



# FINDINGS & RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE



# ALASKA NORTHERN WATERS TASK FORCE

January 30, 2012

Diminishing sea ice and the intensifying worldwide race for natural resources has rapidly increased international interest in the Arctic. Arctic Nations are anticipating the development of northern shipping routes, mineral extraction, oil and gas exploration, commercial fisheries, and tourism.

For Alaska, the economic benefits over the long term could be substantial. But how will we confront the challenges and opportunities awaiting us in the Arctic while also providing for sustainable communities and protecting the environment?

In 2010, the Alaska State Legislature established the Alaska Northern Waters Task Force (ANWTF) to identify opportunities to increase the state's engagement with these issues. On both the state and federal level, the task force has found many urgent needs. The following are its topmost recommendations:

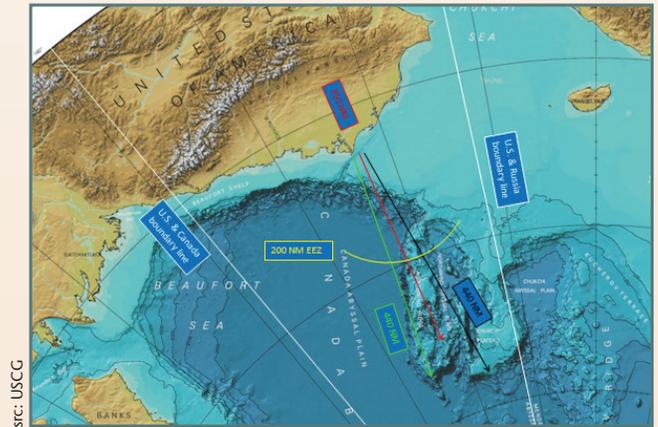
## Priority Recommendations

**1.** Statewide public testimony gathered by the task force made it clear that the state and federal governments must provide Alaskans with meaningful opportunities to participate in Arctic policy and Outer Continental Shelf development decisions. Many local government officials, tribal government representatives, and individuals expressed a need for timelier, more frank, and more thorough information from state and federal authorities regarding policies and activities off Alaska’s coasts. The task force believes that consistent, structured communication and consultation—particularly with those Alaskans likely to be most impacted by evolving conditions—is the best way to build consensus, advance responsible policies, and stimulate broadly beneficial economic development.

**2.** The state of Alaska has only just begun to grapple with the challenges and opportunities developing in the far north. It is imperative the state be strategically involved and in a leadership role in the development of policies affecting the state, its communities, and citizens. It is therefore among the task force’s highest priorities to press for the creation of a commission to develop a comprehensive state strategy for the Arctic. As the Arctic changes, the decisions Alaska faces will continue to evolve and grow in complexity. An Alaskan Arctic Commission will enable Alaska to more effectively respond to unfolding developments and will jumpstart Alaska’s preparations to ensure that the interests of the state and its people are protected.

**3.** The ANWTF recommends that the Alaska State Legislature and the state of Alaska continue to urge the United States Senate to ratify the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). Joining the more than 160 nations that have ratified

UNCLOS will enable the U.S. to legitimize its claims to resources in areas of the Continental Shelf that extend beyond the 200-mile Exclusive Economic Zone. To quote President George W. Bush, who, like President Barack Obama, supports U.S. ratification of the convention, “It will give the United States a seat at the table when the rights that are vital to our interests are debated and interpreted.”



Map shows the extent of the US Continental Shelf off Alaska’s Arctic coast.

The following summarizes top recommendations among the many task force findings in areas including Arctic governance, oil and gas development, marine transportation, infrastructure, fisheries, and research.

**The full recommendations of the task force can be found at [www.anwtf.com](http://www.anwtf.com)**

## Governance

Changes in the Arctic make it necessary to evaluate the adequacy of existing Arctic governance structures and to consider adjusting these systems or creating new ones to better suit developing needs. At the international level, Arctic Nations must strengthen their relations and enhance regulatory frameworks and policy mechanisms to address pressing issues. We in Alaska must ensure that our Arctic residents and the state of Alaska have a strong voice in these matters.

**1.** The ANWTF supports the development and implementation of a comprehensive U.S. Arctic strategy. This strategy should ensure that national interests are balanced with Alaska state interests, so that commitments to safeguard the environment and the wellbeing of the region’s communities and cultures accompany all plans to advance economic development.

**2.** The ANWTF recommends that the state of Alaska and the United States participate in the adoption of international agree-

ments for shipping, fisheries, oil and gas development, and other transboundary issues. It is in our interest to ensure all parties develop resources in the region safely and responsibly.

**3.** The ANWTF recommends the state of Alaska and the Alaska State Legislature support greater international cooperation through the Arctic Council. Having recognized that the Arctic Council is the world’s predominant intergovernmental forum for Arctic governance, the ANWTF recommends greater state engagement with the council and its working groups and encourages the council’s member countries to support expanding its mandate as an institution for forging multilateral agreements among Arctic Nations.



## Oil and Gas Development

A warming Arctic provides new opportunities and challenges for oil and gas development. The U.S. Geological Survey estimates that 13 percent of the Earth's undiscovered oil reserves and 30 percent of undiscovered gas reserves are in the Arctic.

1. The ANWTF recommends that the state of Alaska and the United States develop a framework for the identification, acquisition, and sharing of data and other information to support leasing, permitting, and other agency decisions.
2. The ANWTF recommends that the state of Alaska and the United States support continued improvement in the ability of industry and the government to prevent, contain, control,

clean up, and remediate spills in the Arctic. These measures should include contingency plans and response capabilities for all large commercial vessels operating in Arctic waters, including vessels travelling internationally in “innocent passage.”

