

Climate Change in Alaska: Discussion – Pulling it All Together

(AFE - WRAP UP SESSION) Summary

Wednesday, Feb 4, 2009

(Listening session to which representatives from the State of AK and federally elected officials were invited to hear from their constituents directly)

Moderated by Fran Sussman, ICF International, and Deborah Williams, Alaska Conservation Solutions

Susanne Fleek-Green - for Senator Mark Begich

Kevin Sweeney – for Senator Lisa Murkowski

Michael Tubman – representing Governor Sarah Palin's office in DC

Commissioner Larry Hartig – Chair of the Governor's Climate Change Sub-Cabinet

Jackie Poston – State of Alaska Climate Change Stakeholder Process

Luke Hopkins – Fairbanks North Star Assembly

Question: Jeff Demain, MD: What is the current political atmosphere around climate change? Is it a subject that is better not to look at or be associated it. Officer in his national Allergy association—is dealing with this area b/c it is affecting their patients. So they are taking this very seriously and having a forum in March. Would like to see commitment from elected officials outside Alaska. Are other elected officials taking this seriously enough?

Fleek-Green: Begich started talking about this early as Mayor of Anchorage. Asks two questions: what will it take and cost to do something about this and what can we save by taking action. We've seen impacts here in ak and so that's why we're taking action. But even in Virginia, national politicians are recognizing that need to do something about this. We need to take time right now to put building blocks together to take action. So, even if it's not the top issue in congress (economic and other pressures), it is definitely an issue.

Sweeney: Senator wants to address both mitigation and adaptation. One of the biggest question with any climate change legislation is how will it affect the economy. And with the economy in trouble, that is even more of an issue. So we will likely address this year, but with the economy an issue it will be later in the year.

Tubman – It is important to have a state process. Important to tie it all together—bringing the economic perspective on climate change into the debate on climate change. There are economic benefits to tackling climate change earlier rather than later.

Deborah posed a question to participants: “How many people feel that elected officials in lower 48 are aware and understand your concerns about climate change?” Many more felt they did not, than they did. What about AK elected officials? Some felt they did, only a few that they did not.

Hartig—if you have other ideas on how to deal with this and outreach, please let us know. Goal is develop a draft strategy for AK, will come out to the public again. Debating how to reach rural AK. Take back and rework before give to the Gov.

Mike Brubaker—ANTHC—what are top mitigation and adaptation priorities?

Larry: on adaptation—at the same time as started this public process also started an immediate action workgroup. Subcabinet asked them to come up with a set of recommendations that we needed to do to prevent loss of life or loss of critical infrastructure over next 12 to `18 months. Spurred by the situation with oil tanks at Kivalina. Started by inviting members of communities from the most endangered communities (Kivalina, Shishmaref, others). Every one of the projects to protect these communities got funded. By AK having a plan of what actually needs to happen now, got additional federal funds for these projects.

Larry: On mitigation side—we know there's a win-win situation—can lower expenditures on fuel (from the vehicles)—and so have been focusing on weatherization and energy efficiency

programs, and also spending on renewables (AEA put out a solicitation for renewables projects)—with a goal in the AE Plan of 50% renewables.

Sen. Murkowski—will need significant federal funding to adapt. On mitigation, she is the ranking member of the energy committee and has long been a supporter of renewable energy. Both reduces costs in villages and reduces our GHG emissions.

Sen Begich—for adaptation, need to understand which are the highest risk, and which have viable alternatives. The process in AK makes it easier to get the money in dc when there is a viable process that's been developed. On Mitigation, Sen. Has supported aggressive targets for the US. Nationally, not as hopeful that will see a bill on the floor this year as Sen Murkowski's office, because feels that the economy will take precedence. Has heard end of the year, perhaps. Would like to move AK forward in this area by taking advantage of formula funds or competitive grants (for renewable energy, for economic recovery act, etc.).

Steve Ivanoff—Unalakleet. Glad to hear that Sen. M is pro-cap and trade, and glad to hear the energy and dedication that is here today. My father was born at a site that was 8 miles east of current town site. In 1985 Bureau Indian Affairs built a school on the coast, and that children had to go to school otherwise would lose federal funding, and so the village had to move to that vulnerable site. Shaktoolit, Shishmaref, and Kivalina are all in similar condition.

Fleek-Green: Secretary Salazar from Interior has met with the Senators. Has to get more involved in all of this.

