

# NSSI *news*

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NORTH SLOPE SCIENCE INITIATIVE



Tim Bowman/USFWS

Red-Necked Phalarope

## Project Tracking System Becoming A Reality

The NSSI Project Tracking System (PTS) is fast becoming a reality. Not only is a web interface for entry, editing, and display of project tracking information nearly complete, but NSSI is collaboratively developing project tracking data to include in the system. The NSSI/Geographic Information Network of Alaska (GINA) is placing a special emphasis on developing an automated record update capability that leverages existing project management information systems. The automation will

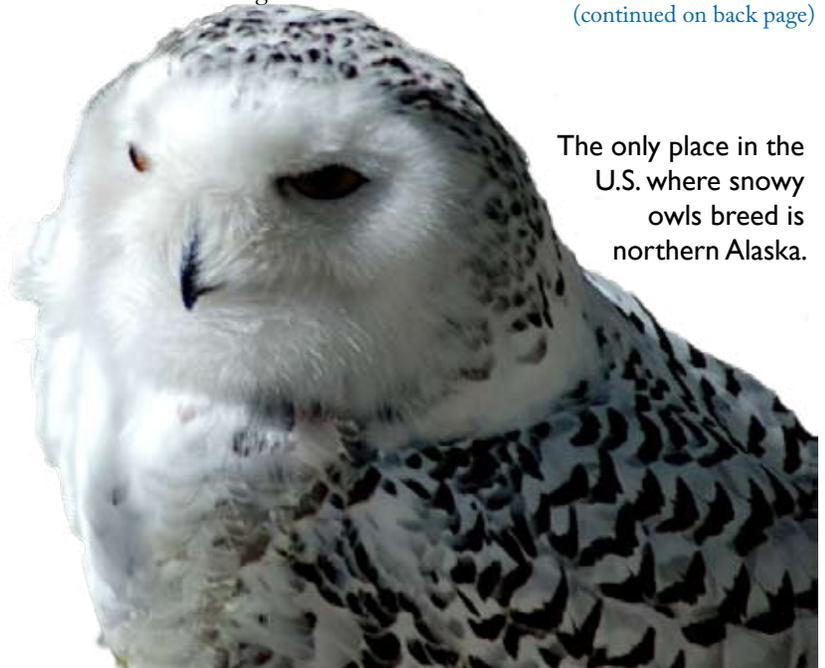
ensure timely updating of project tracking information and will minimize duplicate record entries. Initially, the tracking system is being developed for the Alaska Oceans Observing System and the National Science Foundation's Arctic Research and Mapping Application. The NSSI expects a technical specification will be developed based on this work, and then NSSI can extend the tracking system capability to other collaborators, such as the Minerals Management Service.

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The only place in the U.S. where snowy owls breed is northern Alaska.



## North Slope Water Characterization Project

During last summer's field season, the NSSI collected baseline water characterization data for lakes surrounding Alpine, Barrow, Inogok and Teshekpuk Lake on Alaska's North Slope through an assistance agreement with Michigan Tech Research Institute. They collected this data using autonomous robot buoys and the "bathyboat," generating summary statistics for the different lakes sampled. The bathymetry data and the water quality parameters collected reveal different lake regimes. NSSI can use these lake regimes to assess yellow-billed loon habitat preference and the regimes may have other wildlife applications. The in-situ data also created remote sensing-based algorithms to extend measurements to larger geographic areas. Specific targets for algorithm development include bathymetry, turbidity and frozen lake status. This winter, the algorithms generated from the lake characterizations provided near real-time data for BLM contractors working on Legacy well site demobilization. The NSSI's detailed maps reduced the time the contractor took to find lakes with the proper depth to withdraw water to build ice roads, thus allowing the contractor to focus more of his crew's time working at the Legacy well site.



Scott Guyer/BLM

Chuck Hatt with the bathy-boat on the North Slope.

