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Obama reassigns responsibilities for Arctic Research to a White House council

Arlington, VA - Given the increasing importance of and attention to the Arctic, a resource-rich region that is warming at twice the rate of the rest of the planet, President Obama issued a Presidential Memorandum on July 22, 2010 that assigns responsibility for Arctic research to the White House National Science and Technology Council (NSTC).

The President chairs this cabinet-level council. The President's Science Advisor, Dr. John Holdren, Director of the Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP) and member of NSTC, will organize arctic science policy across the diverse entities constituting the Federal research and development enterprise. Specifically, the NSTC will coordinate the activities assigned to the Interagency Arctic Research and Policy Committee (IARPC) that was created by the Arctic Research and Policy Act (ARPA) of 1984 (Public Law 98-373, as amended) (the Act). Hierarchically, IARPC, chaired by the Director of the National Science Foundation, will become a subcommittee under the Committee on Environment and Natural Resource (CENR), which is one of the four primary NSTC committees.

In response to this change, Shere Abbott, OSTP Associate Director on Environment, and a co-chair of CENR said, "Moving the coordination of arctic research within the White House will improve arctic research planning, and will ensure greater alignment with other national research priorities outlined in forthcoming policy from the administration's Ocean Policy Task Force, and Climate Change Adaptation Task Force, as well as with existing efforts, such as the U.S. Global Change Research Program and the U.S. Group on Earth Observations."

The Act tasks IARPC with broadly surveying arctic research to determine priorities for future research into areas including natural resources, physical and biological sciences and social and behavioral sciences. In so doing, IARPC works closely with the U.S. Arctic Research Commission (USARC, www.arctic.gov, also created by the Act) to develop and establish an integrated national arctic research policy that guides Federal agencies in developing and implementing their Arctic research programs. USARC's primary contribution to this cooperative effort is a biennial "Report on Goals and Objectives for Arctic Research" (see www.arctic.gov/publications/usarc_2009-10_goals.pdf).

In addition to consulting on policy, IARPC will, importantly, also confer with USARC on developing 5-year research program plans to implement the policy, Arctic research programs in Federal agencies, future research, and guidelines for Federal agencies to award and administer Arctic research grants.

Ms. Michele Longo Eder, Acting Chair of the USARC, said, "The Commission has long encouraged this change, and we're pleased with the President's action. IARPC needs to draft a new 5-year Arctic research program plan, and we're hoping to see it completed in less than a year."

To better assess the level of financial support for Arctic research, IARPC is also tasked with providing the necessary coordination, data, and assistance to the Office of Management and Budget and to the OSTP so that a single integrated, coherent, and multiagency budget request for Arctic research can be developed. After the budget is submitted as part of the President's annual budget request, the USARC is directed to review it, and to report directly to Congress on its adherence to the 5-year program plan.

In fulfilling its responsibilities, IARPC is to cooperate with the Governor of the State of Alaska. IARPC also has international responsibilities to coordinate and promote cooperative arctic scientific research programs with other nations, subject to the foreign policy guidance of the Secretary of State.

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