

DRAFT

November 2006

Ken Taylor, Executive Director
North Slope Science Initiative
222 West 7th Avenue, #13
Anchorage, AK 99513

Dear Ken,

The purpose of this letter is to provide advice from the Science Technical Group (STG) to the Oversight Group (OG) on what is needed to complete an implementation plan for a monitoring program within the National Petroleum Reserve—Alaska (NPRA). Further, this letter also provides information about how the STG can assist with this task, if so requested by the OG.

As you are aware, the STG recently formed a monitoring subgroup to assist in providing advice to the OG concerning the monitoring needs of the North Slope Science Initiative (NSSI). It is the STG's intention that the monitoring subgroup will take advantage of the substantial work of the Research and Monitoring Team (RMT), which was originally formed to provide advice to the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) on research and monitoring issues related to the Northeast Planning Area (NE) of the NPRA. Even though there is oil and gas activity in places outside of the NPRA, the STG believes the initial efforts of the monitoring subgroup are best focused on the NPRA because of the considerable work of the RMT.

In its work, the RMT identified 10 high priority issues and developed conceptual models for monitoring those issues. The models included various natural and anthropogenic "drivers" or stressors and indicators of where those stressors might cause potential responses. In 2005, the RMT recommended that the BLM either hire a consultant or assign an employee to develop an implementation plan for monitoring the 10 priority issues. BLM made progress in developing a monitoring framework but considerable effort is still needed to finish an implementation plan.

The STG **highly recommends** that an implementation plan be developed as soon as possible so that a comprehensive monitoring program can be implemented. A monitoring program is needed now because (1) oil and gas activities are on-going, (2) climate change

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is occurring, causing direct and indirect impacts to wildlife and habitat on the north slope, and (3) a long-term dataset is needed to detect impacts and changes because the Arctic is so variable. Understanding and mitigating impacts from oil and gas industry will require many years of data. Thus, implementation of a monitoring program is needed as soon as possible.

Of the 10 issues the RMT identified, caribou and molting geese are of particular importance. The monitoring subgroup of the STG intends to develop an outline for an implementation plan for monitoring in the NE NPRA. The subgroup would also begin to include details, as much as possible, for certain portions of those outlines for caribou and molting geese. The OG and BLM could then use these outlines to complete implementation plans for caribou and molting geese, and to then address the additional 8 issues identified by the RMT. The outlines could also be used to develop implementation plans for monitoring other issues that are outside the boundaries of the NPRA or for future priority issues within the NPRA.

The STG **recommends** that the OG identify the resources necessary to complete implementation plans for caribou, molting geese and the other eight issues identified by the RMT. Funding may be necessary to hire a consultant or specific staff members with the appropriate expertise be assigned to this task. Developing an implementation plan should occur as soon as possible so that a monitoring program could begin in the 2007 field season. Again, beginning a monitoring program in 2007 is necessary because oil and gas activity is already occurring amidst changes related to global warming. Even if agencies do not have funding for a monitoring program in 2007, an implementation program could be used by industry or other organizations to begin or enhance already on-going monitoring tasks.

As you know, one goal of NSSI is to enhance cooperation and collaboration among agencies and industry. The development of an implementation plan in the near-term can advance the above stated goal of NSSI. As an example, the International Polar Year (IPY) will occur from 2007 to 2009. Approximately \$4 million of Canadian funds have been identified for monitoring the health of caribou across North America. If the NSSI had an implementation plan in place, caribou on the North Slope could be more easily included in the IPY monitoring effort [Gary Kofinas, please revise as appropriate]

The STG looks forward to additional guidance from the OG. We would be happy to provide any clarification or additional information that the OG might like.

Sincerely,

John Kelley, Chair
Science Technical Group

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