

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
August 18, 2010

Mary Pete to testify on subsistence lifestyle before Senate Commerce Committee

Arlington, VA – Ms. Mary Pete, director of the University of Alaska Fairbanks campus in Bethel, Alaska, and a recently appointed member of the U.S. Arctic Research Commission (USARC), will testify on August 19th before the Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation about the significant and ongoing impacts of climate change on subsistence resources, and those who rely on them. The field hearing, chaired by Alaska Senator Mark Begich, and titled, “The Changing Arctic: Implications for Federal Resources and Local Communities,” is scheduled to begin at 10:00 am in the North Inupiat Heritage Center in Barrow, Alaska.

As an Alaskan Native subsistence user, who formerly served the director of the Subsistence Division for the Alaska Department of Fish and Game, Pete will discuss the impacts of climate change in the Arctic and how they are affecting subsistence traditions. She will propose collaborative research efforts that would not only better characterize these impacts, but also lead to ways that Arctic communities could adapt to, and, in some cases, even mitigate the impacts.

After summarizing the nature of climate impacts being experienced by Alaskans, Pete will stress the point that subsistence is much more than simply food. Subsistence constitutes a way of existing and relating to the environment. It’s an essential component of culture and identity. If subsistence opportunities decline, then village residents face pressure to relocate, which often leads to disenfranchisement from cultural traditions.

Pete’s testimony will emphasize the federal government’s fiduciary responsibility to provide for the health, safety, and cultural preservation of Alaska Natives and American Indians. It will also emphasize scientific research, conducted in collaboration with tribal groups, as a means of establishing a baseline to protect this trust responsibility. Specifically, Pete will discuss the importance of instituting policies to encourage the adoption of traditional environmental knowledge in management decisions and to support co-management organizations.

The Arctic Research and Policy Act of 1984 established the USARC (www.arctic.gov). Its 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 USARC, which sets goals (http://www.arctic.gov/publications/2009-10_usarc_goals.html) for the approximately \$400 million annual U.S. Arctic Research Program, has urged federal emphasis on integrated Arctic Ocean research, renewed programs related to the prevention of and response to oil spills in ice-covered waters, and to strengthen Arctic health and indigenous language research.

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