

Managing for the Future in a Rapidly Changing Arctic

A Report to the President

An Arctic Nation

The United States is an Arctic nation, one of only eight such nations worldwide that are responsible for the stewardship of a region undergoing dramatic environmental, social, and economic changes. The implications of these changes demand a fresh look at how the Federal Government and its partners address management challenges in the region. In consultation with the National Ocean Council, the National Security Staff, and the Arctic Research Commission, the Interagency Working Group on Coordination of Domestic Energy Development and Permitting in Alaska (Alaska Interagency Working Group) initiated this report to describe these challenges as they relate to the management of natural resources in the U.S. Arctic. The report presents recommendations for advancing a common management approach that provides coordinated, forward-thinking solutions.

Change and Uncertainty

The Arctic is warming faster than any other region on Earth, bringing dramatic reductions in sea ice extent, altered weather, and thawing permafrost. Implications of these changes include rapid coastal erosion threatening villages and facilities, loss of wildlife habitat, ecosystem instability, increased greenhouse-gas emissions from melting permafrost, and unpredictable impacts on subsistence activities and critical social needs. In addition to elevating the already high level of uncertainty associated with resource management in the region, changes such as reduced sea ice are increasing interest in economic opportunities such as offshore oil and gas development and increased shipping through the region. The likelihood of increased human activity in this environmentally sensitive region has implications for managing a U.S. Arctic that currently lacks much of the costly infrastructure necessary to monitor and control the impacts of such activities.

Perspectives and Expectations

In the U.S. Arctic, more than 20 federal agencies have responsibilities that include resource management, scientific research, homeland security, emergency preparedness and response, maritime and aeronautical safety, and support to communities. Many partners in the region work closely with these agencies to achieve a wide range of management goals; these partners include state agencies, tribal governments and Alaska Native organizations, municipal governments, industrial and commercial stakeholders, and conservation organizations. While the perspectives of these partners vary on specific objectives for the region, particularly regarding the appropriate extent of development, there is broad interest in supporting stable economies, thriving cultures, and sustainable ecosystems in the U.S. Arctic. Among the stakeholder concerns are bureaucratic processes that require engagement at many levels and which can burden stakeholders and communities. Partners in the U.S. Arctic want a framework for more inclusive, efficient, and transparent engagement that does not add unnecessary layers of bureaucratic process.

Barriers and Opportunities

The U.S. Arctic is a vast area that is changing rapidly while economic and social expectations are growing. This combination of factors is adding stress to a largely balkanized management system already straining to address many competing issues and priorities. The sheer number of federal agencies alone presents challenges and underscores the need for a more coordinated approach. That said, however, there are many efforts at the local, regional, state, federal, and international levels that endeavor to improve

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coordination among the region's stakeholders. These promising approaches can provide a foundation for a more holistic, integrated approach to management in the region. In advocating for such an approach, stakeholders strongly urged that it emphasize the following principles:

- Whole-of-government coordination to improve efficiency and operational certainty;
- Direct and meaningful partnership with stakeholders;
- Science-based decision-making focused on ensuring sustainable ecosystems;
- Adaptive approaches guided by ongoing research and monitoring;
- A region-wide planning approach that looks across jurisdictional boundaries; and
- Improved understanding and consideration of the cumulative impacts of human activities in the region.

Advancing an Integrated Approach

By incorporating those principles and considering multiple scales and jurisdictions in a more inclusive, transparent approach to management, an “Integrated Arctic Management” approach holds the promise of a broader-based consideration of economic, environmental, and cultural sensitivities and trends. The challenge is to improve the way that governments and stakeholders work together to implement such an approach without adding unnecessary layers of complexity or organizational overload in the U.S. Arctic. Building upon existing models, this report recommends that the U.S. Government:

1. ***Adopt an Integrated Arctic Management approach when making stewardship and development decisions affecting the U.S. Arctic:*** A commitment to apply the principles of Integrated Arctic Management will advance a common management approach that is resilient and adaptable to the changes taking place in the Arctic. Integrated Arctic Management is a science-based, whole-of-government approach to stewardship and planning in the U.S. Arctic that integrates and balances environmental, economic, and cultural needs and objectives. It is an adaptive, stakeholder-informed means for looking holistically at impacts and sensitivities across the U.S. Arctic and generating sustainable solutions.
2. ***Ensure ongoing high-level White House leadership on Arctic issues:*** A new National Strategy for the Arctic Region, to be established through the Presidential Policy Directive process, will identify strategic shared priorities for the U.S. Arctic region and will provide a framework for Executive Branch decision-making and high-level, government-wide leadership on the issues described in this report.
3. ***Strengthen key partnerships:*** The State of Alaska and Alaska Native tribal governments and organizations merit special partnership arrangements with the Federal Government.
4. ***Promote better stakeholder engagement:*** The Federal Government should conduct an assessment of existing means through which agencies, key partners, and other stakeholders interact on planning and management issues, with the goal of building upon best practices rather than creating new layers of engagement.
5. ***Coordinate and streamline federal actions:*** By the end of 2013, the Federal Government should conduct a review of the numerous interagency efforts related to the U.S. Arctic, with an eye toward identifying and addressing overlapping missions and reducing duplication of effort. In addition, there are several tools and processes already in use in the U.S. Arctic that, with increased coordination, can help to advance the Integrated Arctic Management approach to decision-making. These processes are described in additional recommendations related to linking science and management, environmental evaluations, important ecological and subsistence areas, scenario planning, and international coordination.

This report is a call to action on a pressing issue of national importance. The cultural, ecological, and economic costs of failing to adapt and strengthen management approaches in the face of rapid change are unacceptable. Our challenge is to apply the principles of Integrated Arctic Management to today's decisions and to those that lie ahead in our shared future as an Arctic nation.