

North Slope Science Initiative

Interim Report

John Payne, Director (Acting)

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We continued to expend considerable time and effort on budget related issues resulting from the effects of the Continuing Resolution during this period, and the final FY 2007 budget allocations by the Department of the Interior and Bureau of Land Management. Working from the project list the Staff Committee met to discuss the allocation of FY 2007 funding and the best way to address the late arrival of the final budget. The discussion with the Staff Committee included only those items that were identified as NSSI priorities during the 2004 workshops held in Anchorage, Fairbanks and Barrow, issues discussed by the Oversight Group over the course of their meetings, and those that were identified as priorities by the BLM Research and Monitoring Team.

The 12 projects that are being implemented in 2007 include some ongoing projects such as the implementation of the web-based project browser that is North Slope-wide, current, and searchable; maintaining the NSSI Website that includes public and agency interface and a North Slope Internet Map Server (IMS); and implementation of a "one-stop" shop for critical North Slope resource information operating under the Geographic Information Network of Alaska (GINA) program through the University of Alaska-Fairbanks. A couple of projects have already been completed, as noted earlier; these include the GIS/Remote Sensing Workshop and the Caribou Workshop.

There are a number of other projects that are going to be implemented beginning in 2007, including a black brant study at Teshekpuk Lake which is an on-going study by the USGS Alaska Science Center now being funded by NSSI to determine movement patterns and habitat use by black brant. A Fisheries Workshop and a Cultural and Subsistence Workshop are being planned, which are similar in format to the Caribou workshop in that they will report on the status of knowledge that development on the North Slope has on fisheries inventory and monitoring or on the potential impacts to subsistence resources and cultural lifestyles.

There will also be new hydrologic gauging stations staged across the North Slope to better understand North Slope hydrology; these stations would be compliant with USGS requirements. The STAP has been asked to provide recommendations as to the placement of these new gauges. A North Slope hydrography digital hydrology database will be completed in partnership with USGS. NSSI is also funding the development of a digital landcover database to update current individual agency landcover databases and create both a consistent landcover classification across agencies and complete a change detection program for regional scale landcover changes in relation to climate models. Finally we will deploy a second generation of remotely controlled water quality buoys

that are both efficient and cost effective and measure baseline water quality parameters for North Slope lakes, rivers, and near-shore waters.

The NSSI Staff held a meeting on April 10. At the meeting each individual agency representative went around the table to discuss how individual agency priorities potentially relate to interagency cooperation beginning in FY 2008. Additionally, the proposal process for future NSSI Projects was discussed at the meeting. It was agreed that the STG should not be approached with goals and objectives of NSSI proposals, when they are not hammered out amongst the other groups, specifically the NSSI Staff. A primary ranking criterion should be developed to include commonality, public acceptance, and show a sense of direction. STG will review proposals for technical sufficiency, authority, and farm it out to specific appropriate technical experts. This peer review process enables the STG to determine technical adequacy of the proposals.

I met with Pam Haze (DOI CFO), Henri Bisson (Deputy Director, Operations, BLM), Jennifer Thomson (Secretary's Office) and Lynn Scarlett (Deputy Secretary) in April to discuss both the future of NSSI. All parties were impressed with the work NSSI has been able to accomplish in regard to communication and coordination. In addition, selected projects (from the list provided to the Oversight Group) were explained with emphasis on the interagency/intergovernmental coordination and the value added for administration of North Slope activities.

While in Washington, DC, I was able to attend the Interagency Arctic Research Policy Committee (IARPC), senior members meeting and presented the goals and objectives of NSSI in relationship to the circumpolar Arctic initiatives currently underway through the National Science Foundation (NSF). I was able to spend some additional time with senior staff at NSF to discuss potential coordination with Arctic projects that are part of the International Polar Year (IPY). The discussions with NSF will be continuing over the next year.

Two days were spent with at University of Alaska Fairbanks with John Kelley (Chair, STAP), Buck Sharpton and Tom Heinrichs. The time spent with John Kelley was focused on the project list, discussing a better way to utilize the STAP, and keeping NSSI in the forefront of University activities. Both Buck Sharpton and Tom Heinrichs helped address the final requirements for the GINA agreement.

Finally, it was agreed that the NSSI Staff committee should formalized soon. No meeting has had the entire group in attendance and participation by all members is important, especially as the proposal process becomes more concrete. The Staff felt there should be a call for the formalization of NSSI staff committee, by the OG. It was noted that the emphasis of the NSSI Staff is that they are not a deciding group, but a recommending group. This is an especially important notion for the proposal process. The staff should set a frequency of meeting schedules.

Conferences

GeoSpatial Conference 2007, May 7-11, Portland Oregon.

Meetings

Arctic Observing Network, March 27-30, 2007, Boulder, Colorado

NSSI Agency Staff, April 10, Park Service Office, Anchorage, Alaska

NSSI Agency Staff, June 12, BLM State Office, Anchorage, Alaska