

Bering Sea Elders Group

Fall/Winter 2022 Newsletter



A HISTORY OF THE NORTHERN BERING SEA CLIMATE RESILIENCE AREA

The Northern Bering Sea Climate Resilience Area (NBSCRA) was originally created by Executive Order 13754 in 2016. The Bering Sea Elders Group (BSEG), along with several other ally organizations, friends, and partners, have dedicated years to advocating for the protections of Executive Order 13754. The Order provides a pathway for Tribes to exercise self-determination and elevates their role in decision-making over the management of activities in the Bering Sea.

Between 2008 and 2016, BSEG, Association of Village Council Presidents (AVCP), and Kawerak,



Executive Order 13754 provides a pathway for Tribes to take part in decisions that impact the way of life in the Bering Sea region. (Photo by Brenda Nayokpuk. Used courtesy of Bering Straits Native Corporation.)

Inc. each passed resolutions calling for the long-term permanent protection of the Northern Bering Sea Research Area. In 2011, BSEG passed a resolution calling for the long-term protection of Northern Bering Sea waters from large-scale industrial activities. BSEG also called for ecosystem research that brings together western science and traditional knowledge for continued understanding of climate change and its consequences for marine life, Bering Sea habitat, local communities, and Indigenous cultures.

In 2014, BSEG passed another resolution calling for stronger and more lasting protections for the Northern Bering Sea and affirming tribal self-determination in planning for the future of the Northern Bering Sea. The following year, 31 Tribes in the Yukon-Kuskokwim and Bering Strait regions passed similar resolutions.

In 2016, BSEG passed another resolution asking then-President Obama to take Presidential action to permanently designate an area where the Tribes in the Northern Bering Sea have a role, beyond consultation, in federal decision-making. BSEG's partners in this work, AVCP and Kawerak, also passed resolutions.

In December 2016, the Obama Administration issued an Executive Order that enhanced protections and Tribal management in the Northern Bering Sea. The Executive Order



NBSCRA was originally established in 2016 and stretches over 112,300 miles between Kuskokwim Bay and the Chukchi Sea. (Photo by Donna Pushruk. Used courtesy of Bering Straits Regional Corporation.)

established the "Northern Bering Sea Climate Resilience Area" (NBSCRA). The NBSCRA stretches over 112,300 square miles and ranges from the Kuskokwim Bay to the southern border of the Chukchi Sea.

In 2017, President Trump unfortunately revoked the Executive Order. BSEG, AVCP, and Kawerak all passed resolutions calling for the reinstatement of the NBSCRA. Between 2017 and 2020, BSEG, AVCP, Kawerak, and the Aleut Community of St. Paul Island advocated for the protections detailed in that Executive Order. On his first day in office, January 21, 2021, President Biden reinstated the NBSCRA Executive Order and affirmed his commitment to implementing it.

To review highlights of Executive Order 13754, go to page 3.

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MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR

— Fred Phillip —
BSEG Chairman



The Bering Sea Elders Group (BSEG) was formed fifteen years ago by Tribes because of their desire to address food security and protect the health of our traditional waters. Today, BSEG has 38 member Tribes that span across the Yukon-Kuskokwim and Bering Strait regions.

BSEG's mission is to speak and work together as one voice to protect and respect our traditional ways of life, the ocean web of life that supports the resources we rely on, and our children's future.

Since 2008, BSEG has worked on a variety of issues such as food security, fisheries, traditional knowledge, climate change, and co-management.

Much of this has been done in coalition with the Association of Village Council Presidents, Kawerak, Inc., and other Tribes and tribal organizations. These relationships have been productive and beneficial, and we deeply appreciate our coalition partners.

We are all stronger when we work together. If you would like more information about BSEG or any of the topics discussed in this newsletter, please visit the BSEG website (<https://beringseaelders.org>).

BSEG WELCOMES NEW EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



Jaylene Wheeler joined BSEG as its new Executive Director this past July. "I am very happy to be serving in this new role," said Ms. Wheeler. "I look forward to working with our

leadership, Member Tribes, Elder Representatives, and partners to achieve BSEG's mission."

