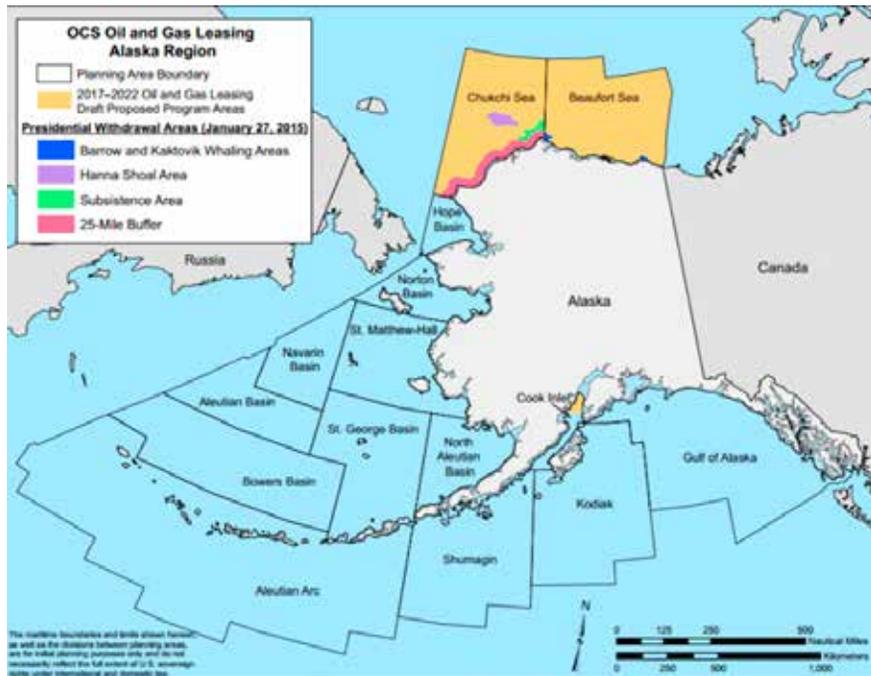




# A Busy March for Arctic Affairs Watchers

By Craig H. Allen



US Dept of Interior Draft 2015-2022 Lease Plan graphic (areas in yellow were to be included in lease plan).

March 2016 was a busy month for those who follow Arctic affairs. Many of us monitored reports from the 1,049 mile long Iditarod race from Anchorage to Nome, marred this year when a snow machine operator crashed into two musher teams, killing one dog and seriously injuring three others. While the mushers raced toward Nome, Arctic Council officials and working group experts, Arctic scientists attending the Arctic Science Summit Week, the Arctic Observing Summit and the US Arctic Research Commission meeting, and participants in the Model Arctic Council all descended on Fairbanks, Alaska.

Meanwhile, in a month that witnessed a new record low in the extent of Arctic winter sea ice, the White House released an updated progress report on federal efforts to carry out the administration's Arctic Strategy, along with a new Framework document that tasks federal agencies with further steps to achieve the ambitious goals established

by the Arctic Strategy. Additionally, during his first visit to Washington, DC as Canada's prime minister, Justin Trudeau joined President Obama in releasing a US-Canada Joint Statement on Climate, Energy, and Arctic Leadership. Finally, rumors circulated on March 15, following Interior Secretary Sally Jewell's announcement that the Obama Administration was withdrawing much of the southeast Atlantic outer continental shelf (OCS) from its draft 2017-2022 OCS Lease Program Plan, that the Administration was also considering whether to withdraw the Arctic OCS areas from the draft plan, foreclosing any oil and gas leases in the Beaufort and Chukchi Seas through 2022. However, the draft plan released by the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM) the following day kept the Arctic leases option open, while imposing significant delays. The new five-year program includes tentative plans to open up a lease in the Beaufort Sea in 2020 and in the Chukchi Sea in 2022

(see graphic at left). The draft explains that these potential sales "are scheduled late in the five-year period to provide additional opportunity to evaluate and obtain information regarding environmental issues, subsistence use needs, infrastructure capabilities, and results from any exploration activity associated with existing leases." BOEM added that it will be holding meetings in cities and communities impacted by the proposed plan and will be accepting comments on the plan for the next 90 days.

## PROGRESS ON THE 2013 NATIONAL STRATEGY

The White House issued its National Strategy for the Arctic Region (NSAR) in 2013. The Obama NSAR builds upon the nation's Arctic Region Policy promulgated by President George W. Bush in 2009. The strategy document rests on four guiding principles: to safeguard peace and stability, make decisions using the best available information, pursue innovative arrangements, and to consult and coordinate with Alaska Natives. It sets forth the federal government's strategic priorities for the Arctic Region, while organizing US efforts under three lines of effort: advance United States security interests, pursue responsible Arctic region stewardship, and strengthen international cooperation.

