

MINUTES

North Slope Science Initiative (NSSI) OVERSIGHT GROUP MEETING February 27, 2006

Anchorage, Alaska
Fish and Wildlife Service, 1100 East Tudor Road,
Mary Smith Media Center, 3rd floor 10:30 am – 4:30 pm

In attendance:

Board Members

Wayne Regelin, ADF&G, Chair	Tim Jennings, FWS
Henri Bisson, BLM, Co-Chair	Karla Kolash, NSB
Marcia Blaszak, NPS	Jon Kurland, NMFS/NOAA
Leslie Holland-Bartels, USGS	Ron McCoy, DOI/OS
Ed Fogels, DNR	Brent Sheets, DOE
John Goll, MMS	

Staff and Others

Ann Claerbout, NSSI	John Payne, BLM
Pat Galvin, ADNR	Larry Pellz, NMFS
Tom Heinrichs, UAF	Bob Shuchman, Altarum
Tim Holder, MMS	Ken Taylor, NSSI
Ed Josberger, USGS	Francis Wiese, NPRB
Igor Katrayev, NPRB	Bob Winfree, NPS

Wayne Regelin, Chair, opened the meeting at 10:40 AM with introductions of those in attendance. Tim Jennings announced that he is sitting in for Rowan Gould and that Tom Melius will soon be the new Regional Director for the FWS, replacing Rowan Gould.

Marcia Blaszak made a motion for the approval of the December 15, 2005 minutes. The motion was seconded by Bob Winfree. There were no objections.

Ken Taylor gave an update on NSSI activities since the last Oversight Group (OG) meeting. Principal NSSI activities during this period focused on continuing web site development and updates, coordinating with the North Pacific Research Board (NPRB) on the development of a user friendly North Slope project database, and working with the University of Alaska, Fairbanks (UAF) to develop the NSSI information management system. A meeting between UAF staff and several GIS data management personnel from NSSI agencies is scheduled for March 7 and 8, 2006 in Fairbanks. Other NSSI activities included the establishment of the Science Technical Group (STG) by the Secretary of the Interior, the preparation of an NSSI budget, and the distribution of a questionnaire to the OG, asking them to describe their priorities for the NSSI during 2006.

Conferences attended by NSSI staff included: Alaska Water Resources Conference (Anchorage), Coastal Erosion Conference (UAA, Anchorage), Marine Sciences Symposium (Anchorage), Pacific Seabird Working Group (Girdwood), and USGS Metadata Workshop sponsored by NPRB (Anchorage). Additional meetings attended by NSSI staff included: NPRB discussions of project database structure and development, Arctic Slope Regional Corporation Lynx Enterprises, potential research by Shell Oil in Beaufort/Chukchi Seas, U.S. Arctic Council and the Office of the Governor information session on Arctic issues, Alaska Industrial Alliance “Meet Alaska”, and USGS projects in NPR-A.

Tom Heinrichs, Associate Director of the Geographic Information Network (GINA), UAF, presented a summary of the NSSI Data System Development Concept and Workplan (presentation on NSSI website).

Ken Taylor reviewed the recent OG questionnaire which addressed the prioritization the Oversight Group Charter Objectives, future broad scale and site specific NSSI land management issues, effectiveness of overviews regarding, inventory, monitoring, and research efforts, direction of 2006 NSSI staff efforts, and adequacies of NSSI OG meetings and staff communication. Results of the questionnaire determined that OG members would like to focus on the following objectives identified in the OG Charter: 1) coordination of ongoing and future inventory, monitoring and research activities to minimize duplication of effort, share financial resources and expertise, and assure the collection of quality information and 2) identification and prioritization of information needs for inventory, monitoring and research activities to address impacts of past, ongoing and anticipated development activities on the North Slope.

There was a variety of land management issues identified as possible future NSSI agency activities. These management issues included but were not limited to: cumulative impact of vessel traffic and noise sources in the Beaufort Sea, addressing and mitigating negative impacts to subsistence use, regional climate change, and funding and collecting data needed to support decisions. High level overviews of North Slope activities, provided to the OG in 2005, were considered “very helpful” by most OG members. NSSI OG members and staff should concentrate efforts in 2006 on working with the STG to identify common priorities for NSSI. OG meetings were determined to be set at the appropriate frequency, and given shortages on staff and time, communication between the OG members and NSSI Executive Director was deemed adequate.

Discussion of the NSSI Budget included the need for the OG to clarify research priorities and present these priorities to a variety of audiences. A clear set of priorities will be needed when pursuing NSSI funding opportunities in the state and federal arenas. We must ensure that various publics fully understand that STG members provide advice and recommendations to the OG on science considerations only and are not policy advisors. The OG members remain the ultimate decision makers when determining priority needs for management decisions across the North Slope of Alaska.

Oversight Group discussion of the 2006 NSSI Workplan outlined the need for definitive commitments of OG staff to the coordination of the STG. The STG meetings are anticipated to involve considerable time commitments from both NSSI staff and STG members alike.

Ann Claerbout, NSSI and Francis Wiese, NPRB, presented the Development of a NSSI Project Database and Browser through Partnership (presentation on NSSI website). NPRB volunteered their staff time in late May or early June to configure the NPRB Project Browser to fit the needs of NSSI and to develop a NSSI project database to house all of the agency North Slope project information. The OG expressed concerns over the level at which quality control of the agency North Slope projects would occur. There was also concern about the security of agency data, and members of the OG stressed the need of close coordination with agency Information Technology departments.

Action: The OG agreed to allow NPRB to populate the project database with the information contained in the 2005 Excel spreadsheet. The 2006 data call for the project information will be completed on a trial basis, with staff from BLM and ADF&G evaluating time commitments and identifying any internal staffing issues that may impede other agency Principal Investigators from updating North Slope project information.

Plans for the next OG meeting included a two-day meeting in conjunction with the first STG meeting in April. Agenda items under consideration included a series of introductory presentations, including discussions of agency priorities and their respective North Slope mandates, discussions of workload expectations, and the establishment of STG sub-groups to address specific OG questions. Bob Shuchman encouraged the OG to assign the STG with specific tasks from the beginning. Bob Winfree noted that the NPS had success in asking science advisory committees to identify the sequence of studies needed to implement identified management decisions. He suggested that a similar task might be appropriate for the NSSI STG. Marcia Blaszak suggested the STG members be assigned pre-work to ensure STG members fully understand the agency missions and charters of the OG and STG. Further suggestions for pre-reading information packets included the NSSI draft Science Plan, 2004 workshop summaries, summaries of NPR-A and state land plans, and the recent OG questionnaire.

Action: Wayne Regelin, Henri Bisson, and Ken Taylor will meet March 9th to develop a draft agenda for joint OG/STG meeting and will distribute the agenda to the OG for review.

Action: OG members are to notify Ken Taylor of specific questions and tasks to assign the STG members at the April meeting.

Due to scheduling difficulties inherent in planning most meetings of the OG, Ken Taylor suggested members might want to begin planning for the meeting following the April meeting. Because the OG charter requires one meeting per year in Barrow, it was suggested that we work to schedule this one in June. June 21 and June 22 were suggested.

Action: Karla Kolash will check with the Mayor's schedule to see if these dates are suitable.

There were no comments from the public. The meeting adjourned at 4:30pm.