

Final Report and Implementation Plan

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

January 30, 2015





Alaskans are at the forefront of emerging economic and resource development opportunities, vibrant healthy communities, and circumpolar cooperation.

- Our vision for the Arctic is based on economic and resource development, a healthy environment, secure and safe communities, and transparent decision making.
- The Arctic is an integral part of Alaska's identity. It is home to many Alaskans and is an important part of our history, our culture, and our future.
- The Arctic also presents multitudes of opportunities that are being realized with an increasingly accessible Arctic. These opportunities are of strategic importance to Alaskans who are building on years of vision, hard work and experience living and working in the region.

Alaska's leaders remain engaged in monitoring the local, national and global impacts of a changing arctic. The state of Alaska has been responsive to these changes and is well positioned to continue to play a strong leadership role in the increased activity in the region.



The Alaska Arctic Policy Commission recognizes the many efforts already underway and lead by state agencies. The state is poised to leverage the intersection of opportunities and challenges that the Arctic presents, offering it's expertise to national and international efforts.



The Alaska Arctic Policy Commission

In April 2012, the Alaska State Legislature established the Alaska Arctic Policy Commission to “develop an Arctic policy for the state and produce a strategy for the implementation of an Arctic policy.” The Commission has operated under the conviction that the state is an active and willing leader and partner in Arctic decision-making with its reliable expertise and resources.

Furthermore, the Commission has remained committed to producing a policy for Alaska’s Arctic that reflects the values of Alaskans, provides a suite of options to capitalize on the opportunities and safeguard against risk. It is a policy that will stand the test of time and act as a living document.



The Commission convened public meetings in seven locations across the state.

Through this process the Commission has investigated and relied upon coordination among jurisdictions, cooperation at all levels of government – international, national, state, local and tribal – and sought to balance multiple values to protect, promote, and enhance the well-being of the Alaskan Arctic including the people, flora, fauna, land, water and other resources.





ALASKA'S ARCTIC POLICY

The Alaska Arctic Policy Commission submitted to the Legislature for consideration an Arctic Policy based on these four vision statements:

- Uphold the state's commitment to economically vibrant communities sustained by development activities consistent with the state's responsibility for a healthy environment.
- Collaborate with all levels of government, tribes, industry and nongovernmental organizations to achieve transparent and inclusive Arctic decision-making resulting in more informed, sustainable and beneficial outcomes.
- Enhance the security of the state through a safe and secure Arctic for individuals and communities.
- Value and strengthen the resilience of communities and respect and integrate the culture and knowledge of Arctic peoples.





Policy Statement #1

Uphold the state's commitment to economically vibrant communities and responsibility for a healthy environment, including efforts to:

- Ensure that Arctic residents and communities benefit from economic and resource development activities in the region;
- Improve the efficiency, predictability, and stability of permitting and regulatory processes;
- Attract investment through the establishment of a positive investment climate and the development of strategic infrastructure;
- Sustain current, and develop new, approaches for responding to a changing climate;
- Encourage industrial and technological innovation in the private and academic sectors that focuses on emerging opportunities and challenges;

Policy Statement #2

Collaborate with all levels of government and stakeholders, including efforts to:

- Strengthen and expand cross-border relationships and international cooperation, especially bilateral engagements with Canada and Russia;
- Sustain and enhance state participation in the Arctic Council;
- Pursue opportunities to participate meaningfully as a partner in the development of federal and international policies, thereby incorporating state and local knowledge and expertise;
- Strengthen communication with Arctic Council Permanent Participants, who include and represent the state's indigenous peoples;
- Reiterate the state's long-time support for ratification of the Law of the Sea Treaty;



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Policy Statement #3

Enhance the security of the state through a safe and secure Arctic, including efforts to:

- Enhance disaster and emergency prevention and response, oil spill prevention and response and search and rescue capabilities in the region;
- Provide safe, secure and reliable maritime transportation in the areas of the state adjacent to the Arctic;
- Sustain current, and develop new, community, response, and resource-related infrastructure;
- Coordinate with the federal government for an increase in United States Coast Guard presence, national defense obligations and levels of public and private sector support; and





Policy Statement #4

Value and strengthen the resilience of communities, including efforts to:

- Recognize Arctic indigenous peoples' cultures and unique relationship to the environment, including traditional reliance on a subsistence way of life for food security, which provides a spiritual connection to the land and the sea;
- Build capacity to conduct science and research and advance innovation and technology in part by providing support to the University of Alaska for Arctic research consistent with state priorities;
- Employ integrated, strategic planning that considers scientific, local and traditional knowledge;
- Safeguard the fish, wildlife and environment of the Arctic for the benefit of residents of the state;
- Encourage more effective integration of local and traditional knowledge into conventional science, research and resource management decision making.