## STAP Gains New Members, Leadership

The Science Technical Advisory Panel (STAP) entered into a new phase this past year. New Chair Bill Streever and Co-Chair Robert Suydam are bringing strong leadership skills to STAP operations. Two new members – Wendy Loya of The Wilderness Society and Scott Pegau of the Oil Spill Recovery Institute received their appointment letters from the Secretary of the Interior on January 16, 2009. Reappointed STAP members include Robert Suydam, North Slope Borough; Al Ott and Dan Reed, Alaska Department of Fish and Game; Gary Kofinas, Institute of Arctic Biology, University of Alaska Fairbanks; Caryn Rea, ConocoPhillips Alaska, Inc.; and John Kelley (Past Chair), Institute of Marine Science, University of Alaska Fairbanks. These new or reappointed members join STAP members Dirk Derksen (USGS); Sue Moore, Marine Mammal Laboratory (NOAA); Matthew Sturm, Army Cold Regions Research Laboratory; Bob Shuchman, Michigan Tech Research Institute; and Doug Kane, Water and Environmental Research Center, University of Alaska Fairbanks. The STAP advises the NSSI Oversight Group.

*The NSSI sends its condolences to the family of Arnold Brower, Sr., who served as a STAP member for nearly three years, representing traditional and ecological knowledge. Brower's expertise as a subsistence hunter and his wonderful descriptions of the North Slope will be missed.*



USFWS Photo

Arctic Hare

## "Worker Bees" NSSI Senior Staff Committee

The Senior Staff Committee is the NSSI committee of "worker bees behind the scenes" that meets frequently as an independent group representing their respective Oversight Group members. These unsung heroes are absolutely integral to the overall mission of the NSSI. They provide the ground-truth for management concerns that drive NSSI considerations of emerging issues. They are also the first line of review for any operational programs the NSSI implements. These members represent the highest technical-level support for their respective Oversight Group members and interface on a regular basis with the STAP to provide management guidance to their scientific deliberations. Not every Oversight Group member has a senior staff representative on this quiet, but powerful committee. Those who do include: Dave Yokel (BLM), Dee Williams (MMS), Tim Viavant (ADF&G), Gary Shultz (ADNR), Carl Markon (USGS), Tom Liebscher (NPS), Deborah Rocque (USFWS), Robyn Angliss (NOAA), Brian Person (NSB Wildlife), Ben Greene (NSB Planning) and John Dragomir (NWS).



Wikipedia Photo

Working Bee

## Web-functional!

The NSSI Web site ([www.northslope.org](http://www.northslope.org)) has a new look and better functionality, thanks to a new Webmaster at Michigan Tech Research Institute, where the Web site is housed. Now in progress, the Web site redesign is scheduled for full implementation at the end of April 2009. The new Webmaster is working closely with a Science Technical Advisory Panel subcommittee, the BLM Office of Communications, and the University of Alaska Fairbanks Geographic Information Network of Alaska (GINA), to make the site interoperable with GINA and add a far greater functionality. Look for the changes!



These past few months have been very busy indeed! We successfully completed the *NSSI 2008 Report to Congress* and sent it to the Speaker of the House and President of the Senate on January 16, 2009 (see page 4). This was the first report of its kind for NSSI and we wanted to create something extraordinary that clearly stated the initiative's mission, vision, legislated purpose and organizational structure; highlighted the coordination and on-the-ground accomplishments of the first three years; and gave readers a strong sense of the future direction of NSSI efforts. The small team working on the report produced an exceptional document that met all of these goals and still holds the attention of its audience. In fact, the report was awarded the Distinguished 2008 Peer Review Award by the Puget Sound Chapter of the Society for Technical Communications. This accomplishment was possible through the dedicated professionalism of BLM Office of Communication's Karen Laubenstein and Vanessa Rathbun; BLM Information Resources Management Branch's Glen Nelson, Greg Chavez and Paul Russell; and NSSI's Deputy Director Denny Lassuy. The full report is on the NSSI website ([www.northslope.org](http://www.northslope.org)).

