

Director's Report
North Slope Science Initiative

July 25 through September 18, 2008

Once again, the majority of the time through mid-August was spent revising and completing the **2008 Report to Congress, North Slope Science Initiative, Organization and Accomplishments**. The final report (pending any recommendations by the Secretary) was forwarded to The Department of the Interior, through the Special Assistant for the Secretary for Alaska on August 8, 2008. The report was supported by three letters of support or concurrence from the Mayor, North Slope Borough, Vice-president, Arctic Slope Regional Corporation, and a joint letter from the Alaska Departments of Natural Resources and Fish and Game. Hard copies and a low-resolution pdf were provided to each of the Oversight Group members. Follow-up emails from the Department indicate the report will be accepted, in its current form, by the Secretary sometime in September 2008. Additional copies, as well as a roll-out to committees and Congressional staff will likely follow in October 2008.

These past few weeks have also been busy coordinating the **United States and Canada Oil and Gas Research Forum 2008**. This forum will showcase current research programs, demonstrating how they have contributed to decision making through environmental assessments and the regulatory process and highlighting the involvement of indigenous people in research programs. The forum will also discuss future oil and gas research needs, including synergies and partnerships for the Beaufort Sea, Mackenzie Delta and North Slope. The forum will be at the Downtown Anchorage Marriott on October 28-30, 2008.

A follow-on workshop is planned for Barrow on November 12-14, 2008, as part of the University of Alaska: North by 2020. The workshop entitled **Reducing environmental risks and impacts in Arctic coastal and offshore oil and gas development** has several goals including:

1. Review international state-of-the-art technologies for Arctic offshore oil and gas exploration to identify innovative approaches for offshore Alaska to reduce environmental risks and impacts, including those stemming from underwater noise, discharge or oil spills, particularly in the exploration phase.
2. Assess state, federal and industry standards and regulations for Alaska offshore exploration in light of the latest standards and emerging best practices internationally to identify opportunities to reduce environmental risks and align incentives for continuous improvement.
3. Identify opportunities to reduce environmental risks through more effective utilization of local and traditional knowledge in oil and gas planning and emergency response.
4. Identify opportunities and needs for improved environmental and social-science data and information for industry and agency decision-making.
5. Identify opportunities to improve communication, coordination or flexibility for responsive decision-making in the changing Arctic offshore environment and make recommendations to state and federal policymakers as appropriate.

Presentations on the North Slope Science Initiative were made to the first **Data Integration Workshop**, sponsored by USGS and Alaska Oceans Observing Systems, and the **Alaska Marine Ecosystem Forum**, on August 7, 2008. The data integration workshop spurred considerable interest for additional discussions and mapping a way forward in the near future.

The NSSI Deputy Director presented an overview of the initiative to the **National Digital Orthophoto Program and Digital Elevation** in Anchorage on August 19-21. The discussions that followed the presentation were focused on the need for both high quality digital elevation models and digital ortho photos of the North Slope. The NDOP is continuing to work on obtaining models for the entire state.

NSSI participated in a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service sponsored **Infrastructure Modeling Workshop** in Fairbanks on August 14-15, 2008, at the University of Alaska Fairbanks campus. This workshop was to identify the need and a way forward for developing a GIS based model for planning oil and gas infrastructure as development occurs on the North Slope. Additional meetings are planned for this effort.

NSSI participated in the Alaska Chapter of the American Association for the Advancement of Science in Fairbanks on September 15-17, 2008.

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 and the Science Technical Advisory Panel are scheduled to have a joint meeting on September 18, 2008, in Fairbanks. This meeting will continue to expand our data and information needs within the broad general categories. The STAP will also elect a new Chair and Co-Chair. Many thanks to John Kelley for leading the STAP through its initial two plus years of organization and development.

As stated in the previous Director's Report, the STAP nominations are still not complete. On advice of the GSA FACA program lead, the one nomination that has not yet cleared should be treated as a "continuing" member until advised otherwise. In speaking with several of the new or reappointed STAP members, they have not yet received their appointment letters from the Secretary.

The week of August 17-22, 2008, a field deployment of the ALWAS water measurement systems were deployed out of Ivatuk (eastern side of NPRA). A report on the collections will be presented to the Oversight Group on September 19, 2008. This was a joint effort between BLM, USGS and FWS. A second deployment was made on September 10-12, 2008, based out of Barrow. Consultation with ASRC and the North Slope Borough Department of Wildlife helped make this weather challenged limited deployment a success.