

Director's Report, North Slope Science Initiative
Activities from October 7, 2009 through January 28, 2010

Old News + Good News

The Secretary of the Interior signed the 2009 Report to Congress in December. Copies have been forwarded, through the Secretary's Office, to key Senate, House and Committee personnel. This year, the surnaming process went very smooth thanks to help from Kim Elton's Office.

I was notified in mid-January that all six Science Technical Advisory Panel (STAP) nominees have passed White House vetting. Appointment letters have been prepared and are awaiting Secretarial signature. Best estimate of signing is early February.

The Science Technical Advisory Panel charter is due for renewal by May 2010. All paperwork for renewal has been completed and forwarded to the Bureau of Land Management, Federal Advisory Committee Act (FACA) coordinator in January 2010. Since this charter is in the NSSI implementing legislation, there are no changes to the previous charter. It is expected to take 60 to 90 days for the renewal documents to be reviewed by the White House, DOI Solicitor and FACA coordinator, then on to the Secretary for signature. The final step is to file the charter (after Secretarial signature) with Congress.

Emerging Issues

The first 13-emerging issue summaries were revised per the Oversight Group suggestions and published in early December 2009. Continuing the NSSI involvement in both the Arctic Observing Network (AON) and the Sustained Arctic Observing Network (SAON), we were invited to participate in the AON principle investigator meeting in Boulder, Colorado in December to present the Emerging Issues. Denny represented the NSSI and much of the meeting was focused on his presentation. This single meeting has led to interest among the principle investigators to utilize the document as support for proposals submitted to various funding entities.

More feedback to expand distribution of the emerging issues was received in invitations to present at two international forums: The State of the Arctic Conference and the Oslo Science Conference. Both invitations have been forwarded with funding support for travel. STAP member Bob Shuchman, PhD, will represent the NSSI at the State of the Arctic Conference in March. No commitment has been made for representation for the Oslo conference.

Over the next few weeks I will be working with the SEARCH (Study of Environmental Arctic Change) Chair to begin integrating the emerging issues within the SEARCH program. More detail will be forthcoming.

During the January 27-28, 2010, STAP meeting work began on developing additional emerging issues that will include socio-economic, restoration and reclamation and fisheries. Drafts of these documents will be available at the April 2010 Oversight Group meeting.

Data Integration and Project Tracking

An invitational one day data workshop was held at the University of Alaska Fairbanks on January 25, 2010 to review the status of the NSSI data catalog for the North Slope. Beginning with general workshops in the winter of 2004 and continuing with more focused workgroups through 2009, the NSSI partnership with the Geographic Information Network of Alaska (GINA) has evolved into resource where information and data are either archived or can be located through a distributed network. To date, over 100 data layers have been identified for inclusion into the GINA network and more have been identified as new initiatives, such as the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Landscape Conservation Cooperatives and the Bureau of Land Management's ecoregional assessments, begin implementation. This workshop was intended to provide a review of where we have been collectively, what is available today and where we need to direct the future, as well as providing the contacts to increase data discovery. The workshop was led by the data/remote sensing STAP subcommittee and was attended by 30 data, GIS professionals and resource managers. Results of the workshop will be available once the STAP has reviewed and passed on the STAP Chair.

On the Project Tracking side, there are over 1100 project records are now available. The NSSI is now working to geo-locate each of the entries. Keeping the project records current continues to be an institutional challenge. Internal to the NSSI membership maintaining records of current projects ranges from a simple electronic "integration" between individual tracking systems to manpower queries and spreadsheets. The annual senior staff committee coordination meetings help the NSSI secure records from those entities that have no internal tracking systems, but such records must be entered manually. External to the NSSI membership, we have complete operability between the National Science Foundation and the NSSI, but, as with the NSSI membership, there is project discovery that often requires manual query and input.

Department of the Interior – Arctic Communication

The DOI continues to hold monthly conference calls for communicating Arctic information between the various DOI Alaska bureaus and the Washington, DC DOI offices. The majority of these calls are about communicating international efforts with such entities as the Arctic Council. The NSSI participates in these monthly calls.

Meetings and Coordination

As stated above, the NSSI was represented at the AON principle investigator meeting in December.

The NSSI participated in many of the Arctic track meetings at the American Geophysical Union meetings in San Francisco in December.

Both Denny and I attended and participated in the Alaska Marine Science Symposium in January. The symposium had the best attendance since its inception. There was also an Arctic track with focus on studies specific to that geographic region. I also participated with several others on the abstract selection committee for the conference to review and make recommendations for the program. Congratulations to the North Pacific Research Board, Alaska Oceans Observing System and the many sponsors for making this symposium a success.

The NSSI will be represented on a panel during the Arctic track of the upcoming Alaska Forum on the Environment, in Anchorage, February 8 -12, 2010. We have also been active in the organizing committee for this forum.

The Second United States and Canada Oil and Gas Research Forum is scheduled for Calgary, Alberta, Canada, November 30 through December 2, 2010. An organizing committee has been established and the planning efforts are underway. The NSSI is on the organizing committee and is a principal sponsor. The Canadian government has underwritten a substantial portion of the forum by providing \$200k. Budgets permitting, the NSSI will be providing additional funding. The first forum was very well attended and the attendance expectation for this forum exceeds the first.

Farewell and Thank You

Denny Lassuy has been on detail from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in the position of Acting Deputy Director since February 2008. Denny has been an exceptional addition to the NSSI and has worked diligently with the Science Technical Advisory Panel and Senior Staff Committee to bring cohesiveness and direction to both groups. His facilitation and organizational skills have proved to be of a standard that will be difficult to replace. A sincere thank you to the Regional Director, Region 7, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and Denny's immediate supervisor, for providing the opportunity for Denny to serve in this detail. He will be missed!