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News-Miner Opinion

Watching the feds: Alaska needs to restore this vital citizen's panel

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News-Miner opinion: It has been just over four years since then-Gov. Bill Walker, faced with the early years of what would become an enduring budget crisis, vetoed all of the funding for the Citizens' Advisory Commission on Federal Areas.

There are no current members. The commission exists now only in state statute, though it has recently had a director whose job is to monitor issues.

President Donald Trump's election just over four months after Governor Walker's veto rendered the loss of the commission less worrisome. The incoming Trump administration was much more friendly to Alaska in terms of land access, resource development and game management, for example.

But President Trump's defeat in the Nov. 3 election — he's still challenging the outcome, however — means Alaska's relationship with the federal government will change once again. The incoming administration of Democrat Joe Biden will have different priorities.

And that means Gov. Mike Dunleavy and the new Legislature, when it convenes in January, need to fully restore and fund the Citizens' Advisory Commission on Federal Areas.

The commission was created a year after President Jimmy Carter signed the 1980 Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act into law. It consists of members appointed by the Legislature and governor and was created to give Alaskans a voice into implementation of the complex ANILCA. It would hold meetings around the state to get citizen input.

The commission's purpose, as laid out in state law, is to "consider, research, and hold hearings on the consistency with federal law and congressional intent on management, operation, planning, development, and additions to federal management areas in the state."

It is also to "consider, research, and hold hearings on the effect of federal regulations and federal management decisions on the people of the state."

As we stated previously in support of this vital panel, the goal of the Citizens' Advisory Commission on Federal Areas is simple: making sure the federal government lives up to the promises of the Alaska Statehood Act, the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act and the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act and that it doesn't overreach its authority in its approach to our state.

With the impending change of administration in Washington, reconstituting this panel should be a high priority for Gov. Dunleavy and the Legislature.