

Director's Report, North Slope Science Initiative
Activities from April 28 through July 6, 2011

The Oversight Group Retreat will be held August 24 and 25, 2011 at the ADNR facility in Palmer. The Udall Foundation, Environmental Conflict Resolution folks will be providing facilitation. The overall purpose of this retreat is to set direction for the North Slope Science Initiative for the future.

Brent Sheets, Department of Energy, National Energy Technology Lab, and a long-time member of the NSSI Oversight Group, has taken another position outside of the DOE. No word yet on his replacement.

Gary Schultz, Senior Staff Committee member for Alaska Department of Natural Resources, retired in May. His service to the NSSI was also long-term and he will be missed. Melissa Head will be taking Gary's place on the Senior Staff Committee. Welcome Melissa.

The Barrow workshop: "Working Together to Understand Our Changing Arctic," that was held on March 29-31, 2011. The draft workshop report was released for independent review in late June with a final document due in mid-July.

The Deputy Director and Staff Assistant positions are in the process of classification. Once classification is complete announcements will be released. Both positions will be filled as permanent position under BLM authorities. The Deputy Director will be a GS-13/14 and the Staff Assistant a GS-6. Both positions will be very welcome as the workload for the NSSI continues to increase. The North Slope Borough will be providing one-half of the funding for the Deputy Director. It is expected both positions will be filled by early fall 2011.

The STAP connectivity paper is complete and has been forwarded to a publisher. The publisher has asked for some minor edits on the paper. Bill is working on the edits and the paper will be resubmitted.

Bud Cribley, Ed Fogels, Karla Kolash, Artealia Gilliard (Alaska BLM Office of Communications), Ruth McCoard (Alaska BLM Office of Communications) and I visited Washington, DC the week of May 16. Overall, the meetings went very well. Most of the agencies and staff we met with were already familiar with the North Slope Science Initiative and we were able to focus our discussions on accomplishments. We talked about the emerging issues, data and project tracking, land cover, Barrow workshop and connectivity paper. One meeting in particular stands out as forward leaning: Kate Moran, Arctic Policy Advisory, Office of Science and Technology Policy and Brendan Kelly, National Science Foundation and Chair, Interagency Arctic Research Policy Committee. This meeting focused on how the NSSI could help formulate recommendations to better address needed Arctic research.

Logistical planning for the North Slope land cover project, a cooperative effort with the Alaska Natural Heritage Program, National Resources Conservation Service, Ducks Unlimited, Inc. and Spatial Solutions, Inc. is moving along. Scott Guyer (BLM) is the logistical lead for the project. Based on the recommendation from the Barrow Workshop that scientists and agencies involve residents of the North Slope in project planning, implementation and final products, Scott travelled to Point Hope, Point Lay and Barrow in advance of the field team to discuss the project. The Arctic Landscape Conservation Cooperative and BLM have provided additional funding so the field work can be completed this year and image processing completed in mid-2012.

Data Integration and Project Tracking

The project tracking/data website now has a short self-help video that guides the user through the many aspects of the site. Feedback on the video has been favorable with some reviewers suggesting they could follow the guide even if they knew nothing about how to navigate the site. Good job Jess!

Project information in Catalog (catalog.northslope.org) has been updated. Project updates for BLM, NSB and NPS are complete. GINA has participated in the design of automated project metadata standards with the Alaska Data Integration Working Group (ADIwg) and will implement this standard in generating the 2011 update of NSF Catalog project information.

Data within Catalog have been completely refreshed with new information. There are currently over 244 data records available in Catalog which represent a wide variety of data types. Users can access data directly from the GINA archive or are referred to appropriate web sources that are maintained by other entities (ie. NSIDC, ADFG, etc). GINA will continue to update Catalog data holdings and is participating in the Arctic LCC Geospatial Data Working Group (GEOwg) meetings and data development activities.

Developing participation in Catalog is important. As part of the project update cycle for 2011, NSSI organizations will be provided with a user login to facilitate maintenance of project records and the integration of Catalog with existing automated project tracking systems will be encouraged. Collaborative development of Catalog resources is being pursued with additional partners (USFWS/Arctic LCC, AOOS, USGS and USARC).

NSSI Public Website

Usage of the NSSI website is increasing. Some of this increase is likely due to the constant media coverage about the Arctic, while, hopefully, some of the increase is due to better functionality of the site. An important addition, and one that was recommended at the Barrow workshop, is the aviation tracking tab. This tab will inform the site user of the dates, locations and types of aircraft that are planned for across the North Slope. This is not only a tool for residents, but one that can be used by agencies and scientists for potential collaboration on aircraft.

Arctic Communication and Coordination

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.

The NSSI has been selected as the co-lead with the Kingdom of Denmark on the Terrestrial Biodiversity Monitoring Program for the Conservation of Arctic Flora and Fauna (CAFF), a subgroup of the Arctic Council. The first coordination meeting was held in Copenhagen, Denmark in early May. All eight Arctic countries and permanent participants will ultimately round out the international team. Right now, the only Arctic nation that is yet to nominate a member is Norway. The permanent participant is also yet to be nominated. However, the international team is moving forward under a very tight schedule with a final monitoring plan due in December 2012. Each country has developed an internal team of experts ranging from four to 12 members. The U.S. team has representation from 8 members as of this writing including several from NSSI member agencies. The first international workshop will be held in

Copenhagen, Denmark the week of October 11, 2011, with a second workshop in Alaska in the spring of 2012. I am working with the CAFF Secretariat, U.S. Department of State, and Kingdom of Denmark to secure funding for workshop participants. It is expected each country will send two individuals to the first workshop.