



April 28, 2021

President Joe Biden  
President of the United States  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW  
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Biden:

As Tribes and Tribal organizations of Western Alaska, Eastern and Northern Bering Sea, representing over 70 federally recognized Tribes, we are deeply grateful to you for reinstating the Northern Bering Sea Climate Resilience Area.

The indigenous people living in the Northern Bering Sea Region have an innate connection to the lands and waters and have been stewards to this area for millennia. Indigenous Peoples continue to be sustained by the incredibly productive Bering Sea by the countless species of seabirds, marine mammals, fish and other wildlife. The region, home to one of the largest marine mammal migrations on the planet, has been experiencing climate change at a rate three times the rest of the planet. Along with a loss of sea ice, populations of red king crab, ice seals, walrus, and other marine species we depend on have been devastated. These unprecedented environmental changes are coupled with increased vessel traffic, destructive commercial fishing, oil and mining exploration and extraction, marine debris, increased militarization and unusual seabird and marine mammal mortality events. Just last year we had to respond to a major foreign marine debris event in the Bering Strait, that later reached the Pribilof Islands. A Russian LNG tanker travelling south through the Bering Strait in January 2021, lost engine power, only narrowly avoiding a major catastrophe.

The Northern Bering Sea Climate Resilience Area was originally created by [Executive Order 13754](#) in December 2016. We—along with our friends, allies and partners—dedicated years to advocating for the protections detailed in the Executive Order. The Executive Order provides a pathway for our Tribes to exercise self-determination and elevates our rightful role in decision-making with regard to management of activities in the Northern Bering Sea such as destructive fisheries, increased shipping, oil and gas and mining, oil spills and other contamination, marine debris events and other impacts that affect our subsistence ways of life. Given these extreme threats to our communities, the need to fully implement the Northern Bering Sea Climate Resilience Area was critical in 2016, and even more dire in 2021.

The Executive Order creates two decision-making bodies: 1) The Federal Agency Task Force and 2) The Bering Intergovernmental Tribal Advisory Council. We would like to work with the Biden-Harris Administration to set up the structure to implement the Executive Order and begin to address the many issues we are facing in the northern Bering Sea region. We recognize some progress has already been made, but there is much more work to be done. In addition to implementing the Northern Bering Sea Climate Resilience Area, we hope to work with your Administration and Congress to pass complementary legislation that will provide more permanent protections for our region.

We believe the Executive Order can provide a model for the Biden-Harris Administration to work with Tribes and allow for shared management and self-determination, as well as respect for Traditional knowledge. We look forward to working together with your Administration. To reach us, please contact either, Mellissa Johnson, Executive Director, Bering Sea Elders Group, [director@beringseaelders.org](mailto:director@beringseaelders.org) or Austin Ahmasuk, Marine Advocate, Kawerak Inc., [Aahmasuk@Kawerak.org](mailto:Aahmasuk@Kawerak.org).

Sincerely,



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Melanie Bahnke  
President  
Kawerak, Inc.



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Vivian Korthuis  
Chief Executive Officer  
Association of Village Council Presidents



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Amos Philemonoff  
President  
Aleut Community of St. Paul Island



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Mellisa Johnson  
Executive Director  
Bering Sea Elders Group

Cc:

Deb Haaland, Secretary, Department of the Interior

Tommy Beaudreau, Nominee Deputy Secretary, Department of the Interior

Elizabeth Washburn, Special Assistant to the President, Domestic Policy Council,  
[elizabeth.r.washburn@who.eop.gov](mailto:elizabeth.r.washburn@who.eop.gov)

Jane Lubchenco, Deputy Director for Climate and the Environment, Office of Science and  
Technology Policy, [Jane.A.Lubchenco@ostp.eop.gov](mailto:Jane.A.Lubchenco@ostp.eop.gov)

Larry Roberts, Chief of Staff, Department of the Interior

Admiral Karl Schultz, Commandant of the Coast Guard, [karl.l.schultz@uscg.mil](mailto:karl.l.schultz@uscg.mil)

Bryan Newland, Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary Indian Affairs, Department of Interior, [bryan.newland@bia.gov](mailto:bryan.newland@bia.gov)

Rick Spinrad, Nominee, Administrator, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

Jennifer Van Der Heide, Senior Advisor to the Secretary, Department of Interior, [Jennifer\\_vanderheideescobar@ios.doi.gov](mailto:Jennifer_vanderheideescobar@ios.doi.gov)

Liz Klein, Senior Advisor to the Secretary, Department of the Interior,

Katherine P. “Kate” Kelly, Deputy Chief of Staff, Office of the Secretary, Department of the Interior, [Kate\\_Kelly@ios.doi.gov](mailto:Kate_Kelly@ios.doi.gov)

Raina Thiele, Senior Advisor for Alaska Affairs and Strategic Priorities, [raina\\_thiele@ios.doi.gov](mailto:raina_thiele@ios.doi.gov)

Justin Pidot, General Counsel, Council on Environmental Quality, [justin.r.pidot@ceq.eop.gov](mailto:justin.r.pidot@ceq.eop.gov)

Karen Hyun, Chief of Staff NOAA, [karen.hyun@noaa.gov](mailto:karen.hyun@noaa.gov)

Ann Marie Bledsoe Downes, Deputy Solicitor for Indian Affairs, [ann.bledsoedownes@sol.doi.gov](mailto:ann.bledsoedownes@sol.doi.gov)

Austin Ahmasuk, Marine Advocate, Kawerak, Inc., [aahmasuk@kawerak.org](mailto:aahmasuk@kawerak.org)

Mellisa Johnson, Executive Director, Bering Sea Elders Group, [director@beringseaelders.org](mailto:director@beringseaelders.org)

Jennifer Hooper, Natural Resources Director, Association of Village Council Presidents, [jhooper@avcp.org](mailto:jhooper@avcp.org)

Lauren Divine, Ecosystem Conservation Office Director, Aleut Community of St. Paul Island, [lmdivine@aleut.com](mailto:lmdivine@aleut.com)

Erin Dougherty Lynch, Senior Staff Attorney, Native American Rights Fund, [dougherty@narf.org](mailto:dougherty@narf.org)

Attachments:

Summary of the Northern Bering Sea Climate Resilience Area

Comments on the Department of the Interior’s Federal Oil and Gas Program

Comments to NOAA on Climate Recommendations for Fisheries and Protected Resources