

Federal Commission Calls For Greater Seafloor Mapping of Arctic Ocean

WASHINGTON, DC, May 6, 2010 - Mankind has better maps of the Moon than it does of the Arctic Ocean seafloor, and as more shipping comes to the Arctic, it's time to fix that, according to the U.S. Arctic Research Commission.

In testimony prepared for a Thursday hearing, the Commission endorses Alaska Representative Don Young's bill H.R. 2864, which authorizes funds to better chart the Arctic Ocean for safe navigation. The bill also supports work to extend United States territorial claims off Alaska, and presses for better monitoring of changes to Alaska's coast.

Marine mapping off Alaska is the responsibility of the Department of Commerce's National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA).

On May 6th, Dr. John Farrell, Executive Director of the USARC, will testify at 10:00 am before the Subcommittee on Insular Affairs, Oceans and Wildlife, in Room 1324 of the Longworth House Office Building.

"The Commission supports charting the Arctic Ocean floor as basic for security, safety, improved science, and economic activity in the North," said Commission Chairman Mead Treadwell.

"We've asked Dr. Farrell, a marine geologist, to make three points:"

- Navigational charts developed from seafloor mapping improve the safety and reliability of marine transportation of all kinds, including commercial shipping, research and military operations.
- Seafloor maps are integral to our nation's efforts to develop a claim for new territory outside the 200-mile limit. These claims, which could add territory the size of California or greater to Alaska in the Arctic Ocean, are allowed under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea.
- Mapping helps scientists and resource managers build "baseline" knowledge to track changes in the Arctic environment that affect the lives of coastal residents and the population levels of fish and wildlife.

Last year, the Commission completed work on an *Arctic Marine Shipping Assessment* (www.arctic.gov/publications/AMSA_2009_Report_2nd_print.pdf), the first combined effort by Arctic nations to prepare for increases in Arctic shipping resulting from receding ice conditions in the Arctic. AMSA recommendations approved by the eight-nation Arctic Council in 2009 called for new Arctic Ocean mapping efforts.

USARC, established in 1984, develops goals and policies for the nation's Arctic Research Program and reports to the President and Congress. Approximately \$400 million per year is spent by federal agencies, which work with the State of Alaska, international and academic partners, to implement goals set by the Commission.

Dr. Farrell's testimony is available at www.arctic.gov. Media Contact: Kathy Farrow, (703) 525-0112, kfarrow@arctic.gov