Ms. Wheeler has nearly 20 years of professional experience working with tribes and in Tribal healthcare where she served in key management positions. Her educational background includes a Bachelor of Arts in Rural Development from the University of Alaska

Fairbanks and a Master of Public Administration from the University of Alaska Southeast.

Ms. Wheeler was born and raised in Nome, and has ties to Teller, Diomedea, and Gambell. She is also a tribal citizen of the Nome Eskimo Community and a former board director of the Sisnasuak Native Corporation. Ms. Wheeler currently resides in Anchorage with her family, including her two children, Christian (18) and Angela (2).

BERING INTERGOVERNMENTAL TRIBAL ADVISORY COUNCIL MEETS FOR THE FIRST TIME



On June 3, 2022, the Federal Task Force and Bering Intergovernmental Tribal Advisory Council (BITAC) held their inaugural joint meeting. This historic event elevates the role that Bering Sea Tribes have in making management decisions regarding the Northern Bering Sea and is the result of years of collaborative work.

Alongside AVCP, the Aleut Community of St. Paul

Island, and Kawerak, BSEG has worked diligently the past two years to implement the NBSCRA Executive Order and bring it to life. For example, this includes the Bering Sea Tribes nominating and selecting BITAC members.

The BITAC, as recognized at the June meeting, plays a critical role in the successful implementation of the NBSCRA Executive Order. The historic meeting focused on mutual learning and relationship-building between the two entities.

According to BSEG Executive Director Jaylene Wheeler, "There are many complex issues that the NBSCRA faces which require a collaborative approach. BSEG is honored to help in this effort, and we are hopeful that the BITAC and its partnership with the Federal Task Force can help serve as a model for true, equitable tribal co-management."

HIGHLIGHTS OF NBSCRA EXECUTIVE ORDER 13754

Continued from page 1

- Requires the establishment of a federal Bering Task Force made up of key federal agencies responsible for management efforts in the NBSCRA. The Federal Task Force Co-Chairs are the Department of the Interior (DOI), the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), and the U.S. Coast Guard (USCG).
- Provides for the creation of the Bering Intergovernmental Tribal Advisory Council, which will work in partnership with the Federal Task Force and provide "input and recommendations on activities, regulations, guidance, or policy that may affect actions or conditions in the NBSCRA, with attention given to climate resilience; the rights, needs, and knowledge of Alaska Native tribes; the delicate and unique ecosystem; and the protection of marine mammals and other wildlife."
- Requires that federal agencies include traditional knowledge in federal decision-making processes.
- Prohibits offshore oil and gas drilling in specific areas of the Northern Bering Sea.
- Supports existing prohibitions on bottom trawling in the Northern Bering Sea.

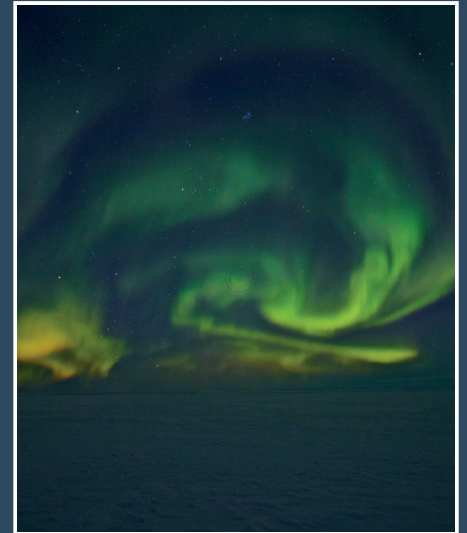


BERING SEA TRIBAL COALITION

BSEG continues to coordinate and participate in the Bering Sea Tribal Coalition. This longstanding coalition meets regularly, and its core tribal partners are BSEG, Kawerak, the Association of Village Council Presidents, the Aleut Community of St. Paul Island, Tanana Chiefs Conference, the Yukon River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission, and the Kuskokwim River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission.

