

Comments on Draft Science Strategy  
By  
North Slope Science Initiative Science Technical Group  
Subcommittee Members  
Caryn Rea  
Dan Reed  
Matthew Sturm

Background: At the June 26 & 27, 2006 meeting of the Science Technical Group (STG), a subgroup was formed to review and provide comments on the NSSI Science Strategy document prepared by the Argonne Laboratory at the direction of BLM and members of the Oversight Group. The comments of the subgroup will be circulated to the remaining STG by the Chairman, Dr. John Kelley prior to submittal to the Oversight Group by the Executive Director.

Purpose of Strategy: As indicated in a July 7, 2006 email to the STG by Ken Taylor, Executive Director, *the NSSI Science Strategy was originally developed to be useful as a tool for the public to understand what the North Slope Science Initiative was and how it would operate. Argonne was given this direction. When the Oversight Group finally provided information and feedback to Argonne, the task changed from "a tool for the public" to "guidance for the Oversight Group". Two drafts later, the Oversight Group decided it wanted a "combination" document to be followed by an "implementation" plan for any projects. What the Oversight Group got was just such a "combination" document that was to serve as an umbrella for both the public (including academia), as well as for their use. The "implementation" plan was to follow the Science Strategy as a separate document.*

Review Comments:

Taking into account the intended purpose of the Science Strategy Plan, the following comments are offered for consideration by the Oversight Group.

- 1) Clearly, a lot of time and effort was spent writing the draft of June 2004, but the changing direction of the document shows. In its current form, the document does not seem to have a real purpose. It is too brief and too cursory in its treatment of the evolution and genesis of NSSI to be a useful document for explaining NSSI to the public, but it is far too detailed and specific on the ways in which NSSI should approach inventorying and monitoring to be passed forward as is.
- 2) A combination document that is to serve both the public and the NSSI membership makes for a disjointed, unfocused document that is difficult to follow. In addition to details on the NSSI initiative and players, there is discussion about determining data gaps, prioritizing data needs, followed by instructions to the scientists on developing DQOs and making sure that specific processes are followed (conceptual framework development, GIS considerations, etc).
  - ◆ We recommend that two documents be made out of the existing one. A shorter, concise document should be prepared that discusses the NSSI-what it is, its membership, goals and objectives and how the STG fits into the NSSI. For example, chapters 2 (Identifying Inventory, Monitoring and Research Projects) and 3 (Study Design and Data Considerations) would come out of the document discussing the NSSI. Chapter 4 (Program Implementation) would be moved to the front of the document, following a brief introduction. No Executive Summary would be necessary.
  - ◆ The end product should be a useful summary statement of the North Slope Science Initiative. Section 1 (The Introduction) has useful and reasonably well-written information in it. Of that section the only piece that may need updating is the section on the Research Monitoring Team.

- ◆ Lead with the O.G.'s mission statement.
  - ◆ There is considerable redundancy with respect to the description of NSSI between early chapters and chapter 4 which should be excised.
  - ◆ Ensure in section 4.3 that the description of the Science Technical Group matches the Charter that was signed by the Secretary.
  - ◆ Consider including an organization chart that identifies the members of the oversight group and STG and any reporting relationships. This is easier to read than a textual description.
  - ◆ Appendixes B and D would be appropriate to maintain with the document on the NSSI, streamlining where necessary and updating.
  - ◆ Decide if the NSSI is supposed to have "...a very specific niche among the array..." (Second sentence under Scope in the Executive Summary) or "... as the premier science program..." (Second sentence under Recommendations in the Executive Summary) and stick with one or the other for right now. We find the latter to be a bit pretentious, and the language may end up closing more doors than it opens at this point in the process.
- 3) Have a second document that contains the discussions from chapters 2 and 3 on identifying projects and considerations for study design. These chapters are the result of significant work by the previous Research and Monitoring Team (RMT) and should not be discarded. Appendixes A and C should remain with this document with some updating as appropriate. Some members of our workgroup prefer to maintain this document as a "Working Draft". Some proposed titles for this document, include *Science Approach and Strategy* or *Guidance for Development of a Science-Based Research and Monitoring Program for North Slope Alaska*.
- ◆ Use the words *Working Draft* in the header, impose *Draft* in gray over each page, and excise the Executive Summary.
  - ◆ There are a lot of really nice morsels in this draft that I really don't want to lose and we need to continue to keep aware of internally. But I'd like to have a current draft as a resource I can browse and hi-grade from depending on the issue or topic we are looking at.
  - ◆ I don't want to use it as a point of reference to evaluate our actions.
- 4) The details in Chapters 2 and 3 were developed by the Research and Monitoring Team and appear to be guidance for future researchers as far as elements to consider in developing a monitoring or research program. Has the Oversight Group agreed to this guidance and if not, are they expecting the STG to provide comments on this guidance?
- ◆ The text on prioritizing really gives no useful guidance on how to accomplish this. Each agency is more likely to set its own priorities. The value of the NSSI is that it should provide each individual agency some larger context within which it sets its priorities. Our value is more likely to be making the whole science process more efficient with less redundancy.

