

# **The Changing Arctic- Framing the Issues for Alaska Study Group Charge 2020**

## **OVERVIEW:**

In 2008, Commonwealth North published a 63-page report from its “Changing Arctic” study group titled “Why the Arctic Matters: America’s Responsibilities as an Arctic Nation.” As the US government considers an update to its existing Arctic Strategy, set for sometime this summer, Commonwealth North charges a new study group to review previous recommendations for state and federal Arctic policy, recommend updates and revisions, and produce a report that will be helpful to provide Alaska input to current considerations of Arctic policy in the White House and the Congress.

Much has happened since our 2008 report. Notably, the climate change issue has grown in importance, and concerns about ocean acidification have grown in Alaska. Russia has begun year-round Arctic Ocean shipments of liquefied natural gas, and a feasibility study for US direct exports is soon underway while Russia gains commitments to double LNG production from Yamal. The US and Canada have, by edict, outlawed offshore oil and gas exploration (a reversal by President Trump is being challenged in the courts) but Congress has authorized ANWR leasing. Money for two of six needed icebreakers has been budgeted (the Commonwealth North study only asked for two.) Legislation is pending to establish a revenue base for shipping infrastructure, including icebreakers. Native language preservation has received a boost, mostly through state legislation. Russia has expanded military activity in the Arctic and China has expanded its presence, first through regular icebreaker and transport missions, the Law of the Sea has gone no further, but US claims for new territory are more ready if we could make a claim. New agreements within the Arctic Council on search and rescue, oil spill prevention/response/science cooperation, best practice-sharing on shipping, and International Maritime Organization (IMO) agreements on a mandatory polar code and shipping lane safety in the Bering Straits are now in place.

Ahead, besides the issues we discussed in 2008 are increasing, private moratoria on Arctic investment...new standards to protect polar bear...new procedures and designated shipping routes to protect whales. We are dealing with a global pandemic from a zoonotic disease, an animal-to-human virus that could be an increasing threat from the Arctic as “old” bugs see the light of day with permafrost melting. Needs for better communications on neighborly matters continue with Russia as sanctions and global disagreements reduce communication. Military plans in the US Arctic are oft discussed but seldom funded, even as Russia expands its activity off our shores as well as in the Barents and Baltic region.

## **Current Commonwealth North positions**

Here are the main conclusions and recommendations from the 2008 paper:

America must understand it is an Arctic nation... our Arctic helps defend America. It fuels, feeds, supplies vital transport services – and inspiration – to the world. And it can do more...

In 2009, the United States adopted a new Arctic Policy, focused on goals for international cooperation in the Arctic. As we witness sea ice retreat, warming temperatures, new estimates of Arctic energy resources, stress on indigenous peoples, and other rapid change, Commonwealth North – Alaska’s premier public policy forum – recommends next steps to help America’s Arctic better contribute to America’s national, economic and environmental security:

- With the State of Alaska, the U.S. should adopt a concrete plan of action to meet the broad opportunities and responsibilities America faces as an Arctic nation. Recognize that the Arctic’s diverse “natural capital,” energy, fish, minerals, and location are strategic U.S. assets. Managed right, these assets will sustain us today and tomorrow.
- The Arctic’s cold helps moderate the Earth’s climate and keeps large amounts of carbon locked into permafrost that would otherwise enter the atmosphere. We must respond to climate change with adaptation measures as well as effective mitigation. For example, coastal erosion threatens to wash some of our Arctic communities out to sea. We need to develop and fund a plan to secure their future.
- Define our needs for Arctic infrastructure – for access to resources, air, land and sea transport, environmental protection, research, communications and health – and develop a plan to enlist international, national, state, and private funding.
- Allocate the resources necessary to enable the Coast Guard to do its job as the Arctic Ocean becomes increasingly accessible to all comers. Provide funding for two new Polar-class icebreakers, replacing those now in near-caretaker status.
- Ratify the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, and aggressively prepare a U.S. claim for extended continental shelf. Engage our neighbors in developing common rules and investments for safe, secure and reliable shipping. Manage our common assets – air, water, fish and wildlife – in concert with other Arctic nations.
- Improve the standard of living for all Arctic residents by addressing basic medical care, high infant mortality rates, youth suicide, poor access to clean water and reliable sanitation. Help indigenous languages and culture survive. Work to reduce high energy and food costs, and contamination of subsistence foods from trans-boundary pollution.
- Encourage greater indigenous participation in Arctic decision-making.
- Continue scientific exploration to unveil the Arctic’s mysteries. Education and outreach help us respond to the Arctic’s opportunities and responsibilities.