The Bering Sea Tribal Coalition focuses on issues affecting the Bering Sea, including but not limited to:

- Fisheries and the North Pacific Fishery Management Council
- Magnuson-Stevens Act reauthorization
- Tribal consultation
- Incorporation of traditional knowledge into federal and state management processes
- Expanding tribal co-management/co-stewardship opportunities
- Co-production of knowledge in research



"Our Tribes are stewards of our oceans, and we are not merely users of resources, but intimately connected and part of the ecosystem in the Bering Sea. Our oceans and our people are facing unprecedented threats due to climate change and bycatch. The Magnuson-Stevens Act needs an update, and this bill provides critical solutions to these emergencies. Most importantly, for the first time, this bill specifically acknowledges the importance of subsistence fishing and adds Tribal representation to the North Pacific Fishery Management Council, giving our Tribes a long overdue seat at the decision-making table. Kawerak supports this bill and we are grateful for the co-sponsors' recognition of the unique government-to-government relationship the United States of America has with federally recognized Tribes."

Melanie Bahnke, President
Kawerak, Inc.

BERING SEA TRIBAL COALITION ADVOCATES FOR ACTION ON SALMON CRISIS

In partnership with the Bering Sea Tribal Coalition, BSEG is calling on federal management bodies to address the growing salmon crisis.

In December 2021, BSEG and other Bering Sea Tribal Coalition partners submitted an emergency petition to the U.S. Department of Commerce to eliminate Chinook salmon bycatch and set a cap of chum salmon bycatch in the 2022 Bering Sea trawl fishery season.

BSEG and other Bering Sea Tribal Coalition partners have also prioritized attending North Pacific Fisheries Management Council (NPFMC) meetings, including the June 2022 meeting in Sitka, to testify about the consequences of hundreds of thousands of salmon caught as bycatch.

“There are salmon that were headed to our rivers and could’ve filled our smokehouses and fed our children and families,” said BSEG Chair Fred Phillip, “but instead, were killed and discarded.”

Prior to the June 2022 NPFMC meeting, Bering Sea Tribal Coalition partners published an op-ed in the

Anchorage Daily News calling on the NPFMC to take action and asked, “[W]hy are we — the local people who depend on these fish for our physical, spiritual and cultural survival — restricted from taking a single salmon, while factory trawlers are allowed to kill tens of thousands? Federal management bodies are obligated to manage fisheries and the continued existence of our salmon — when will they act? How much longer will they wait?”

A similar piece was published in the Daily Sitka Sentinel, stating “[O]ur people are ready for action. We are ready for the waste and injustice of salmon bycatch to end. We are ready to return to our fish camps, nets, and uluaqs in hand, our children by our sides, learning and practicing our traditional ways of life.”

While in Sitka, representatives from BSEG and other Coalition partners also met with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) to discuss broader issues with federal fisheries management and tribal consultation.



While in Sitka, Bering Sea Tribal Coalition members met with other tribal representatives and NOAA to discuss shortcomings in federal fisheries management.



Mary Peltola
U.S. Representative - Alaska



Jared Huffman
U.S. Representative - California

REAUTHORIZATION OF THE MAGNUSON-STEVENS FISHERY CONSERVATION AND MANAGEMENT ACT

BSEG has long supported amendments to the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (MSA) that would address bycatch and give Tribes a greater role in federal fisheries management.


Over the last year, BSEG has worked with its partners in the Bering Sea Tribal Coalition to advocate for updates to the MSA, including adding two voting tribal seats to the North Pacific Fishery Management Council to correct the longstanding imbalance of the NPFMC's membership.

BSEG acknowledges the work that Representative Jared Huffman of California and Representative Mary Peltola of Alaska have done to advance these important legislative updates to the MSA.

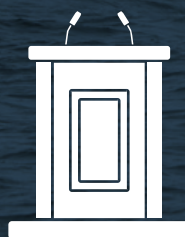


YOUR VOICE IS NEEDED

Make a Difference and Testify at a NPFMC Meeting!



Your connection to salmon is an important story to share, especially with decision-making bodies such as the NPFMC.



