

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20510

October 28, 2013

The Honorable Sally Jewell
Secretary
United States Department of the Interior
1849 C Street N.W. – M.S. 7229
Washington, DC 20240

The Honorable John Kerry
Secretary
United States Department of State
2201 C Street, N.W. – Room 7226
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretaries:

We write to express our continued concern over the looming possibility of an international transboundary park arrangement between the National Park Service (NPS) and Russia that would span the Bering Straits region. Our understanding is that a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) has been agreed to by the Department of State and Russia, and that a delay in translating it for both sides is the reason it has not been released. While your Departments appear to have decided this arrangement is in the best interest of our nation, Alaskans remain unconvinced that it will benefit those who actually live in the region. To the contrary, the most direct impact is likely to be another layer of federal bureaucracy that serves only to restrict Alaskans' rightful access to – and lawful activities on – these public lands.

Our staffs met with representatives for the Shared Beringian Heritage Program last November and listed our concerns over this concept at that time. Alaska Governor Sean Parnell similarly outlined his reservations in a letter to then-Secretary of State Hillary Clinton in September 2012. Yet, nothing has changed. The proposed “sister park” arrangement, with its cross-border collaboration and cooperation defined by the MOU, continues to present several potential problems for Alaskans. Local communities still stand to receive no direct benefit to our knowledge. Subsistence activities and access are still not adequately protected. New limitations are still likely to deprive rather than foster economic opportunities, particularly with regard to resource development. In our view, international influence has been excessive, while local, State and Native participation has been insufficient.

To our knowledge, none of these concerns have been addressed, and it is difficult to fathom how additional bureaucracy will do anything but further slow and complicate decisions by federal agencies in the Bering Sea region. Accordingly, as Alaskans continue to communicate to us their valid apprehension over the negative impacts an international arrangement could have, we have decided to elevate this issue and formally request that you fully account for local and statewide concerns.

While we support the general concept of fostering a strong, international relationship between Alaska and Russia across the Bering Straits, we hereby request that you consider the views of Alaskans prior to any final decisions on this issue. Specifically, we ask that you engage directly with the Alaskans this arrangement will directly affect, that you schedule public

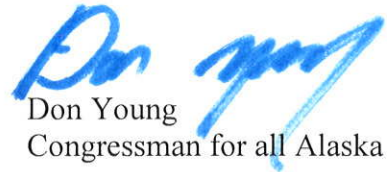
meetings in our state to familiarize yourselves with local concerns, that you engage on this matter with the State of Alaska, and that you convene government-to-government consultations with the Alaska Native Tribes who are likely to be impacted.

Our offices are ready to help in any way we can. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Lisa Murkowski
United States Senator



Don Young
Congressman for all Alaska