

Interim Director's Report, North Slope Science Initiative  
Activities from December 4, 2008 through February 13, 2009  
February 14, 2009

Since it will still be a few weeks before the next Oversight Group meeting, I thought I would provide this interim report so we don't lose track of the many activities of the North Slope Science Initiative.

The focus of the American Geophysical Union meeting in December was largely on issues facing the Arctic. Many of the "town hall" meetings and pre-and post formal sessions were focused on research and needs in the Arctic. Much of this fit into the emerging issues the NSSI is currently developing. I participated in the Barrow Arctic Observing Network meetings which had considerable information sharing discussions on the availability of data related to the Arctic. Two NSSI posters were presented at the meeting (water parameters study and general information about the NSSI).

Considerable progress has been made on a web-based project tracking system (PTS). This was greatly aided when Dr. Bill Streever, Science Technical Advisory Panel Chair, volunteered the assistance of Tatyana Venegas of his staff at BP to work directly with the NSSI to gather North Slope project information (who's doing what where). This help allows us to target a project roll-out date of April 15, 2009 (at the next scheduled Oversight Group meeting). Her progress has also been helped by the addition of Jesse Grunblatt as the GIS/Data Coordinator for GINA. Jesse is a GINA employee assigned to the NSSI Director's Office in Anchorage. The PTS will provide for online entry, editing, and display of project information.

The addition of Jess to the NSSI team, along with ramping up progress on the PTS, has also boosted the development and operability of the NSSI node of GINA. Over 250 GIS data sets have been acquired describing climate, ecology, demography, geology, hydrology and infrastructure within the North Slope. In addition, a variety of imagery products have also been developed for this area. NSSI is currently reviewing these data sets and developing the required metadata to support visualization and distribution of this information. A subcommittee of the STAP has been providing recommendations throughout this process. The NSSI web pages that allow GIS data display and exchange are being updated.

The interface between the NSSI data node at GINA and the public interface of the NSSI website is also being updated with added capabilities and functionality. A new look is already in place for the public website ([www.northslope.org](http://www.northslope.org)), and by mid-April new functionality will be operational. Credit for these changes go to GINA personnel and the addition of a full-time webmaster at Michigan Tech Research Institute.

The entire month of January was a "blur" of symposiums and meetings. These included the Alaska Marine Science Symposium, Alaska Forum on the Environment, a North Slope water resources information system, Climate Change Executive Roundtable, and the scheduled Senior Staff Committee and Science Technical Advisory Panel (STAP). Both the Alaska Marine Science Symposium and the Alaska Forum on the Environment held separate workshops specifically on Arctic issues. NSSI participated in both sessions. Much time was spent on data issues and accessibility related to the Arctic systems (both terrestrial and marine). The primary parties that have interest in making information available and tracking on-going work in the Arctic were participants. It was evident from all of these various forums that many others are now beginning to realize and struggle with the complexities that NSSI has been formally working through in the past year. Discussions of the existing science, the gaps,

data access and quality control, and the relevance of all of these to actual management decisions were a part of most of these forums. It was also evident that this flurry of interest in arctic systems will present significant coordination challenges, but that the NSSI, its structure and its ongoing efforts (e.g., emerging issue reviews, project tracking system, GINA) will be able to help a great many willing partners to advance the state of North Slope science and its relevance.

The Senior Staff Committee and the Chair of the Science Technical Advisory Panel met January 27 in Fairbanks to provide an annual look at upcoming projects that member agencies had on the books for FY 2009, or may have in the works for FY 2010 and beyond. Staff from nearly all NSSI member agencies and one advisory agency (USGS) participated in the coordination meeting. Most participants brought project spreadsheets with them to help highlight projects that might be of shared interest. These spreadsheets were subsequently used by Tatyana (BP) and Jess (NSSI/GINA) to update the Project Tracking System. It was rewarding to see that the majority of agency projects were well coordinated at respective field office levels, and that many ongoing or planned projects are relevant to the Emerging Issues identified by the Oversight Group. There was also a good discussion of additional options (different forums, altered timing, greater frequency) for improving coordination in the future.

Following the coordination meeting between member agencies, there was a joint Senior Staff Committee and Science Technical Advisory Panel meeting on January 28 and 29. The primary focus of the joint meeting was the completion of all 9 remaining emerging issue discussions (white papers currently in prep – Denny will serve as editor/coordinator for the STAP on these). However, the STAP also picked up on the discussion of improvements in mechanisms for coordination and, in collaboration with the Staff, developed a recommendation to the Oversight Group on further mechanisms for science coordination.

Denny attended the Arctic Change 2008 conference in Quebec, Canada, where he also ran into Philip Martin and Jeff Adams from USFWS, and Dr. Henry Huntington an independent arctic researcher (from Eagle River) with broad experience in traditional knowledge and whaling issues. Conference attendees came from across the polar arctic, and covered topics from “the future of circumpolar research and policy” to climate change and its impacts on arctic ecosystems, sea ice, marine mammals and the vulnerability of northern communities. There was a strong component of traditional knowledge in many of the sessions, from fisheries study design to changing patterns in human health. Some of the materials Denny was able to glean from other conference participants, particularly on negotiating research relationships with northern communities, was provided to the STAP TEK subcommittee.

We are scheduling a meeting with the North Slope Borough to get feedback on the landcover work that was completed last summer near Wainwright. The field work was to supplement the National LandFire database so we could have a far more accurate and consistent product across the North Slope. Additional field work is scheduled for this summer, but the NSSI wants to have feedback on the vegetation protocols prior to additional collections.

We have received five nominations for six positions, or reappointments on the STAP. In talking with both the STAP Chair and the Oversight Group Chair, it was decided to go out for a second call for nominations. The five nominees who responded to the November 2008 call have been notified of a delay in appointments and advised they do not need to respond to the second call. The Federal Register Notice for this second call should be published in late February. The Secretary’s Office has indicated it is unlikely there will be any new appointments made before mid-April at the earliest.

Finally, I have spent considerable time in training since the beginning of the new calendar year to learn the new Federal Budget Management System (FBMS) and become certified in agreements administration – an arduous, but necessary step to keep NSSI functioning.

A reminder, the next STAP meeting will be in Fairbanks on April 14 and 15, 2009. The Oversight Group will meet jointly with the STAP and Senior Staff Committee on April 15, 2009, when the remaining emerging issues summaries will be presented.

Special thanks to Caron Gibson, BLM Alaska State Office, for recording the minutes of the STAP meeting in January, and to Judy Ridder, BLM Northern Field Office, for taking minutes for the Senior Staff Committee Meeting.