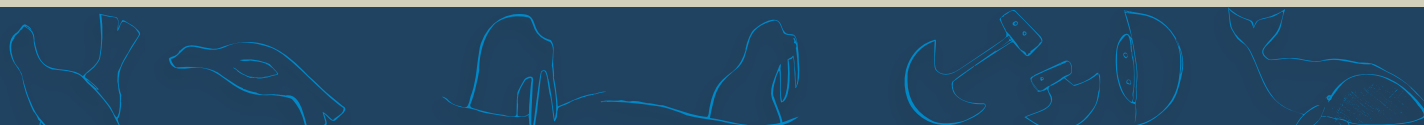
WANT TO TESTIFY?

For the schedule of NPFMC meetings, please see www.npfmc.org.

The North Pacific Fishery Management Council (NPFMC) manages the Alaska federal fishery three to 200 miles offshore. The NPFMC meets five times throughout the year. Tribes, subsistence users, and fishermen can participate in NPFMC meetings in several ways, including in-person or remotely by phone or Zoom.

If you have an interest in providing testimony, please keep the following in mind:

- ✓ You must sign up in advance.
- ✓ If speaking as an individual, you have three minutes to testify. Anyone speaking on behalf of an organization is allotted six minutes (only five minutes at the Advisory Panel).
- ✓ Stay within your allotted time and be concise when responding to any questions — this helps make a greater impact.
- ✓ When signing up, you get to decide whether or not you'd like to take questions from those you are testifying to (e.g., Advisory Panel or Council).



PARTNER UPDATE

Kawerak Offers NPFMC Engagement Training



KAWERAK, INC.
Our People & Tribes are Thriving

BSEG values cooperation and the work of our longstanding partners. In the spirit of working together, we are highlighting the work of our partner, Kawerak Inc.

Indigenous voices need amplification as our home, the Arctic, faces unprecedented changes that are already having substantial impacts on the lands and waters where we live and eat. Our voices are needed at the decision-making level. It is imperative that the voices, perspectives, and knowledges of Bering Sea Indigenous peoples are included in fisheries decision-making and planning, and that Indigenous people have access to bodies such as the North Pacific Fishery Management Council (NPFMC) and the ability to effectively participate in them. In order to support our Tribal members who wish to engage with the NPFMC the Kawerak Social Science Program will again soon be offering trainings.

The decisions made at the NPFMC have the potential to directly impact the ability of Indigenous peoples and Tribes to access traditional resources and to affect the health and sustainability of the ecosystem we are a part of and rely on, yet there are no designated, Tribal



voting seats on the NPFMC (though we have long been advocating for this via changes to the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act). It is important that Indigenous people engage with the NPFMC and its bodies regularly and consistently through written and oral testimony to have a say over management actions in, and impacting, our traditional lands and waters.

To get the latest updates about this training and other Kawerak events, stay tuned to Kawerak's Facebook page or sign up for Kawerak's newsletter at <https://kawerak.org>.

The Kawerak Social Science Program can be reached via email at socsci@kawerak.org or by phone at (907) 443-4273.

PARTNER UPDATE

ISN Offers Community Monitoring Tools



INDIGENOUS SENTINELS NETWORK



We are stronger when working together!

To that end, we are highlighting the work of our partner, the Aleut Community of St. Paul Island.

For over two decades, the Indigenous Sentinels Network (ISN), owned and operated by the Tribal Government of St. Paul Island, has provided Bering Sea communities with tools to track, record, and communicate community-driven environmental monitoring data.

ISN tools have helped communities greatly improve co-management partnerships and maintain robust records of environmental changes, including rates of coastal erosion, wildlife population trends, invasive species, and subsistence harvest information. ISN also creates space for documenting traditional and local knowledge alongside scientific data. Through a suite of apps, ISN allows communities to collect and own their data, as well as offering coordinated networking to share data and analyze regional trends.

With a recent grant from the North Pacific

Research Board, the ISN team has embarked on a community engagement project to expand and improve our tools for communities. The focus of the project is to understand community and Tribal Government needs for data sovereignty, intellectual property rights, accessible app design, and long-term funding sources for professional monitoring positions.

