

READOUT OF THE NORTHERN BERING SEA CLIMATE RESILIENCE AREA (NBSCRA) JOINT BERING FEDERAL TASK FORCE AND BERING INTERGOVERNMENTAL TRIBAL ADVISORY COUNCIL MEETING

JUNE 3, 2022

The Bering Federal Task Force and Bering Intergovernmental Tribal Advisory Council held an inaugural joint meeting.

The White House Office of Science and Technology Policy convened the first joint meeting between The Bering Federal Task Force (Task Force) and the Bering Intergovernmental Tribal Advisory Council (Tribal Advisory Council) on June 3, 2022 under the auspices of Executive Order 13754, which created the Northern Bering Sea Climate Resilience Area (NBSCRA). The hybrid meeting included participants who gathered in Anchorage, Alaska, and participants who joined by Zoom from multiple venues including remote Alaskan villages and the D.C. metro region. The Honorable Jane Lubchenco, Deputy Director for Climate and Environment at the Office of Science and Technology Policy, introduced the Federal Team assembled. The Task Force was led by 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, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), Department of Commerce; and Tasha Hippolyte, Acting Deputy Assistant Secretary for Trade, Department of Homeland Security.

In addition to the co-chairs, Task Force membership includes representation by the following departments and agencies, commissions and offices:

- Department of Defense
- Department of Energy
- Department of Health and Human Services
- Department of State
- Environmental Protection Agency
- National Science Foundation
- Office of the Director of National Intelligence

- Denali Commission
- Marine Mammal Commission
- United States Arctic Research Commission

- Council for Environmental Quality
- Domestic Policy Council

- Interagency Arctic Research and Policy Committee
- White House Council on Native American Affairs

The Tribal Advisory Council was established in April, 2022 through a partnership of the Association of Village Council Presidents (AVCP), Kawerak Inc., the Bering Sea Elders Group (BSEG), and the Aleut Community of St. Paul Island. Representation includes over 70 Tribes from the Northern Bering Sea region. Membership on the TAC includes representatives from:

- Kwigillingok
- Alakanuk
- Cheforak
- Platinum
- Bethel and Emmonak
- St. Paul
- Shishmaref
- Unalakleet
- Golovin
- Nome
- Savoonga

Members of the Task Force recognize the critical role that the Tribal Advisory Council will play in the successful implementation of the NBSCRA. Building effective, respectful partnerships with Indigenous communities and ensuring knowledge-informed decision-making that includes science and Traditional Knowledge will require partnership that is based in collaborative approaches and effective dialogue. Relationship-building is key to the successful partnership between the Task Force and Tribal Advisory Council with a goal of co-stewardship and co-management.

The historic meeting focused on mutual learning and relationship-building between the two entities. Ensuring equitable and collaborative processes are in place is critical, given the urgent issues facing the region. The Task Force learned about some of these issues that intersect both impacts from climate change and anthropogenic activities such as fishing and vessel traffic. Food security is a serious concern due to interconnected changing ocean, coastal and land ecosystems. Looking at issues of food security, such as the dramatic declines in salmon, in a comprehensive manner will be important. Complexity across issues and the interaction of factors that both communities and agencies are dealing with call for a coordinated approach.

Task Force members expressed that they are hopeful that this effort can serve as a model for collaborative approaches in co-stewardship and co-management with Tribes and Indigenous Peoples in other places. The urgency to address the challenges brought about by climate change require the need for collaboration to meet shared stewardship goals and responsibilities through interagency coordination on activities in the NBSCRA, and to further support Tribal Sovereignty, self-governance and fulfilling the Federal trust and Treaty responsibility by providing a mechanism for input and leadership from Tribes and communities that are dealing with the impacts of climate change and increased anthropogenic activities. There is a strong need to also build resilience across the region, informed by both Traditional Knowledge and science, to address these challenges. The Task Force looks forward to seeing the collaborations unfold.

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 by President Trump and was reinstated by President Biden 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 health 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 Traditional 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 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 supporting 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 Environment and Restoring Science to Tackle the Climate Crisis and Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities Through the Federal Government.

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