

'A Call To Action' On Planning Arctic Development

By [Annie Feidt, APRN - Anchorage](#) | April 4, 2013 - 5:16 pm

Dozens of federal, state and local agencies have a say on how development happens in arctic Alaska. A report released today (Thursday, April 4th) makes the case for doing a better job coordinating the work those agencies are doing as big decisions are made on important arctic issues.

If your eyes glaze over when you hear the words “integrated management plan” you’re not alone. Mine did too, when I read the press release from the Department of Interior about the new [arctic report](#). But Fran Ulmer has a better way to describe it:

“It’s a call to action.”

Ulmer is chair of the United States Arctic Research Commission. The report is called, “Managing for the Future in a Rapidly Changing Arctic.” It describes those rapid changes and many of the proposed developments in the region, in energy, tourism, shipping and even fishing. Ulmer says the report makes the case that in the past, agencies charged with making decisions on development, haven’t done a good job coordinating with each other:

“The piecemeal decision making approach, which has been mostly how things have happened, won’t cut it in the arctic, given what a very special place it is. That its both valuable and vulnerable, that its important to the people who live there, Alaska Natives, but also to the future of the state and to the nation.”

Ulmer says the report invites people to the table to do a better job coordinating activity in the arctic. Susan Murray, with the environmental group Oceana, is especially pleased the report emphasizes using science along with local and traditional knowledge when making big decisions. She says she’s optimistic the report will lead to more comprehensive planning in the arctic:

“It’s always good when we take the time to look and plan. It’s the times that we rush into something where we end up with mistakes and disasters and it is always heartening to us when we see our government stop and take a look so we’re not just doing it piecemeal and turning it into essentially a goldrush that we then have to correct in the future when we make mistakes.”

Along with the report, the Arctic Research Commission is launching something it calls the [Arctic Science Portal](#). Ulmer says it’s an attempt to make research more accessible to the general public and to industry and regulators:

“It’s a door that unlocks other doors. So if you’re interested in what research has been done on ice or marine mammals or on anything else, it will help you find where you need to go to get information about that research. So it doesn’t answer the question about ice, it tells you where to go to get that.”

Ulmer says the web portal is still a work in progress. And that also describes the plan to do a better job coordinating development in the arctic. Ulmer says a lot of people in the lower 48 still don’t even realize the United States is an arctic nation. So it’s tough to get the attention and resources that are necessary for arctic planning.