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## **Northern Waters Commission A Call to Action**

**China declares itself an Arctic nation. Building an icebreaker.**

**Canada renames the much sought-after Northwest Passage the "Canadian Northwest Passage."**

**Two new-built container ships cut the shipping time from East Asia to Rotterdam in half. Sea route across northern Russia. Icebreaker escorts not needed.**

**Norway seeks talks with Alaskans.**

**Canada – Alaska border dispute flares up.**

**Iceland envisions a transshipment role for itself.**

**Russia claims undersea territories and resources.**

**Disclaimer.**

**This paper is NOT -- repeat NOT -- a treatise on global warming or explanations for it. This is a look at Alaska's potential role in new strategies and opportunities brought forward by receding sea ice in Northern Waters,**

**Discussion**

Reports clearly indicate that the sea ice in Northern latitudes is receding.

No matter what the cause might be, what meaning does that fact have for Alaska and the United States?

Other nations and their governments are already hard at work on their own interests. Russian, Canada, Norway, Iceland and even our own Federal government are players.

These governments and their commercial partners are at the table. What should the State of Alaska and the Alaskan people be doing? We are not very active yet, but we should be.

How and when do we claim our place at the table? Or should we maintain a subordinate, quasi-colonial posture? Most are repulsed by the very thought of the latter.

The situation in Northern Waters could be summed up as follows.

**The waters north and northwest of Alaska have strategic importance for at least these four reasons:**

- 1. Protection of routes of ocean transit.**
- 2. Mineral and other resource rights, sub-surface and on-shore.**
- 3. Territorial rights and claims by foreign governments.**
- 4. Rights and welfare of local inhabitants.**

As governments, the interests listed above are shared by the Federal government and the State of Alaska.

Some independent Federal agencies are taking actions, and some bilateral or multilateral international forums exist. Not all these agencies are coordinating with one another.

Although these shared interests are critical, yet, as of now, there is no organized Federal-State mechanism for handling or even discussing these matters.

Fortunately, there is an approach that is time-proven and very successful.

### **Suggestion**

1. Use the very successful Fishery Management Council model, on which Federal and State appointees sit, deliberate, form policy and approve actions.
2. Feds and State agree to form a **Northern Waters Commission** (working title).
3. A balanced membership is formed comprised of Federal and State of Alaska appointees.

The **Northern Waters Commission** would be the forum at which to discuss policy issues, such as those listed in the four strategic areas above.

Regular meetings would be held, just as with the North Pacific Fishery Management Council, in a balanced atmosphere, with advice and input from staff, local governments, public agencies and the public.

Initial discussions about the **Northern Waters Commission** have been held with members and staff of our Congressional delegation, members of the State Legislative and Executive branches, the US Arctic Research Commission, the Mayor of the North Slope Borough, and experienced members of the public.

There is universal acknowledgement of the general issues involved with receding sea ice, and there is a real interest in the course of action outlined above as a means of addressing those issues.

As further background, in New York City a March 1, 2010 conference was held at the Council on Foreign Relations on the general subject of the retreating sea ice in the North. Senators Murkowski and Begich both made statements there, as well as Mayor Edward Itta.

Many notables were at the conference including the Norwegian Ambassador to the United Nations; David Rockefeller Jr.; Theodore Roosevelt IV; Nome Mayor Denise Michels; Alaska State Representative Carl Gatto; Bering Straits Native Corporation executive Gail Schubert; Alaska Native Arts Foundation chair Alice Rogoff; US Arctic Research Commission chair Mead Treadwell; and former Alaska Commissioner of Commerce, Community and Economic Development Bill Noll.

There was also an evening reception on March 1st at the Alaska House New York on the same subject. Mead Treadwell, Alice Rogoff and Bill Noll shared the podium at the reception. Mead gave a great power point presentation, followed by a lively Q&A.

About 80 had attended the Council on Foreign Relations event. Follow up is expected. As one example, an officer from Norway's General Consulate requested bilateral talks with Alaskans on this general subject.

Here is a link to the text of the afternoon session at Council on Foreign Relations, including the remarks by Senator Murkowski, Senator Begich and Mayor Itta:  
[http://www.cfr.org/publication/21623/adapting\\_to\\_climate\\_change\\_in\\_the\\_arctic\\_coordinating\\_a\\_federal\\_state\\_and\\_private\\_sector\\_response.html?breadcrumb=%2Fbios%2F13363%2Fscott\\_g\\_borgerson](http://www.cfr.org/publication/21623/adapting_to_climate_change_in_the_arctic_coordinating_a_federal_state_and_private_sector_response.html?breadcrumb=%2Fbios%2F13363%2Fscott_g_borgerson)

Here is a link to the evening session at Alaska House New York:  
<http://www.ustream.tv/recorded/5121092>

So, the question is, what to do next?

### **Recommendation**

The State of Alaska perform work to create a report that will be the basis for taking actions deemed prudent to protect the interests of Alaska and Alaskans and advance these interests in the face of the receding sea ice.

There are and will be opportunities for people and businesses. Will Alaska play the role of a colony or foil for Federal and international protagonists? Or will Alaska step into the breach and take its rightful place alongside the sovereign powers already working for their own ends?

### **Proposed Scope of Work**

- A. The current and recent commercial and recreational marine transits passing Alaska over the top across Russia and Canada. The nature of this shipping and its potential. The economics.
- B. Estimated oil, gas and other minerals in Northern Waters and their value.

- C. Territorial claims to sea, sub-sea or land areas and resources.
- D. Current actions by the US Coast Guard and the US Navy. Port potentials.
- E. Other commercial potential such as tug support, pilotage, and ice breakers.
- F. Shoreside support needs and potential for commerce. Infrastructure.
- G. Social and economic potentials for local residents, businesses and governments.
- H. Federal agencies currently involved in any way. International forums.
- I. Existing Federal laws and regulations, and those pending in Congress.
- J. The Law of the Sea Treaty: situation report.
- K. The North Pacific Fishery Management Council budget and funding source.
- L. Public hearings in key Northern locations.

Respectfully submitted.

William C. (Bill) Noll, Owner

Former Mayor of Seward

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