Sterling Gologergen, Kawarek, Planner. Taking this away from infrastructure a bit. Testified in Washington, DC on climate change impacts on what changes I feared coming. Her fears are coming true. Walrus, hunting all becoming more difficult. Face a question of to how keep the traditions and culture. No child left behind has left the schools without resources. High rates of suicide, particularly, in the male population. Climate change impacts are not just an issue of infrastructure, but go beyond that—we are the canary in the mine.

Deborah: native voices are very powerful in Washington.

Sen Murkowski—delighted when can get native voices to DC.

Tubman—hope to get these issues into our strategy development project. Will be useful to have this information as we talk on the national level. Need to have all these stories from AK, of which there are so many. Will help get funding, and also to develop more creative solutions to these questions of adaptation.

Poston: This Alaska Forum on the Environment is one effective way of getting information to decision-makers in Washington DC & elsewhere because of the people who are speaking and attending the forum. We have brought approximately 50 speakers together to exchange information on topics related to mitigation and adaptation for the first 3 days of the conference culminating in this listening session. Following this are Research Coordination Workshops, a NOAA Stakeholder Forum, and the Mitigation & Adaptation Advisory Group meetings. There are also other ways to make sure your voice is heard through the State's stakeholder process. They consist of the following: 1) complete a survey form available in the room, 2) go online to the SOA Climate Change website and submit electronic comments, 3) email or call me directly. Jackie also noted that every meeting is open to the public and all mtg times, dates, and call-in numbers posted online.

Millie _____ - Kivalina: Council member and mother of 4 and resident. I read in the stimulus plan that environmental track will look at relocating some of the villages in AK "so that they won't use their cultural practices" and What I've been told over time is that the reason they won't move Kivalina to the site selected in 1992 by consensus of the community is that the Corp of Engineers say this site is in the middle of a flood plain. Question: what can be done to waive those regulations so the people of Kivalina can start moving to this site? Wants to emphasize that, over time, our little spit of time where our village is will keep getting smaller and smaller. I wonder where my children will be in 10 years?

Hartig. People in Kivalina are struggling—it's inevitable, just how long will it take. Yes, CoE said the site is not appropriate because of permafrost and flooding. We don't want to repeat the mistakes of the past. We want people who move to make their own decision—but provide them with meaningful choices. I don't want ever to be in a position of telling the people from Kivalina

where they are going to go. The State is providing planning grants to communities. Kivalina has a grant right now to evaluate their options, just like other villages. We want to give the villages meaningful choices.

Robert Katham. Community Development Quota (CDQ) and the NMFS (National marine fisheries service). Numbers of pollack are declining, and there is an increase in the intercept of Kings. We need more science and ways to fund more science on fisheries and the economic and community impacts.

Hartig: will be talking about this at conference in Nome.

Fleek-Green: Begich has heard a lot on this issue. Is on the commerce committee, with oversight for NOAA (over NMFS). Will make a case for increased funding for the NMFS and to the state so can increase the baseline scientific data. Also, working with Sen. Rockefeller's staff to fully fund some of the programs from the Magnuson-Stevens Act, under the economic stimulus package.

Luke Hopkins. IAWG. This is not the time to NOT spend money. There are projects and needs out there. When the state and federal government work together there are advances to be made. There are issues, but funding helps move things along and make advances within the state.

Sweeney: Yes.

Kris Eb, ESSLLC:. IN the UK they have used a different approach to get adaptation moving. Happy to talk more about how people did it in UK. PM signed off on a bill—setting networks across the country. Could be a good model for the US and AK. Could talk to the federal government in other routes than just the committees.

Faith ____, Red Oil (grassroots organization): There will be a delegation of AK youth going to DC for Power Shift—a youth summit. March 2. Hope that our Senators will be receptive as possible. Takes guts for these kids to do this.

Victoria _____, Tlingit tribe in Yakutat: Mother, fisher, subsistence gatherer. Really disappointed reading in the paper when saw a comment in the ADAiley News that said the rural people should just move out of the areas where they live. People in cities don't realize how tied native aboriginal people are to the land. We have wisdom about the land, wisdom about the weather. Is often described as anecdotal information, as if it is not to be listened to with the same sense of importance. Listen to us, because when you lose us, you will lose this knowledge. Climate change is something we will have to adapt to, and we are the most adaptable people there are. We will adapt to this. We are your partners and the ones who will help you get through this. We love the land. It's still our land, and we are the stewards, regardless of who holds the title to this land. I'm so glad to hear these comments. Let us be at the table, and we will help you.