Alaska's Arctic Policy articulates our vision and will guide the state's initiatives and inform U.S. domestic and international policy in ways that will ensure a benefit to Alaskans.

Over the course of the next few decades and into the future, increased access to the Arctic will bring more activity, traffic and people to the region. While this presents enormous opportunities for Alaska, there are potential risks involved. It is critical that policy makers act strategically to advantage Alaska in a changing Arctic. Therefore, the Alaska Arctic Policy Commission has provided as part of its final report:

- A review of economic, social, and environmental factors of relevance to the Arctic and more broadly to all Alaskans.
- An Implementation Plan that presents four lines of effort (drawn from our vision of the Arctic) and strategic recommendations that form a suite of potential independent actions for legislative consideration.

Arctic Policy Implementation Plan

The Commission has framed its strategic recommendations into four lines of effort:

Economic and Resource Development



Response Capacity



Healthy Communities



Science and Research



As part of the Implementation Plan for the state's Arctic Policy these recommendations should be considered a suite of options for future action. The Implementation Plan provides 'shovel-ready' actions for consideration by state policy-makers as Arctic interest develops and resources become available.

In an increasingly busy Arctic it is critical that Alaska proceed prudently. The work of the Commission is a culmination of the many years of effort, resources, and attention the Legislature has devoted to further understanding the current and emerging challenges in the Arctic. Alaska should fully engage and take an intentional leadership role in Arctic activities ensuring the alignment of developing policies with the priorities and needs of Alaskans.





Promote Economic and Resource Development

Natural resource development is the most important economic driver in Alaska, today and into the future. Alaska has successfully integrated new technology, best practices and innovative design into resource development projects in Alaska's Arctic and must continue to be a leader. The strong economy, instituted by responsible natural resource development, provides a base for Alaska's Arctic communities to thrive by creating new economic opportunities such as infrastructure, jobs, contracting services and community revenue sharing. The state must continue to foster an economic investment climate that encourages and promotes development of the Arctic.

With careful consideration and state investment, the Arctic region will continue to produce returns to the state and communities that ensure community health and vitality.





Address Response Capacity

It is crucial that the state maintain a concern for human and environmental security in the face of increasing change and activity, even as that increased activity brings the benefit of additional response resources to the region. Alaska's response capacity is measured by private sector, government, community and non-governmental infrastructures, assets and planning. The differences in proximity, risk, geography and scale of challenge make evaluation of response capacity and the design of solutions difficult; there is not a one-size-fits-all approach. Action is needed to enable the responsible development of resources; facilitate, secure and benefit from new global transportation routes; and safeguard Arctic residents and ecosystems.

Response capacity will require strong partnership and communication to prepare for incidents, to respond and develop best practices.





Support Healthy Communities

The justification for addressing Arctic issues is not only to better understand increasing changes or human activity in the region, but to recognize the historical and current presence of Alaskans in the region, with corresponding needs to enjoy a quality of life consistent with and responding to national standards, traditional ways of living, and a remote Arctic environment.

With sound economic opportunity for Alaskans, the state can build a vibrant economy, driven by private sector growth and a competitive business environment that has the potential to deliver social benefits while responding to the needs for a healthy environment.

Quality of life can be improved for the whole Arctic region without compromising: the economic security and well-being of other communities or the state as a whole; healthy marine and terrestrial ecosystems; of effective governance supported by meaningful and broad-based citizen participation.





Strengthen Science and Research

Alaska's future prosperity largely depends on the scientific, technological, cultural and socioeconomic research it promotes in the Arctic in the coming years and its ability to integrate science into decision-making. Ongoing and new research in the Arctic must be designed to help monitor, assess and improve the health and well-being of communities and ecosystems; anticipate impacts associated with a changing climate and potential development activities; identify opportunities and appropriate mitigation measures; and aid in planning successful adaptation to environmental, societal and economic changes in the region.

Alaska should pursue strategies to broaden and strengthen the influence of its agencies, its academic experts and its local governments and associations.



Conclusion

These four lines of effort, which comprise the strategic recommendations of the Commission, ultimately address the socioeconomic factors related to Arctic activity, while responding to change, opportunity and risk. The Commission considers these the building blocks from which areas that were not addressed directly can find innovative solutions that correspond to unique circumstance and statewide resonance.

The Alaska Arctic Policy and Implementation Plan seeks a better quality of life for the whole Arctic region without compromising the well-being of other communities or the state as a whole: healthy marine and terrestrial ecosystems; effective governance supported by meaningful and broad-based citizen participation; and economic security.

The Commission's work mobilizes the state's human, natural and financial resources to address current needs while recognizing that adequate resources should be available for future generations, and understanding that these might come in new and different forms as technology and demands shift over time.

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