3. The ANWTF recommends that the University of Alaska establish an oil spill research center.



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## Marine Transportation

Maritime powers have been searching for a shorter route from the Atlantic to Asian waters for centuries. The warming Arctic raises the feasibility of two such routes: the Northern Sea Route, north of Russia, and the Northwest Passage, north of Canada and Alaska. Shipping traffic—already increasing—is expected to surge in the decades ahead. We must take steps to establish secure and environmentally sound marine transportation in the region as soon as possible.

1. The ANWTF recommends that the United States, with the participation of the state of Alaska, work with the international community to finalize the Polar Code for ships operating in Arctic waters and examine whether to establish an offshore vessel routing scheme for circumpolar marine traffic, including through the Aleutians.
2. The ANWTF supports increasing short- and long-range navigational aids in the North American Arctic and extending Automatic Identification System (AIS) vessel tracking across the North Slope waters to Tuktoyaktuk, in the Northwest Territories.
3. The ANWTF endorses completing the Aleutian Islands Risk Assessment and recommends that the state of Alaska continue to support and participate in the United States Coast Guard Port Access Route Study.

## Fisheries

As sea ice diminishes and some commercial fish species move into northern waters, interest in fisheries north of the Bering Strait has increased. However, currently there is



src: NOAA

not nearly enough information available to make sustainable management of commercial fisheries possible there, and in 2009 the North Pacific Fishery Management Council approved a moratorium on fishing in these waters. The ANWTF believes the state of Alaska and the U.S. government should continue in its precautionary policy, but the moratorium should not cause Alaska to postpone research into viable commercial fisheries north of the Bering Strait.

1. The ANWTF recommends greatly increasing fisheries-related research and monitoring in the region.
2. The ANWTF encourages the state of Alaska and the U.S. government to continue actively negotiating fisheries-related transboundary accords with other nations.
3. The ANWTF recommends that the state of Alaska and federal authorities prepare strategies to maximize the degree to which local communities and resident Alaskans will benefit from the development of commercial fisheries in waters north of the Bering Strait.

## Infrastructure

Immediate investment in Arctic infrastructure is a foremost priority for Alaska and the entire United States. Increased human activity related to shipping, oil and gas development, commercial fishing, and tourism will require, at a minimum, new ports and safe harbors, equipment and facilities for oil spill response, additional Polar Class icebreakers for the U.S. fleet, and improved charting and mapping.

**1.** The ANWTF recommends the Alaska State Legislature and the state of Alaska continue to urge the federal government to forward base the United States Coast Guard in the Arctic and to fund the construction of additional icebreakers and ice-

capable vessels for the U.S. fleet.

**2.** The task force recommends the state of Alaska and the federal government continue efforts to develop deep-draft ports and additional safe harbors in northern waters as soon as possible.

**3.** The ANWTF supports increased funding to expedite the National Ocean and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA) Hydrographic Arctic mapping. The task force particularly supports updated mapping of coastal navigation routes and entrance routes to coastal villages.

## Research

Worldwide climate change is already having an impact on the Arctic, where temperatures are rising twice as quickly as those in more southern latitudes. Profound transformations are underway in its complex ecosystems. These changes are expected to trigger unprecedented degrees of human activity in the region.

As a consequence, transformation in the far north will accelerate all the more, not just environmentally, but also on socioeconomic levels. Under these circumstances, the need for wide-ranging scientific research and monitoring in the Arctic has never been more pressing. We must continue to gather essential baseline information about the environment and its dynamics in order to become better able to discern shifting conditions. In turn, our understanding of the implications of changes there will increase, and we will improve our ability to prepare for and mitigate impacts.

**1.** The ANWTF recommends that the state of Alaska and the federal government identify priorities for Arctic research. By ranking priorities funding can be targeted more effectively and research can be better coordinated. Major knowledge gaps will be closed far more quickly.

**2.** The ANWTF recommends improving the exchange of research information and integration of data management. Faster and more extensive integration of data collected by state and federal agencies, academics, and industry would yield enormous benefits for all stakeholders.

**3.** The ANWTF recommends increased long-term monitoring of the Arctic, including routine surveys of key chemical, physical, and biological parameters of the Beaufort and Chukchi Seas and associated coastal plains. In order to better understand, quantify, and predict the effects of changes in both marine and terrestrial Arctic ecosystems, Alaska must increase our long-term monitoring of a wide range of environmental characteristics.



src: gb-sei.co.uk

## Alaska Northern Waters Task Force Members

Representative Reggie Joule, Chair, Kotzebue

Senator Bert Stedman, Vice-Chair, Sitka

Senator Lyman Hoffman, Bethel

Representative Bob Herron, Bethel

Larry Hartig, Commissioner, Dept. of Environmental Conservation

Chuck Greene, Vice-President, NANA Corp., Kotzebue

Chris Hladick, City Manager, Unalaska

Edward Itta, Former Mayor, North Slope Borough

Dave Kubiak, Chair, Alaska Marine Conservation Council

Denise Michels, Mayor, Nome

The United States Coast Guard served as the federal liaison and was represented by Rear Admiral Christopher Colvin until May 19, 2011. Upon Rear Admiral Colvin's departure, Rear Admiral Thomas Ostebo served as the federal liaison.

## Alternate members

Senator Donald Olson, Golovin

Representative Bryce Edgmon, Dillingham

Cora Campbell, Commissioner, Dept. of Fish & Game

Richard Glenn, Vice President, Arctic Slope Regional Corp., Barrow



July 9, 2011: The Alaska Northern Waters Task Force meets in the village of Wales on the Bering Strait.

For the full findings and recommendations of the task force, please go to [www.anwtf.com](http://www.anwtf.com)