

READOUT OF THE NORTHERN BERING SEA CLIMATE RESILIENCE AREA (NBSCRA) TASK FORCE MEETING

DECEMBER 21, 2021

The Bering Task Force held its inaugural meeting, plans to meet with the Inter-Tribal Advisory Council in early 2022 to identify priority issues and activities.

The Bering Task Force formally convened on 10 November 2021 and was led by the co-chairs: Raina Thiele, Senior Advisor to the Secretary for Alaska Affairs & Strategic Priorities, Department of the Interior; Kelly Kryc, Deputy Assistant Secretary for International Fisheries, The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) at the Department of Commerce, and Tasha Hippolyte, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Trade, Acting, the Department of Homeland Security. Hosted by the Office of Science and Technology Policy, this was the inaugural meeting of the Bering Task Force of the Northern Bering Sea Climate Resilience Area.

Task Force membership includes representation by the following departments, offices and agencies:

- Department of State
- Department of Health and Human Services
- Department of Defense
- Department of Energy
- The Environmental Protection Agency
- The National Science Foundation
- The White House Council on Native American Affairs
- The United States Arctic Research Commission
- The Marine Mammal Commission
- The Interagency Arctic Research and Policy Committee
- The Domestic Policy Council
- The Council for Environmental Quality

The meeting was opened by the Honorable Jane Lubchenco, Deputy Director for Climate and Environment at the Office of Science and Technology Policy. She emphasized the importance of the effort initiated by the Task Force that integrates multiple priorities of this administration, particularly climate, racial and economic inequities, engagement with Indigenous Peoples, and the recognition of the value of both science and Indigenous Knowledge. She emphasized the importance that a collaborative model like the NBSCRA can offer for other regions, places and ecosystems in building respectful partnerships with Indigenous communities, knowledge-informed decision making and a pathway for Tribal voices who have been historically underserved in decision-making processes.

Additional welcoming remarks were provided by Tommy Beaudreau, Deputy Secretary of the Department of the Interior. He recognized the leadership by Indigenous Peoples, and specifically

Elders, from the region in establishing the NBSCRA. He further commented about the powerful example this effort provided in more locally-led policy and the need for more inclusive conservation that responds to local needs and includes traditional management practices to address changing ecosystems.

Dr. Richard Spinrad, Under Secretary of Commerce for Oceans and Atmosphere & NOAA Administrator shared an optimistic perspective in opening remarks after participating in the United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP26). He emphasized that the framework provided by the NBSCRA could serve as a model for how the U.S. Government collaborates with partners to provide products and services for people and places across the United States. He encouraged the Task Force to heed guidance coming from COP26 in working towards solutions that have deliverables and outcomes.

Next, the co-chairs shared their vision for the Task Force and Inter-Tribal Advisory Council in the implementation of the NBSCRA.

- Collaborate to meet stewardship goals and responsibilities through interagency coordination on activities in the NBSCRA.
- Provide a mechanism for input and leadership from Tribes and communities that are dealing with the impacts of climate change, to promote agency action in support of Tribal sovereignty and self-governance, and to fulfil Federal trust and treaty responsibilities to Tribal Nations in the region.
- Build resilience across the region, informed by both Indigenous Knowledge and science, to address challenges brought on by climate change.

Shannon Jenkins, Senior Arctic Policy Advisor for the U.S. Coast Guard presented an overview of the Executive Order and reviewed the current status of actions. Task Force members then shared their current priorities and activities in the region and discussed potential areas of collaboration.

Summary of Opportunities for the Task Force:

- The Inter-Tribal Advisory Council plays a critical role in the successful implementation of the NBSCRA. It will be critical to ensure effective dialogue between the Task Force and the Inter-Tribal Advisory Council to collaborate on issues of concern in the region.
- Food security is a serious concern due to changing ocean, coastal and land ecosystems as a result of climate change. Looking at issues of food security in a comprehensive manner will be important (e.g., holistic, inclusive of Indigenous Knowledge).
- Supporting capacity in communities to respond to emergencies is needed for communities is needed to engage meaningfully with federal partners. The Council can help identify how to build this capacity.
- Adaptation planning is needed for communities and regions to plan and prepare for climate change including the best available information (science and Indigenous Knowledge) scaled to region/community to make decisions that promote resilience.
- The northern Bering Sea is part of an interconnected social-ecological system that spans international borders. Bilateral relationships will be important in building long-term resilience.
- This region has been and continues to experience dramatic climate impacts. The Task Force and Council can come together to elevate and highlight the impacts the region experiences.

- The Task Force recognizes the complexity across issues and interaction of factors that both communities and agencies are dealing with that call for a coordinated approach.

Next Steps:

The Task Force and Inter-Tribal Advisory Council will meet to identify priority focus and alignment in the new year (to be determined). Before the joint meeting, the Task Force plans to meet the second week of February in 2022. The work that will need to be addressed prior to this meeting includes scoping for the Federal Task Force under the Arctic Executive Steering Committee (AESC) and the formation of two working groups to focus on outreach and engagement and the coordination of activities.

Background on the Northern Bering Sea Climate Resilience Area:

The Yup'ik, Cupik, St. Lawrence Island Yupik and Inupiaq peoples have been living in the Northern Bering Sea region for millennia practicing a way of life that is inextricably tied to the rich marine ecosystem of the Bering Sea. Warming ocean temperatures, sea ice loss, and increasing anthropogenic activity all threaten the subsistence practices and food security of these communities. The coastal Tribes along the northern Bering Sea and the Bering Strait requested that the Federal Government act to protect the health of the marine ecosystems of the Northern Bering Sea and Bering Strait while maintaining opportunities for sustainable fishing and sustainable economic development. In direct response to these requests, President Obama issued Executive Order 13754 creating the Northern Bering Sea Climate Resilience Area. The Executive Order was revoked in 2017 and was reinstated by President Biden reinstated it in January 2021.

The Executive Order recognizes the importance of building resilience through conserving ecosystems that provide important cultural and subsistence value and services to people in the region. The Executive Order provides a mechanism to conduct and coordinate federal activity in the region, with attention to the rights, needs, and knowledge of Federally Recognized Tribes, with the aim of promoting ecosystem sensitivity and the protection of wildlife. A Federal Bering Task Force was established under the Arctic Executive Steering Committee. The Federal Task Force is co-chaired by the Department of the Interior, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, and the Department of Homeland Security. The Bering Task Force will coordinate Federal activity and consider additional mechanisms to reduce impacts to subsistence and cultural activities within the Northern Bering Sea Climate Resilience Area. The Executive Order also formally elevates the voice of Tribes and the role of Indigenous Knowledge in decision-making within the region by mandating that the Task Force establish and engage in regular consultation with a Bering Intergovernmental Tribal Advisory Council, which will consist of Tribal government representatives. Together, these two bodies will guide the inclusion of Traditional Knowledge and science into Federal resource management in the northern Bering Sea region, thus preserving this unique ecosystem and the indigenous peoples who rely upon it.

Further, this action advances knowledge-informed decision-making and engagement with Indigenous Peoples in addressing the changing Arctic consistent with the priorities of the Biden Administration on [Protecting Public Health and the Environmental and Restoring Science to Tackle the Climate Crisis](#) and [Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities Through the Federal Government](#).