

President Bush signs Arctic policy that emphasizes scientific research and international cooperation

ANCHORAGE, AK, January 9, 2009 - The new Arctic Policy signed by the President today “reminds the world that the Arctic matters to the United States,” said Mead Treadwell, Chair of the U.S Arctic Research Commission (USARC). “Our opportunities and responsibilities in the Arctic are increasing with climate change. The Arctic Ocean is becoming more accessible to the world, and this policy responds to these new realities.”

The U.S. Arctic Research Commission proposed a review of U.S. Arctic Policy in a goals and objectives report sent to the President two years ago. The last time Arctic Policy of the United States was reviewed and revised by the National Security Council was 1994, and much change in the Arctic has occurred since, both in the environment and in international relations.

“The Commission commends the National Security Council and the Department of State for their leadership of this policy review, and looks forward to working with the next Administration, the Congress, the State of Alaska, and the international research community to see the research goals in the policy realized,” Treadwell said.

“The policy should give a boost to Arctic research on climate, environment, economic opportunities, and the requirements of Arctic peoples. The policy reflects the need for increased international collaboration on scientific research and monitoring, and for ensuring better access for scientists in the Arctic Ocean.”

On the Law of the Sea Convention, the policy promotes Arctic exploration and research as a means to expand our nation's offshore Arctic territory consistent with the United Nations process. The policy also gives strength to efforts now pending in Congress to provide the U.S. with icebreaker capacity to operate year-round in Arctic waters. Icebreakers will serve many missions in the Arctic, including their current role as a primary platform for U.S. Arctic Ocean research.

To follow up, the Commission continues to support the eight-nation Arctic Marine Shipping Assessment, associated with the Arctic Council, to be published this spring. “That document will give nations the background to ensure that Arctic shipping will be safe, secure, and reliable,” Treadwell said.

Because the U.S. has many important and strategic interests in the Arctic, the USARC has called for research efforts in five broad categories: (1) environmental change of the Arctic Ocean and Bering Sea; (2) Arctic human health; (3) civil infrastructure; (4) natural resource assessment and earth science; and (5) indigenous languages, identities, and cultures.

Details on these research goals will be released shortly in the Commission's report to the incoming administration and to Congress, “*Summary Report on Goals and Objectives for Arctic Research 2009 for the U.S. Arctic Research Program*.” The report also calls for greater interagency efforts to coordinate and collaborate on Arctic research programs, greater federal financial support of scientific research conducted by academia and non-profits, and means to capitalize and support the ongoing costs of infrastructure (e.g., icebreakers, laboratories, satellites, observatories, networks, sensors, and autonomous vehicles), necessary to conduct Arctic research.

The Arctic Research and Policy Act of 1984 established USARC. This federal agency's principal duties are to develop and recommend an integrated national Arctic research policy and to assist in establishing a national Arctic research program plan to implement the policy. Commissioners also facilitate cooperation between the federal government, state and local governments, and other nations with respect to Arctic research, both basic and applied. The U.S. conducts approximately \$400 million in Arctic research annually.