- ◆ The discussion regarding a "conceptual scientific framework" left us with considerable concern over codifying this thinking or process in an official document.
- ◆ Section 1. 2. 3. Figures 2 and 3: We believe the appropriate role for the STG will lead us to be issue driven, more like an advisory board to the Oversight Group than a scientific think tank setting out priorities ourselves. We view the Oversight Group's role as setting NSSI priorities and the STG's role as providing advice and recommendations to the Oversight Group during their process of prioritization if asked to do so.
- ◆ We question the current relevance of Table 3.
- ◆ The data discussion may need to be updated.
- ◆ Some members of subgroup felt that there was too much detail about process in Chapters 2 and 3 when it is unclear to this group whether the OG has bought off on these processes.
- ◆ Without funds to disburse for projects (hopefully that will change in 2007 +?) and no leverage to exert on researchers to follow these processes, we are concerned that this might not be realistic. This raises a point for the OG to consider when developing research priorities and the needs to set standards for study plan design and implementation for successful PIs. What would the role of the STG be, if any, with respect to oversight of the selected projects? It must be clear what the lines of communication would be between researchers, the OG and the STG, as well as authority for modifying a researcher's approach if it did not meet the expectations of our program.
- ◆ We cannot proceed with such a detailed blueprint for how the system should work if we are trying to control other peoples spending.
- ◆ There are some useful elements in these chapters (the section on TK), but overall, as long as they exist out there, someone is going to think they are how NSSI is supposed to work, and I doubt that is the way it is really going to happen.
- ◆ It appears that the NSSI has already committed to the Information Sharing System and GIS. Is this true?

**Overall Comments:**

As stated earlier, a significant amount of work has gone into developing this document, much of which should be kept albeit with more focus. One brief document on the NSSI that discusses the mandate by Congress, the assignments by the Secretary of the Interior, the memberships on the OG and STG would be a valuable tool to educate an external stakeholder about this initiative. Reduce the redundancy and streamline the discussions as much as possible. Use of organization charts, insets for the goals of objectives (as is already done) would assist with getting the key messages delivered.

The role of the STG with respect to interaction with research projects awarded is unclear. Will the OG set the priorities for research and ask for input from STG before finalizing? Who will develop the scopes for the research and oversee the implementation? Will a small subgroup of the STG be involved as far as receiving periodic updates on the research or will that be the role of the OG?

The NSSI document should be a roadmap that makes the roles and responsibilities for all participants (i.e. expectations) clear at the start of this program. Recognizing these roles may evolve as the program progresses, we need to have the set of ground rules established at the beginning.

From previous meetings of the Research and Monitoring Team, the directive from the OG was to provide guidance to future researchers on the basic tenets of a research program that we wanted to see followed. This led to the development of conceptual frameworks for each of the target issues established by the RMT which are being questioned by some members of the STG. The intent was to guide the researcher on key drivers associated with assessing potential impacts of resource extraction on specific wildlife issues of concern to a resource agency or subsistence hunters (caribou, birds,..). Perhaps these figures could be removed from the Guidance document and replaced with brief discussions on the rationale for including as a target species for consideration and what potential impacts might be expected (or need to be tested) as a result of resource development. It is expected that any qualified researcher will already be aware of the issues surrounding a specific issue and their proposal would allow the NSSI members to determine whether they had an adequate understanding of the issue and a reasonable approach for study.

Dictating protocols for data management by all contractors should be a part of this guidance document to assure consistency in attributes collected by multiple researchers. This will go a long way toward assuring data compatibility for analysis.