



**MAYOR LUCY NELSON'S OFFICE  
NWALT CO-CHAIR  
POSITION STATEMENT  
ON ARCTIC POLICY DEVELOPMENT**

**July 14, 2020**

Greetings,

I would like to take the opportunity to comment on the Arctic Policy Study Group's topics from the Northwest Arctic's perspective.

The Northwest Arctic Borough (NWAB) is a home-rule borough with a population of 7,700. NWAB is comprised of eleven villages: Ambler, Buckland, Deering, Kiana, Kivalina, Kobuk, Kotzebue, Noatak, Noorvik, Selawik and Shungnak.

The NWAB is scattered across an area of 38,000 square miles—an area about the size of Indiana. There are no road systems connecting our communities. The lack of a connecting road system makes residents heavily dependent on expensive travel and increased costs for the transportation of goods and supplies. The large geographical size of our Borough hampers our ability to provide adequate emergency public safety services and other necessary public services without prohibitive expense.

The Northwest Arctic Borough is a partner of the Northwest Arctic Leadership Team (NWALT) which consists of four members that also include the Northwest Arctic Borough School District, NANA Regional Corporation and Maniilaq Association. NWALT maximizes resources and reduces duplication of efforts to address issues affecting the people of Northwest Alaska, while honoring and perpetuating our Inupiaq cultural heritage.

The NWALT's critical focus areas include:

- Inupiaq Language & Culture
- Healthy Communities & Wellness
- Education & Workforce Development
- Economic Development
- Infrastructure & Basic Services

From the Northwest Arctic Borough's perspective that relate to Arctic Policy Development here are some of the projects and on-going critical focus areas that pertain to our concern on arctic issues:

Changing Sea-Ice Conditions:

- Over the past five years, we have noticed that our spring and summers are becoming warmer which impacts sea ice conditions, different species of bugs and birds showing up, shorter fall and winter season which impacts the harvest of bearded seal and other sea mammals.
- Permafrost causing erosion and flooding. We have many of our communities impacted by erosion including Buckland, Kivalina and Noatak and some upper Kobuk communities.

While the Coast Guard is present during the summer for several months, we feel that their presence is needed on a year-round basis. It is unsafe during the summer and winter months due to changing sea ice and summer boating conditions. During the past several winters, we've seen an alarming number of inter-region travelers suffer tragic fates due to unexpected open water and other unexpected weather. The prevailing east wind halts travel by boat from many communities during the summer. Our communities are served by 147 volunteer Search & Rescue members, however, lack the equipment and supplies to meet the annual need of emergency services. That is where the Coast Guard comes in readily trained and with proper equipment necessary to serve residents emergency needs year-round.

Cape Blossom Road & Port:

*Cape Blossom Road*

The construction of the Cape Blossom Road and Port is consistent with the Northwest Arctic Borough and City of Kotzebue Comprehensive Plans. Our regional leaders came together to form a trilateral working group to support the construction of the Cape Blossom Road project through support resolutions that are part of the Northwest Arctic Transportation Plan. The trilateral group formed includes the City of Kotzebue, Native Village of Kotzebue, and Kikiktagruk Inupiat Corporation, with additional assistance and support from both NANA Regional Corporation and the Northwest Arctic Borough. The current status of the Cape Blossom Road is as follows:

- the mobilization of gravel by the City of Kotzebue and the Northwest Arctic Borough to allow shovel readiness for DOT to contract sooner than later;
- Contract Bid is currently put forth to the public effective July 10, 2020 to build the road and will be awarded August 4, 2020;
- Twenty-four point seven (\$24.7 million) is in the Statewide Transportation Improvement Plan available to build Phase I from the Airforce Base to Sadie Creek. An additional \$27.5 million will be needed to complete the second phase to build the bridge across Sadie Creek then onto Cape Blossom.

Meetings will continue to be held to oversee, plan, and lobby for phase two funding for the Cape Blossom Road until it is finalized through project completion in 2021.

### *Arctic Port*

Due to increasing threats and national security issues, the Arctic is becoming more important as countries compete to gain a foothold in the Arctic for access to resources and faster shipping routes. Any significant U.S. presence in the Arctic will require a port as a home base. An Arctic port in Northwest Alaska would serve as a strategic central location benefiting the military, national security, coast guard, neighboring boroughs and all local residents. An Arctic Deep-Water port will facilitate economic transportation of goods, fuel, equipment, materials to and from our region, provide an economic engine for increasing and diversifying revenues while lowering the cost of transportation and goods to Northwest Alaska and neighboring communities. As mentioned as part of the Cape Blossom road, these two projects work hand in hand and will have a significant positive economic impact, spur community development, and bring social and economic benefits. Designating an Arctic Deep-Water port in the Northwest Arctic will be invaluable and we ask for your assistance and guidance. Estimated by the Corp of Engineers for a deep-water port is \$105 million and may increase as the years pass and/or the design of the port project changes.

### Arctic Mining:

The Northwest Arctic Borough supports responsible resource development. We are uniquely positioned to greatly expand our role in supporting the state's economy. Our region has substantial known deposits of zinc, lead, silver, gold, coal, jade copper and other metals. We currently receive revenues from the Red Dog Mine operated by Teck Alaska. This Arctic mine is one of the largest lead and zinc mines in the world and is located about 70 miles north of Kotzebue. The Red Dog Mine serves as a model of how mineral development can occur in rural areas with the support and input of our local communities.

### Renewable Energy:

The Community & Economic Development (CED) Department promotes business and economic development that is consistent with the traditional and cultural values of the region by assisting businesses and providing them with capacity-building opportunities. The CED Department connects residents with services and directly administers grants, loans, marketing programs and serves as staff to the CED Commission. In addition, CED houses the Energy Division that partners with the Energy Steering Committee to build energy projects that benefit all residents and partnering organizations. The energy vision for the region is to be fifty percent reliant on regionally available energy sources by 2050. The Energy Division is working to achieve this goal by:

- Developing a trained workforce
- Bringing renewable energy to the region
- Lowering energy costs;



- Educating users about efficiencies and,
- Improving the energy efficiency of existing systems

All energy work is coordinated with NANA Regional Corporation, the Regional Energy Steering Committee, and other regional partnerships. Currently, we have three communities (Buckland, Deering & Kotzebue) that have successful wind farm projects and almost 90% of our communities have solar arrays that result in huge savings on diesel fuel operation and cost.

While the Arctic Policy Development is diverse and has a much broader scope than what the Borough can manage, we feel through collaboration efforts that we can all contribute to the existing Arctic Strategy in many ways because we live in the Arctic and have first-hand knowledge of the changes that impact our people, the land, water, natural resources and infrastructure.

The State of Alaska and the US Federal Government can help advance Arctic policy by being visible in our great state and witnessing the changes that are happening throughout our summer and winter seasons. Leveraging organizations like the Northwest Arctic Borough would be one way to build partnerships and collaborate to advance Arctic policy. Keep us involved, let the people who live in the Arctic be your voice to help build policy structure in DC and on the Arctic Council. It is the people who live off the land, water and natural resources who know first-hand how changes in the Arctic occur daily, monthly and annually. The Northwest Arctic is home to a large amount of existing infrastructure that is identified in your North Study Report.

We look forward to the collaboration put forth in the Arctic Strategy to recommend updates and revisions to produce a report that will be helpful to provide local input into the current considerations of Arctic Policy in the White House and Congress.

Quyanna!



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Mayor Lucy S. Nelson