We have deployed a number of successful projects since last spring. One project involved two new seasonal hydrologic gauging stations in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge on the Canning and Tamayariak Rivers. The stations transmit their information in near real-time (<http://water-data.usgs.gov/nwis/rt>). The land cover project completed its field work near Wainwright in August and the results are out for review. When completed, we will sign an agreement to complete the project work by the fall of 2010. Two deployments of the remotely sensed water information system (May 2008 NSSI Newsletter) were completed. These deployments concentrated on lakes in the northeast portion of the National Petroleum Reserve-Alaska and in areas near Barrow.

Finally, the data information and project tracking systems received a major jolt of progress in the form of Jess Grunblatt joining our office (see back page), and from the added help of Tatyana Venegas, whose time was generously donated to the NSSI by BP.

As we look toward the future, we are faced with many challenges. Most imperative is securing a fixed budget. Discussions to achieve this continue within the Department of the Interior. The NSSI continues in its unique position as a forum composed of individual member organizations, each with its respective mandates and policies, but tasked to identify and move forward on shared science needs. The broad spectrum of NSSI membership means that a similarly broad spectrum of "emerging issues" is becoming apparent. NSSI will identify areas with the greatest overlap in interest, capability and need, and then collaborate with the Oversight Group, Senior Staff Committee and the critically important Science Technical Advisory Panel to move forward on the highest priorities among these areas. Despite these and other challenges, the NSSI is making great strides in meeting its mission and is looking forward to a bright future.

## NSSI Oversight Group has a new Chair

Geoffrey Haskett is the new Chair of the NSSI Oversight Group. He is the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Alaska Regional Director. He came to Alaska in Oct. 2008 from Washington, D.C., where he was the Assistant Director for the National Wildlife Refuge System. He has also served as Deputy Director for the Southwest Region and Assistant Director for Refuges and Wildlife in the Southeast Region. This is not Geoff's first assignment in Alaska. He served as a Supervisory Realty Officer and Deputy for the Alaska Lands program within the National Park Service from 1985 to 1988.



Geoff holds a Master of Science degree in public administration (1980), is a graduate of BLM's Oregon/Washington Management Development Program (1985), completed the Federal Executive Institute's Leadership for a Democratic Society (1993) and the Center for Creative Leadership Development Program (1997). He attended Harvard University's John F. Kennedy School of Government Program for Senior Executive Fellows (2001). Geoff was also the recipient of the Secretary of the Interior's Meritorious Service Honor Award in 2003.

## Northern Oil and Gas Research Forum

On October 28-30, 2008, the NSSI helped organize and sponsor the United States and Canada Northern Oil and Gas Research Forum: Current Status and Future Directions in the Beaufort Sea, North Slope and Mackenzie Delta. This international forum for U.S. and Canadian scientists, industry and regulators focused on sharing research programs and future directions for northern oil and gas exploration and development. The event showcased current research programs, how they contributed to decision-making through environmental assessments and the regulatory processes, and how the involvement of indigenous peoples have helped these research programs. A second focus was to identify future oil and gas research needs, including the development of partnerships for the Beaufort Sea, Mackenzie Delta and the North Slope. Forum attendance far exceeded expectations with nearly 306 registrations. The forum was held concurrently with the Minerals Management Service Information Transfer Meeting so registrants could participate in both venues.

## Home from Africa: NSSI Welcomes Jess Grunblatt

The North Slope Science Initiative is excited to welcome Jess Grunblatt as a new member of the NSSI team in Anchorage. He comes to NSSI as an employee of the University of Alaska Fairbanks Geographic Information Network of Alaska (GINA), recently returned from Kenya. With more than 28 years of experience in both Alaska and Africa in GIS and remote sensing applications, Jess will be at the forefront of NSSI's work with GINA, remote sensing and GIS. This will contribute to the science associated with responsible resource development and climate change on Alaska's North Slope.

