

Director's Report
North Slope Science Initiative

June 11 through July 21, 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 revised version was forwarded to the subcommittee on July 7, 2008. I have met with each of the subcommittee representatives individually and the current version has their comments included. The Senior Staff Committee was forwarded the document on July 8, 2008, and met on July 15, 2008 to discuss and edit.

NSSI, NOAA Weather Service and Alaska Oceans Observing Systems met on June 25th to participate in a joint teleconference with Mary Glackin, Deputy Under Secretary for Oceans and Atmosphere. The purpose of the teleconference was to express the need for services provided by NOAA and establish a cooperative atmosphere as we move forward in the future of Arctic observations.

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 July 15, 2008, and is working on the emerging issues of vegetation change and migratory waterfowl (species of management concern). These will be forwarded to the STAP for their consideration.

The STAP nominations are still not complete. Apparently, nine out of the ten nominations have been approved by the Office of the White House Liaison. One nomination is still pending. Approved and remitted to the Secretary to send out nomination letters are:

John Kelley
Gary Kofinas
Scott Pegau

Bill Streever
Alvin Ott

Dan Reed
Robert Suydam

Caryn Rae
Wendy Loya

The September 2008 meeting of the STAP is scheduled for Thursday and Friday, September 18th and 19th. The first day will be a joint meeting with the Senior Staff Committee and the second morning will be a joint meeting with the Oversight Group. A Federal Register Notice is being prepared. This reschedule is to take advantage of many members attending the AAAS meeting in Anchorage.

The first phase of the joint North Slope land cover project to collect additional field data for the image processing began the last week of June with a field deployment to Wainwright. The field crew was lead by Scott Guyer, Bureau of Land Management, and had members from The Alaska Natural Heritage Program and Ducks Unlimited, Incorporated. Weather cooperated for nine of the ten day field venture and the team collected nearly 300 field sites.

During the June 10 meeting of the Oversight Group, Dr. Gary Kofinas provided an update on the efforts of a STAP subcommittee that he chairs on how to support the NSSI mission through the use of local and traditional knowledge (or "traditional ecological knowledge," TEK). At that time, Dr. Kofinas presented a proposal that sought Oversight Group "re-endorsement" and support for the purposes of the subcommittee. The matter was referred to the Senior Staff Committee to review and provide input back to the Oversight Group at their next meeting. The matter was discussed at the July 15 meeting of the Senior Staff Committee and the group felt strongly that it was important to continue to work towards the identification and implementation of specific and effective means of incorporating TEK into NSSI deliberations. The group also acknowledged that this is an area not generally well understood by most NSSI participants and that all would benefit by having this STAP Subcommittee on TEK implement the proposed work. Therefore the Senior Staff Committee recommended that the Oversight Group provide conceptual and procedural support by tasking the STAP on TEK to implement the proposed plan, seek answers to the questions posed in that proposal, and return to the Oversight Group with a plan for how to inform and train NSSI affiliates (Oversight Group, Senior Staff Committee, the full Science Technical Advisory Panel, and other partners as appropriate) on how best to access and use TEK. Limited financial support may also be appropriate for direct support of the training session(s). Finally, the Senior Staff Committee also recommends that the Oversight Group commit to the NSSI to acting on the training it receives from this process and, as appropriate, to use TEK as best it can in its future deliberations."