

Director's Report
North Slope Science Initiative

April 24 – June 10, 2008

Much of the past few weeks have been spent on developing the first NSSI report to Congress. The Oversight Group, at the April 23, 2008 meeting, set up an Executive sub-committee of four Oversight Group members to interface with the Director in the development of the report. The first text version was presented to the Executive sub-committee on June 2, 2008. A meeting between the NSSI Director and the sub-committee will be help in the near future to develop a more finished version for distribution to the Oversight Group as a whole.

We continue to work closely with the Science Technical Advisory Panel (STAP) and the Senior Staff Committee to define the management questions, data needs and challenges that have been presented in the **Emerging Issues** section of the 2008 and 2009 annual operating plans. The STAP were presented with the first matrix (permafrost, coastal and riverine erosion and caribou) that included the Senior Staff Committee management questions in each of the categories. The STAP has now been tasked to review the management questions, data needs and challenges to consider recommendations on the science approach or efforts that would be needed to credibly address each of the areas. Continuing with this effort, the STAP were asked at a meeting on May 9, 2008, to take another group of general subject categories and begin to consider the science that may be needed. With numerous issues surrounding the marine environment, the STAP chose the general "**Marine**" category and divided into more defined focal areas to help the Senior Staff Committee. The new categories are:

- Oceanic climate/sea ice degradation (ocean surface issues, increased open water period, reduced ice-related habitat)
- Oceanographic changes (water column to bottom issues, currents, temperature, water chemistry)
- Impacts from increasing marine activity (OCS, shipping, infrastructure)
- Species at risk (marine mammals, prey base, whales, walrus, ice seals, benthic prey, others)

The Senior Staff Committee met on June 3, 2008, and has developed management questions, issues and data needs for the marine environment. These will be forwarded to the STAP for their consideration.

The week of May 12 – 16, 2008, was spent in Washington, DC to participate in the Arctic Research Consortium of the United States (ARCUS) annual meeting, the Interagency Arctic Research Policy Committee Principles meeting (this included a brief post meeting with Lynn Scarlett (Deputy Secretary) and Mark Myers (Director, USGS), and the U.S. Arctic Research Commission (USARC) meetings. An NSSI status report was presented to the USARC and the Chair (Mead Treadwell). Ken Taylor joined me for the ARCUS meetings and together we took advantage of the time to meet with the Washington, DC Governor's Office (John Katz and Sam Bishop), Chuck Kleeschulte (Murkowski staff), and several Department of the Interior officials [Henri Bisson (Acting Senior Advisory for Alaska Affairs for the Secretary), Mike Olson (Deputy Assistant Secretary for Land and Minerals Management), Jim Mosher (Deputy Assistant Secretary for Fish, Wildlife and Parks) and Kaush Arha (Deputy Assistant Secretary for Fish,

Wildlife and Parks)]. All of the meetings were successful in relaying a strong support for the NSSI and its administrative structure with the increased visibility the Arctic is receiving. All of the meetings expressed a greater need for NSSI, especially given its legislative mandates to collaborate and coordinate information both internally and externally.

Just when we thought the STAP nominations were complete and the letters sent out to the appointees, a surprise! It seems the White House FACA Office wanted more background information on the nominees (yes, they did receive a nomination book), and specifically why we were recommending re-appointments. This information was forwarded from me through the Special Assistant to the Secretary for Alaska Affairs, then on to this oversight group. We are still waiting for their approval. Ashley Banister is following through on this one. It is a step we have never jumped through before. One thing for sure, we are developing a “guide book” on how to recommend and process nominees!

The week of May 19 – 23, 2008, was a bit of a whirlwind. I met with the principles at Michigan Tech Research Institute (MTRI) to redesign the NSSI website to make it more user friendly while increasing content. Since MTRI is located in Ann Arbor, Michigan, I took advantage of the location and met to finalize plans for the North Slope deployment of the water quality and bathymetry technology with the University of Michigan. This system will be deployed during the period of August 18 -22, 2008.

It was on to Salt Lake City, Utah to coordinate the collection of land cover data with the U.S. Forest Service remote sensing laboratory. The discussion was on the applicability of LandFire and the next generation of the Landfire product. A field crew has been established for a late June deployment in the Point Lay and Wainwright areas of the North Slope. This crew will include Landfire personnel from The Alaska Natural Heritage Program, Ducks Unlimited, Inc., Bureau of Land Management, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and a remote sensing technician from the Forest Service. Certainly a diverse team!

The University of Alaska, Geographic Information Network of Alaska (GINA) has announced a staff position for NSSI to be located in Anchorage. I will be on the selection committee along with Tom Heinrichs. This individual will be the interface between GINA and the NSSI member agencies. Tom Heinrichs has also agreed this position will finalize the long-awaited project data base.