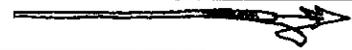


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March 23, 2015

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Alaska District  
ATTN: CEPOA-PM-C-PL  
P.O. Box 6898  
JBER, AK 99506-0898  
[akregports@usace.army.mil](mailto:akregports@usace.army.mil)

**RE: Alaska Deep-Draft Arctic Port System Draft Interim Feasibility Report and Environmental Assessment, Identification No. ER 15-02**

Dear Michael Noah, Chief, Environmental Resources Section:

Kawerak is the regional non-profit tribal consortium for the Bering Strait Region. Kawerak appreciates the USACE's report and overall agrees with the tentatively selected plan. Leaders from throughout our region have indicated that a deep draft port and additional infrastructure is necessary to provide for the safety of our region. Below are our comments to the USACE for the above referenced report, an environmental assessment and suggestions for moving forward.

**Compatibility**

Because the USACE identified in Table 36 that cultural identity will be negatively impacted, Kawerak recommends that an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) should be conducted. In an eventual EIS the USACE will be able to dedicate more time to the likelihood that cultural identity will be impacted, as well as to determine measures to mitigate impacts to cultural identity.

Kawerak recognizes and applauds the USACE for noting that the following interagency compliance documents have been completed:

1. NEPA compliance is completed
2. Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act compliance is completed page 142, Main Report and listed in Appendix B, however Kawerak notes that the coordination act report is actually Appendix G;
3. The USACE asserts that no invasive species will be introduced
4. Essential Fish Habitat compliance is completed

Kawerak identified the following findings to be important and of some concern but because of the short timeframe to comment will not be able to provide exhaustive comments on any issue:

1. The USACE indicates in the cover letter that no public meeting will be held on the report and environmental assessment, however recent media reports from local news KNOM and local newspaper Nome Nugget report that the USACE will hold a public meeting in Nome in April 2015. Kawerak hopes that a public meeting will occur in the future;

2. The USACE directs the public to comment separately to the Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation in regards to any Clean Water Act Certifications, however, Kawerak believes the USACE is proper authority to make comments to on Clean Water Act certifications;
3. The report notes that cultural identity will be negatively impacted Page 115, Main Report;
4. Clean Water Act compliance is not completed page 141, Main Report;
5. Endangered Species Act compliance is not completed page 142, Main Report;
6. Marine Mammal Protection Act compliance is not completed page 143, Main Report;
7. National Historic Preservation Act compliance is not completed page 143, Main Report; and
8. In regards to Environmental Justice the USACE notes that the project is not near a low income or minority residential area page 143, Main Report, US Census data indicates otherwise.

Of the above listed findings Kawerak requests the USACE to ensure that mitigation measures are considered when cultural identity will be negatively impacted from Port Expansion. Additionally, Clean Water Act, Endangered Species Act, Marine Mammal Protection Act, and National Historic Preservation Act compliances need to be completed.

The USACE indicates that the project is not near a low income or minority residential area. A low income and minority residential area is near the project and is no less than ½ mile from the Port of Nome. Nome residents and Nome subsistence users use the same water body that will be managed by the Port of Nome. Nome's demographics indicate that a majority of residents are of minority race. As of the 2010 census it shows that 65.3% of the Nome population is of some minority race, most of whom are of Alaska Native descent. In the Nome census area 27.7% of the population lives below the poverty line; within Nome 10.3% of the population live below the poverty line. The high cost of living and the urgent housing shortage as a result of recent gold mining exacerbate the economic situation and impact those on both sides of the poverty line. The port expansion has the potential to affect the housing market and change the socio-economics of the community of Nome; Kawerak will suggest that the Nome Planning Commission consider this issue. Below are website links to articles that highlight the housing shortage.

<http://www.alaskapublic.org/2014/01/23/document-highlights-rural-housing-shortage/>  
<http://www.knom.org/wp/blog/tag/housing-crisis/>  
<http://www.knom.org/wp/blog/2014/01/21/sounding-board-housing-crisis-in-rural-alaska/>  
<http://www.homesteadingtoday.com/5455621-post15.html>

In order to adequately address NEPA and the cumulative impacts to a low income or minority population as well as assure environmental justice, Kawerak reminds the USACE of the following federal guidance documents to guide this public comment period:

1. Executive Order 12898
2. Presidential Memorandum February 1994
3. Council on Environmental Quality's (CEQ), Environmental Justice; Guidance Under the National Environmental Policy Act
4. Health Impact Assessment (HIA)

The above listed guidance documents support the notion that the USACE should consider an EIS as it relates to social, economic, and cumulative impacts to Nome's low and minority population.

#### **CONCLUSION**

Kawerak respectfully requests that the USACE place more attention on the need to mitigate the social implications of port expansion to the community of Nome. NEPA provides the necessary guidance to the USACE for the Deep Draft Port Study, and from our understanding of NEPA, we recommend an EIS so that local agencies and the public can provide meaningful input. Fortunately, the USACE has already initiated much work within the appendices that provide the necessary detail for an EIS.

In September 2014 Kawerak hosted a gathering in Nome called the Bering Strait Voices on Arctic Shipping, which was an unprecedented gathering of local residents and ocean policy experts. Below are quotes from that gathering.

*"We need more emergency response capability at the local level"*

*"Need improved communication infrastructure and equipment to be more effective in emergency response at the local level"*

We do believe that the port expansion will benefit the overall protection of our region's subsistence resources, and appreciate the opportunity to weigh in on the processes that are important to alleviate any concerns that the public may have. If you have questions please feel free to contact Austin Ahmasuk, Marine Advocate at (907) 443-4368 or e-mail [marine.advocate@kawerak.org](mailto:marine.advocate@kawerak.org). Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,  
Kawerak, Inc.



Melanie Bahnke, President