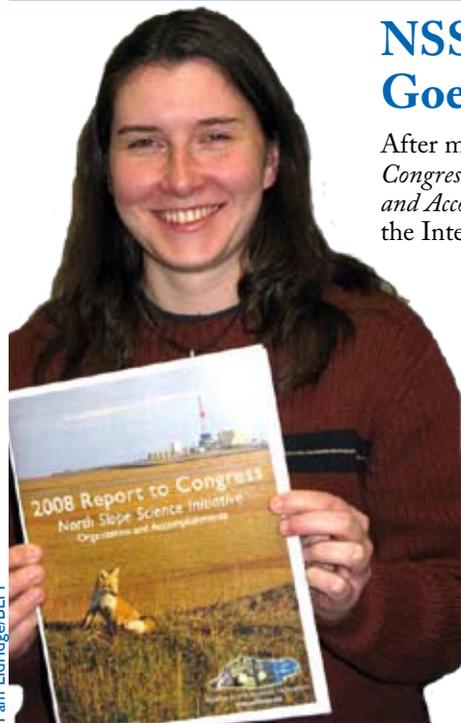
Jess's experience can only enhance NSSI's programs. When he began his career in Alaska in 1980 under contract to the State of Alaska Department of Natural Resources, he worked with the Bristol Bay Landcover Mapping Project, which was then among the largest land cover mapping efforts in the world. He went on to help establish the North Slope GIS system that serves today as the GIS capacity within the North Slope Borough. He left the North Slope Borough to work under contract with the World Bank in Nairobi, Kenya, where he established a GIS department within the Kenya government's Rangeland Ecological Monitoring Unit that conducted remote sensing and ecological studies, including wildlife and livestock census within the Kenya rangelands. After four years in Kenya, Jess again returned to Alaska and worked for the North Pacific Fisheries Management Council. That led to his joining the Habitat Protection Working Group with the Exxon Valdez Oil Spill Trustee Council. In 1995, Jess returned to his former World Bank-funded position in Kenya for two more years, where he also completed a National Desertification Assessment Pilot Project for the United Nations Environmental Programme. He returned to Alaska in 1997 to develop the inventory component of the National Park Service Inventory and Monitoring Program within Alaska's national parks, including landcover and soils mapping, and an orthoimagery program. In 2007, Jess returned briefly to Kenya again under a United Nations contract on humanitarian and development applications of GIS.



Photo by Pam Eldridge/BLM

Jess Grunblatt

"The addition of someone of Jess's caliber will make a huge and positive difference for NSSI in the future," said NSSI Director John Payne.



Pam Eldridge/BLM

Vanessa Rathbun with NSSI Report to Congress

## NSSI's First Report Goes to Congress

After months of arduous work, the *2008 Report to Congress, North Slope Science Initiative, Organization and Accomplishments* was signed by the Secretary of the Interior in January 2009!

This important first report to Congress stresses the central role of the NSSI organization, clearly states its vision and mission, and provides an interesting glimpse into our future. The report is unlike most in that it is full of side bars, pictures and graphics in an attempt to keep the reader engaged. It also includes information on each of the committees that operate to make the NSSI a fully functional organization.

The report is such a success that it received the Distinguished 2008 Peer Review Award by the Puget Sound Chapter of the Society for Technical Communications in January 2009.

The NSSI 2008 Report to Congress will be "rolled out" to various Congressional committees in late March. Find a copy on-line at [www.northslope.org](http://www.northslope.org).

## PTS Becoming Reality

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NSSI/GINA has acquired more than 240 GIS data sets describing climate, ecology, demography, geology, hydrology and infrastructure, along with a variety of imagery products, within the North Slope. NSSI is currently reviewing these data sets and developing metadata and tools to support visualization and distribution of this information. The NSSI data archive will allow broader dissemination of data collected through research on the North Slope. This can encourage synergies in the application of this data between groups, and promote a greater appreciation for the data gaps and needs within the North Slope research community.

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