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Murkowski, Young Express Concern Over Bering Strait Park Proposal with Russia

WASHINGTON, D.C. – U.S. Sen. Lisa Murkowski and Rep. Don Young (both R-Alaska) this week voiced concerns about the ongoing effort to create an international park in the Bering Strait region with Russia. Murkowski and Young outlined their concerns in a [letter](#) to Interior Secretary Sally Jewell and Secretary of State John Kerry.

The proposed park – referred to as Transboundary Area of Shared Beringian Heritage – would link the proposed Beringia National Park in the Russian Far East, with the Bering Land Bridge National Preserve and Cape Krusenstern National Monument on Alaska's Seward Peninsula.

In their letter, Murkowski and Young said there has been a woeful lack of transparency and communication with Alaska officials regarding the creation of such a park.

“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,” Murkowski and Young wrote.

The National Park Service (NPS) and State Department are currently working with their Russian counterparts to finalize a memorandum of understanding establishing cross-border collaboration and cooperation. The NPS released a draft of that agreement Monday. Murkowski and Young criticized the administration for moving forward without first consulting Alaskans.

“In our view,” Murkowski and Young wrote, “international influence has been excessive, while local, state and Native participation has been insufficient.”

Among the issues Alaskans have with the park proposal is the lack of any direct benefit to the Alaska Native communities in the region, inadequate protection of subsistence activities, and possible restrictions on mineral and other economic development.

“While we support the general concept of fostering a strong, international relationship between Alaska and Russia across the Bering Strait, we hereby request that you consider the views of Alaskans prior to any final decisions on this issue,” Murkowski and Young wrote.