Rob Rosenfeld, Yukon River Inter-Tribal Watershed Council: I hear many insensitive comments in urban areas and what we do here in AK is raise our consciousness about the connection between urban and rural ak. Pieces of legislation need to be looked at—small school legislation (maybe a grace period of 2-3 years to get the student numbers up). Urban ak needs to have an understanding of just how important rural AK is. Need to have resources to bring them into the urban centers if that's what they want.

Hartig: The State also have a rural subcabinet which is active. Are looking at question of who is moving into urban centers and why are they doing it? Where does that leave the village in terms of school population and other issues? Are engaging, through AFN, in these issues and will try to work with rural Alaskans to meet their needs as well as they can.

Tina Carr. Alegenik. Live in about 22 miles from Dillingham. Gateway to state park. When I first came to Ak in 1979 used to see lots of Caribou. When moved back to ____ and would run into herds of Caribou everywhere, along the five lakes. Our hunting season is in August for Caribou, and so we went up to second lake. Every time we go to hunt, we hope we will catch something. We caught one caribou. The state ranger landed and he said, you know you are the only person who have caught a caribou in 40 miles. If we don't subsist, we can't survive. I spent \$410 on three boxes of groceries—half my paycheck. And I still have oil bills and other bills to pay. I am the only person working in this home besides my husband, who traps. But fur prices have gone down due to economic crises. Martens are smaller, so price is lower. Filling up the snowmobiles is \$80 /trip—and he has to go out every 2-3 days or else predators take the animals from the traps. We put in a wood stove to help compensate with oil prices, but are \$320 every two weeks

(?) – 50 gallons every two weeks—for heat—that’s half her paycheck. Also does work for Nushagak Watershed council. I counted 22 moose on the banks last summer when went to Nushagak Lake. Something is happening. We are having a tough time. We are seeing a lot of changes in the climate. A couple of years ago we had bad time with caterpillars—they even ate all the berry flowers, so we didn’t have huckleberry.

Rickey _____, Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium: We need more understanding to make this infrastructure work. I’d like to see more data made available for the public. Flood plain mapping, soil mapping, other data that is needed. Work with NEPA process.

Mike Brubaker ANTHC: Glad to hear that the state had put together a health and culture working group. As we’re hearing from these comments, the effects of climate change go beyond erosion, infrastructure, but also come down to social and psychological effects, effects on disease, accident rates, etc. So it is an important issue. Indian Health Service (IHS) has provided some funding to ANTHC to develop a model for (????) . From an international standpoint, we need to participate as Alaskan in Arctic Policy issues An issue that should be paying attention to is the contaminated sites in Russia (former military sites). Eastern Russia—where a lot of these rivers and watersheds are that are shared resources for the Arctic—there have been no surveys of these sites. AK and Canada are downstream of Russia!

Rob Rosenfeld. One of the things that’s been maddening is seeing the influx of hundreds of millions of dollars into the state of AK to address these issues. Throwing money at a problem is not always the answer. We need to learn from developing countries and folks who have worked at grassroots level. Have not always seen this when funds are directed. Although there are many committees set up, it doesn’t always get heard by government officials.

Fleek-Green: Lessons about getting your voice heard: People in Anchorage and DC do not understand what it’s like in rural AK, but the message is getting through.

- Write
- Attend town halls
- Contact the folks who agree AND disagree with you
- Media is focused on this –doesn’t have to go directly to legislature

Sweeney: Keep him up to date so can report back to her and get engaged with her office as much as possible.

Tubman: Invite you, if you come to DC, to visit with the congressional delegation, and come to our office as well. Important for the governor to hear your priorities.

Poston: Thanked everyone for coming and staying well after the day ended.

Written comments were received and forwarded to appropriate parties. They consisted of the following:

1. “Dry Toilet Technology” is suggested to minimize sanitation waste in rural AK, especially in areas with permafrost. Ms. Kati Hinkkanen is project manager of the Dry Toilet Organization in Finland. Use of water is old technology and this is an upgrade from the “honeybucket” system.
2. Can reflective surfaces be built along with revetments which are being constructed to protect shorelines to make up for the loss of sea ice?
3. Villages should have cleaner fuel. They are presently operating with diesel which is “dirty.”
4. Rock was purchased from Nome and transported to Kivalina for construction of part of the seawall during the summer of 2008. Nana Regional Corp is working on developing a rock quarry 12 miles up the coast from Kivalina. If this materializes, use of this material would reduce the cost. Please find ways to assist.