach. None of the cameras are trained on the mouth of the river.

Castimore said law enforcement monitor that video to decide when they need to go to the fishery to direct traffic.

The camera will be the ninth added in an array that spans the Cook Inlet and includes Anchorage, Port MacKenzie, Nikiski and three platforms in its coverage area. They're primarily used for ice forecasting though the cameras can also be used for other purposes, said advisory council director of operations Steve "Vinnie" Catalano.

"Part of the agreement we have in place is that the cameras can also be utilized for emergency response and that would include oil spill response," Catalano said. "If there's something in the area that the cameras would prove to be useful for the unified command we can get access to them."

The camera would cost just over \$6,000. The camera and the installation will be paid for through an Alaska Ocean Observing System grant, Catalano said.

Neither Catalano or Castimore knew when the final agreement would be reached, however Catalano said he'd like to see the camera installed in the next few months.

The most likely spot for installation would be near the outhouses on the North Beach access of the river, Castimore said.

That spot is one of several considered for the project.

“Our biggest concerns down there are dunes,” he said. “The City of Kenai kind of takes the stance that those dunes are sacred, we don’t walk on them, we don’t dig through them, we don’t run wires through them.”

When the pole and camera are up and running both CIRCAC and the city have considered mounting other equipment in the same location.

Staff at CIRCAC have been in contact with the Marine Exchange of Alaska and the Alaska Ocean Observing System to install weather sensing equipment that could provide real-time weather observations to vessels moving through the area, while the City of Kenai may install additional cameras.

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