

Commentary

The Alaska Arctic Policy Commission, Legislative Arctic Committees, and Governor Walker's Arctic Policy Effort

Rep. Bob Herron

The Alaska Arctic Policy Commission (AAPC) was legislatively created in April 2012 and its first meeting was March 23, 2013. The AAPC was comprised of [26 Commissioners](#), including 10 Legislators and 16 subject matter experts from throughout the state; and co-chaired by Senator Lesil McGuire and Representative Bob Herron. The AAPC was tasked with creating an actionable Arctic policy for Alaska – to produce a policy for Alaska's Arctic that reflects the values of Alaskans and provides a suite of options to capitalize on the opportunities and safeguard against risks.

The AAPC emphasized public engagement, convening meetings in seven locations around the state over the course of two years and receiving testimony from local residents in each location. Alaskans from all walks of life positively influenced the AAPC's Final Report and Implementation Plan released January 30, 2015 (www.akarctic.com).

The AAPC, by statute, concluded its work after the release of the Final Report and Implementation Plan. Per the recommendation of the AAPC, during the 2015 Legislative Session, the House and Senate each created their own Arctic Committee. The House Economic Development, Tourism and

Representative Bob Herron has served in the Alaska Legislature since 2008. His current House District comprises 33 villages in the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta. He recently served as Co-Chair of the Alaska Arctic Policy Commission, which delivered its final report in January, 2015 (www.akarctic.com). He also chairs the House Economic Development, Tourism, & Arctic Policy Committee. Representative Herron has sponsored and successfully passed 9 pieces of Arctic legislation – most recently HB 1, Alaska's Arctic Policy in 2015.

Arctic Policy Committee is chaired by Representative Bob Herron; the Senate Arctic Committee is co-chaired by Senators Lesil McGuire and Cathy Giessel. These committees have and will continue to meet both separately and jointly to further discuss and seek ways to execute the AAPC Implementation Plan.

The Implementation Plan includes 32 Strategic Recommendations organized into four Lines of Effort:

1. Promote Economic & Resource Development
2. Address the Response Capacity Gap
3. Support Healthy Communities
4. Strengthen Science & Research

Some examples of recommendations from each of these Four Lines of Effort:

- 1A - Facilitate the development of Arctic port systems in the Bering Strait region to support export, response and regional development.
- 1B - Strengthen or develop a mechanism for resource production-related revenue sharing to impacted communities.
- 2D - Facilitate and secure public and private investment in support of critical search and rescue, oil spill response and broader emergency response infrastructure
- 3B - Reduce power and heating costs in rural Alaskan Arctic communities.
- 3F - Enforce measures that protect and help further understanding of food security of Arctic peoples and communities.
- 4F - Invest in U.S. Arctic weather, water and ice forecasting systems.
- 4G - Update hydrocarbon and mineral resource estimates and mapping in the Alaskan Arctic.

The Implementation Plan has three target audiences and represents the playbook for Alaska Governor Bill Walker's Administration and the Legislature, through the work of its Arctic Committees, and the federal government to implement Alaska's Arctic Policy. In the Implementation Plan, each recommendation is assigned one or two departments or agencies as leads, and also includes suggestions for legislative actions to further the recommendation. As part of the Governor's efforts, nearly every Administrative Department is involved in Arctic policy implementation – the undertaking is led by Craig Fleener, Governor's Arctic Policy Adviser, and includes, among others, Commissioners from the Departments of Commerce, Community & Economic Development; Transportation & Public Facilities; and Environmental Conservation; as well as Mike Sfraga, Vice Chancellor from the University of Alaska, Fairbanks.

In addition, in late 2014 a team appointed by incoming Governor Walker authored, and is still committed to implementing, an Arctic Policy and Climate Change Transition Report: http://gov.alaska.gov/Walker_media/transition_page/arctic-policy-and-climate-change_final.pdf.

Alaska's Arctic Policy now in statute

During the Fall of 2014, the AAPC collectively produced a draft Alaska Arctic Policy bill for consideration by the Legislature. The Legislature subsequently passed HB 1. After being heard and altered in several committees, the policy differs from the AAPC draft, but is substantively similar. The bill took effect August 9, 2015 and is codified in Alaska Statute 44.99.105. The policy consists of four pillars:

- Uphold the state's commitment to economically vibrant communities sustained by development activities consistent with the state's responsibility for a healthy environment;
- Collaborate with all levels of government, tribes, industry, and nongovernmental organizations to achieve transparent and inclusive Arctic decision-making;
- Enhance the security of the Arctic region of the state and, thereby, the security of the entire state; and
- Value and strengthen the resilience of communities and respect and integrate the culture, language, and knowledge of Arctic peoples.

This law, now officially Alaska's Arctic Policy, is intended as an overarching guide for the AAPC's Implementation Plan.