ISN is hosting a series of informational sessions on the app and related topics, and open discussions for participant input and feedback. Through a suite of smartphone apps, ISN allows communities to collect and own their data. It also offers coordinated networking to share data and analyze regional trends.”

Interested in learning more? Visit <https://sentinelsnetwork.org> or contact Lauren Divine at lmdivine@aleut.com.



CO-PRODUCTION OF KNOWLEDGE

Valuing Our Traditional Knowledge

The Arctic has been home to Indigenous Peoples from time immemorial. Distinct worldviews with complex knowledge systems passed on from generation to generation have evolved over time and are still developing in a living process today. Indigenous Peoples' knowledge systems encompass both cultural and ecological systems that interlink and support each other.

The Arctic environment is changing at an unprecedented rate due to climate change. Given the complex interactions associated with Arctic change, it is imperative to bring different knowledge systems together in a holistic view to address issues from research, policy, and resource management perspectives. Indigenous Peoples' knowledge systems hold methodologies and assessment processes that provide a pathway for better understanding the Arctic than using a scientific lens alone.

There is a strong need to understand multiple drivers of climate change and their cumulative impacts using methodologies from both science and Indigenous Peoples' knowledge systems. Bringing together multiple knowledge systems and scientific disciplines should be advanced through a co-production of knowledge approach.

To watch the full presentation, visit:

<https://youtu.be/GVCrUMMxoAI>

This article was reprinted courtesy of Kawerak and was originally published on February 3, 2020 at:

www.kawerak.org





INCLUDING OUR PEOPLE AND OUR KNOWLEDGE IN FEDERAL RESEARCH

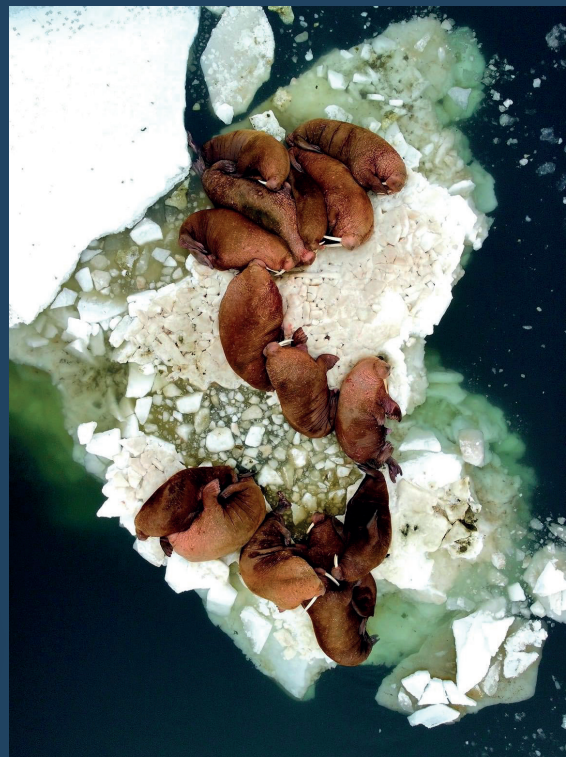
In 2019, BSEG passed a resolution “Requiring Researchers and Funders to Engage Western Alaska Communities in a Co-Production of Knowledge Approach on All Research Activities and to Directly Fund Knowledge Holders, Tribes, and Native Organizations for Such Efforts.”

To push this work forward, BSEG has worked with its partners in the Bering Sea Tribal Coalition to encourage the National Science Foundation and other institutions

to fund and support Arctic research that is based on a co-productive approach.

This approach requests that any research conducted on, near, or about our lands, waters, air, and communities will be done using a true co-production of knowledge. This acknowledges that we are equals in the design, conduct, analysis, implementation, and publication of the research, and management of research data and information.





2023 BSEG SUMMIT

BSEG's next summit will be held May 2-4, 2023, in Anchorage, Alaska. BSEG Member Tribes will be invited to send an Elder Representative to the Summit.

Agenda items include:

- BSEG Executive Committee elections
- Programmatic updates
- Strategic planning
- Elder knowledge exchange

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