



January 21, 2021

As Tribes and Tribal organizations of Western Alaska and the Bering Sea, we offer our deepest appreciation and gratitude to President Biden for reinstating the Northern Bering Sea Climate Resilience Area in his Day 1 executive actions.

The Bering Sea area has been home to our ancestors for thousands of years, and it will be home to our descendants for thousands of more years to come. In this bountiful but fragile part of the world, we live in balance with each other and our environment and the fish, birds, and animals. Our people are not merely users of our environment—rather, we are part of this delicate and globally unique ecosystem.

The Northern Bering Sea Climate Resilience Area was originally created by [Executive Order 13754](#) in 2016. We—along with our friends, allies, and partners—dedicated years to advocating for the protections in Executive Order 13754. The Order provides a pathway for our Tribes to exercise self-determination and elevates their role in decision-making over the management of activities in the Bering Sea. Any decisions affecting indigenous people must be made in partnership with the leadership of the Tribal governments, who are sovereign nations and have a unique government-to-government relationship with the United States. The order also sets out clear direction on shipping pollution, industrial fishing, oil and mineral extraction, marine debris, and oil spill preparedness. Importantly, it also emphasizes the importance of bringing Traditional Indigenous knowledges and western science together to provide the best information to address climate change.

The rapidly changing climate and the associated loss of sea ice in the Bering Sea have drastically impacted our hunting and fishing opportunities and our food security. We are bearing witness directly and experiencing the negative impacts of this reality daily. As the Bering Sea becomes ice free, increased shipping, pollution, the potential for offshore oil and gas drilling, large-scale mining, destructive commercial fisheries that trawl the bottom of the ocean floor, and the introduction of invasive species threaten our food security, cultures, and communities.

We celebrate the reinstatement of the Northern Bering Sea Climate Resilience Area on President Biden and Vice President Harris's first day in office. We also recognize that there is more work to be done, and we urge Congress to pass complementing legislation to provide permanent protections for the Northern Bering Sea Climate Resilience Area, so that our home waters are not used as a political football from administration to administration. The protections for the Northern Bering Sea Climate Resilience Area are part of President Biden's broad, encompassing [Executive Order on Protecting Public Health and the Environment and Restoring Science to Tackle the Climate Crisis](#)—and there are additional components of the broader order that will also

benefit our respective regions and protect our way of life. Including indigenous knowledge and science in federal policy-making is core to good governance of the people, by the people, and for the people.

The Bering Sea and Bering Strait are home to more than 70 federally recognized Tribes, and as Indigenous Peoples we have thrived in this region for millennia. As the original and contemporary stewards of the lands and waters, we have established deep connections with the region that have resulted in extensive bodies of knowledge about the Bering Sea ecosystem that have been passed down from generation to generation. Our worldviews include humans as an integral part of this highly interconnected ecosystem, including marine, freshwater, terrestrial, atmospheric, and ice-related systems. Our people live an indigenous way of life that is inextricably woven with our lands and waters. Our Traditional and Indigenous knowledge systems are continually updated, adapted, and reshaped as our individual and collective experiences and observations inform them. The Bering Sea is part of our identities as Yup'ik, St. Lawrence Island Yupik, Cup'ik, and Inupiaq people, and is as important to us as the land.

We look forward to working with the Biden-Harris Administration on the implementation of the reinstated Executive Order 13754, especially the creation of the Bering Sea Intergovernmental Tribal Advisory Council and the integration of our Traditional and Indigenous knowledges into federal decision making processes. We, the people of the Bering Sea, deserve to be part of decisions that affect our lands, waters, and communities. Quyana, President Biden.

## **Background**

Kawerak, Inc. (Kawerak) is the Alaska Native non-profit Tribal consortium for the 20 federally recognized Tribes of the Bering Strait region. The Association of Village Council Presidents (AVCP) is the regional non-profit Tribal consortium for 56 federally recognized Tribes in the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta. The Bering Sea Elders Group (BSEG) is an association of Elder Representatives appointed by 38 Tribes in the Yukon-Kuskokwim and Bering Strait regions. The Aleut Community of St. Paul Island is the federally designated name used to identify the community of Unangan, or Aleuts, residing on St. Paul Island.

The Bering Sea Climate Resilience Area was revoked in May of 2017 when President Trump signed Executive Order 13795 implementing an America First Offshore Energy Strategy.

## **Press Contacts**

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

Melanie Bahnke  
President  
Kawerak, Inc.  
[mbahnke@kawerak.org](mailto:mbahnke@kawerak.org)

Vivian Korthuis  
Chief Executive Officer  
Association of Village Council Presidents  
[vkorthuis@avcp.org](mailto:vkorthuis@avcp.org)

Amos Philemonoff  
President  
Aleut Community of St. Paul Island  
[president@aleut.com](mailto:president@aleut.com)