The U.S. is faced with several issues related to the Arctic and its management, including some affecting federal/state relations. Additionally, some of the federal and international governmental responses are receiving little Alaskan input to their resolution or even statewide media attention. This study will help Alaskans act proactively to formulate a position on Arctic issues, to make that position heard and to protect Alaska's interests.

Commonwealth North charges its 2020 study group with the following:

1. Review current Arctic policy issues and produce a document with recommendations for Board approval that:
  - a. Educate our membership and the public about Arctic challenges and opportunities
  - b. Revise and update the 2008 recommendations
  - c. Recommend a plan to help advance approval and implementation of the proposed recommendations at the state and federal level.
2. Host briefings at the study group level and recommend programs for the overall membership and the public which will inform CWN deliberations.
3. Report back to the board with a broad outline and potential resolutions to inform US and state policy in time to affect current deliberations at the White House on US strategy.
4. Determine the continuing relevance of the items spelled out in the 2008 charge statement and include them in the study group's recommendation:
  - Economic/Sustainability/Infrastructure
  - Environment
    - Climate change- what CO<sub>2</sub> limits should be established internationally to help Alaska maintain values it holds dear?
    - Health: bird flu, contaminants, others
  - Geopolitical (Sovereignty/Treaties/Federal- State relations/Security)
    - Law of the Sea/claim to new land offshore
    - Arctic shipping
    - Boundaries with Canada and Russia
    - Extent of Alaska's sovereignty and self-determination; what role does/should the state play in the Northern Forum and Arctic Council?
    - Search and Rescue: with Russia. Expansion of Military and/or Coast Guard
  - Research/Exploration/Education
    - What policy issues arose from the IPY research, and should Alaska take a position on these policies?
  - Energy/Resources

- Arctic energy supplies- where is Alaska heading, and how does Alaska's Arctic energy relate to supplies in the rest of the world Arctic?

## **5. Scope of Study**

This study will identify present and emerging issues in the above areas, and possible recommendations relating to the issues, with the following steps:

- Review previous Commonwealth North study efforts related to the study topics, particularly state/federal relations.
- Incorporate input from other interested civic, educational, and business groups
- Solicit input on the various study topics from experts residing in Alaska, D.C., or other parts of the Arctic. Local experts to speak directly to study group and/or the CWN membership, and outside experts speaking through telephonic and video connections to the study group.
- Evaluate the effectiveness of current policies relating to the study topics.
- Develop recommendations for State positions on the various policies emanating from the study group research.

## **6. Nature of report to be issued**

This report will frame the present and emerging Arctic issues and policies currently affecting the State. It will suggest guiding principles for approaching any of these Arctic policies. It will provide recommendations and the rationale for any recommendations relating to Arctic policies. The report will address the process of reaching out to the State and the public to continue the discussions raised in the report.

## **7. Conflict of Interest Standards**

The intent of this study is to represent a balance between the geographic, demographic, ethnic and economic interests in Alaska. All Alaska citizens have a vested interest in policies affecting Alaska and the Arctic regions. Individual members will be asked to identify any specific or unique conflicts relative to specific points they advocate.

## **8. Measure of Success**

This study will succeed by generating a greater awareness of the issues facing the state regarding Arctic policies and opportunities. This awareness will lead to an ongoing discussion between the citizens and their legislative representatives and state executive management. Follow up may include the establishment of a separate committee that works towards implementation of the recommendations. This group may include members from a broad mix of organizations, including private sector business groups and state government, as well as individuals representing various interests within the state.