

North Slope Science Initiative

Report from the Executive Director

June, 2005

D.C Briefings: During the week of May 16th, Henri R. Bisson, Wayne Regelin, Dick LeFebvre and I briefed John Katz (Governor's Office), Senator Stevens staff, Representative Young's staff and Senator Murkowski and staff on the NSSI. Wayne explained how the NSSI is currently funded and what we have forecast for our future funding needs. I briefed several environmental organizations at the offices of the Alaska Wilderness League, and those in attendance expressed considerable interest in the NSSI and what we are trying to accomplish.

Other Briefings: We briefed John Tresize (DOI budget), Drue Pearce, and others via teleconference on the NSSI and future budget needs. John requested that we meet with him and his staff while in D.C. to discuss budget needs in more detail. I was requested to work with John's staff to include budget numbers in the NSSI presentation prior to briefing OMB and CEQ.

Briefings were held for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers on the NSSI and the potential gas line project in Anchorage at the BLM office. Colonel Tim Gallagher and several of his staff attended and requested a similar presentation at the Coastal Engineering Research Board conference which will be in Anchorage this June.

Other Meetings: While in D.C., Henri and I met with Dick Bouts (Senate Energy) to discuss the language in the energy bill formalizing the NSSI. Some minor changes were made to the final language, but the essence of the language we were requested to provide remains.

I attended the annual Open Water Meeting of the North Slope Borough, Alaska Eskimo Whaling Commission, National Marine Fisheries Service, Minerals Management Service, BP and Shell Oil where issues related to both onshore and offshore development impacts to marine resources were discussed. Several excellent presentations on current research activities regarding noise impacts on marine mammal migrations provoked considerable discussion. Increasing barge traffic to support both onshore and offshore activities and communities is a growing concern among North Slope residents. NMFS will release a draft EIS addressing noise levels and criteria in fall 2005.

Marc Stiglitz (Toolik Lake Research Station), Steve DeAlberquerque (ConocoPhillips) and I met to discuss hydrologic modeling of the Kuparuk drainage and the potential for predicting tundra closure dates using the data sets collected by researchers at Toolik. I attended a related meeting on remote sensing needs in NPRA where we discussed the potential for measuring spring breakup flood stage and velocity at specific points through remote sensing platforms.

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Science Technical Group Charter: The Science Group Charter was approved by the Director of BLM and forwarded to the Secretary's office. The Executive Secretary for Interior determined that the other Interior agencies need to surname the charter before it could be signed by the Secretary. The charter is currently being routed through the other agencies for their approval.

Other Activities: Work continued on revisions to the draft Science Strategy, but there is much left to be done. Office space was assigned to Ann Claerbout, our intern who will provide much needed assistance for the NSSI. She will report to work June 20th. Agency spreadsheets identifying research, inventory and monitoring efforts have been received from five of the 10 NSSI member agencies. BLM, ADFG, ADNR, NSB and ASRC have yet to complete this assignment, and MMS needs to provide some additional information to that submitted.

The next NSSI Oversight Group meeting is scheduled to be in Barrow in early August. Because some members have expressed interest in a field trip while there and because it is the tourist season, considerable effort has been made to schedule this well in advance to ensure hotel accommodations and allow Oversight Group members to calendar other activities around this meeting. August 3rd and 4th are the tentative dates for this meeting.

A request for proposals from NOAA regarding the establishment of a Regional Integrated Sciences and Assessments (RISA) Program was received in May, and a letter of intent for NSSI participation was submitted. There are currently seven RISA programs established in the United States, and NOAA has expressed a strong interest in having one in Alaska. There are many similarities between the RISA programs and the NSSI, and this may provide an opportunity for some additional funding to help solidify the NSSI.

An abstract explaining the NSSI was submitted for a presentation to the International Symposium on Oil and Gas Activities in the Arctic, 13 - 15 September, 2005, St. Petersburg, Russia. Notice of acceptance is expected in early June.