The 2013 Obama NSAR was followed one year later by the administration's Implementation Plan for the National Strategy for the Arctic Region. The Implementation Plan sets forth the methodology, process, and approach for executing the NSAR. To better organize federal efforts to accomplish the tasks assigned in the Implementation Plan, on January 21, 2015, Obama issued Executive Order 13,689 titled "Enhancing Coordination of National Efforts in the Arctic." The executive order established the Arctic Executive Steering Committee (AESC), with responsibility for fostering communication, coordination, and collaboration among the

25 federal departments, agencies and offices tasked with responsibilities in the Arctic region. The AESC is specifically charged with coordinating interagency work to implement the NSAR across the strategy's three lines of effort.

### THE FRAMEWORK FOR GOING FORWARD

The 2015 Arctic Progress Report concludes that the US made “tremendous progress” in 2015 in advancing the nation’s strategic goals and policies in the Arctic region. In doing so, the report cited the government’s preparations for assuming the chairmanship of the Arctic Council for 2015-2017 and the August 31, 2015 conference on Global Leadership in the Arctic: Cooperation, Innovation, Engagement and Resilience (GLACIER) in Anchorage, during which President Obama made some 35 commitments to advance resilience, promote investments to address climate impacts, assist remote Alaskan communities, and enhance Arctic safety and security.

The 2016 Implementation Framework supersedes the 2014 Implementation Plan. It is organized along the three lines of effort set out in the NSAR. Under the first line of effort, the Framework lists “evolve Arctic infrastructure and strategic capabilities.” Given the heading, one would expect to find bold statements here regarding a commitment to address the obvious lack of infrastructure in the US Arctic region. Unfortunately, and largely due to severe budget constraints, the Framework is long on creating approaches, evaluating options, encouraging public-private partnerships, developing recommendations, conducting more studies, and preparing reports — and short on commitments to actually dredge channels, pour cement, or cut steel.

For example, it calls on the Army Corps of Engineers to “evaluate the feasibility of” deepening and extending harbor capabilities in Nome, and if such a project is feasible, to develop a construction timeline for the project by 2020 (originally, on-site operations were tentatively scheduled to begin by 2020). Perhaps the Framework drafters had advance warning that the



(ABOVE) President Obama addressing the GLACIER conference. Official White House photo. (RIGHT) The US Coast Guard icebreaker **Healy** off Nome, Alaska. Official US Coast Guard photo.



Administration was likely to withdraw the Arctic OCS from oil and gas leasing through at least 2022 and saw no need to commit to new infrastructure in the region during the current decade. Alternatively, the Framework drafters might have been deferring to the US Committee on the Marine Transportation System (CMTS), which was reportedly scheduled to release, in March, its 10-year prioritization framework for developing federal infrastructure in the Arctic. The coming CMTS framework is expected to recommend reliance on public-private partnerships to fund the needed Arctic infrastructure.

Under the heading “preserve Arctic region freedom of the seas” the 2016 NSAR Framework lists as the “next steps” the development of “long-term plans to sustain Federal capability to physically access the Arctic with sufficient capacity to support US interests in the Arctic.” It sets a goal of beginning production activities on a (i.e., one) new US Coast Guard heavy icebreaker by 2020,

while continuing planning on additional icebreakers (with no set date). US Coast Guard talking points make it clear that a minimum of two heavy icebreakers are required to provide year-round, assured access in the Arctic. The service revealed further details of its planned approach at an industry day in McClean, Virginia, on March 18, 2016, to be followed by one-on-one meetings with industry at the General Services Administration building from March 28-31.

The heading “provide for future United States energy security” begins with a long list of activities in support of the goal of pursuing the development of renewable energy resources. It then closes with a much shorter list titled “ensure the safe and responsible development of non-renewable energy.” The latter section is closely tied to the second line of effort heading (pursue responsible Arctic region stewardship) and to the third line of effort (strengthen international cooperation), which calls for agreements that promote shared



Prime Minister Trudeau and President Obama, Official White House photo.

Arctic state responsibility to protect the Arctic environment.

The 2016 Framework also outlines plans to encourage the Senate to give its consent to accession to the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, continued mapping and charting of the Arctic coastline and waters, multinational spill response and search and rescue exercises, preventing unregulated fishing in the Central Arctic Ocean, completing the work necessary to delineate the outer limits of the US continental shelf in the Arctic, promoting Arctic waterways management, and implementing the Polar Code, which enters into force January 1, 2017.

#### THE US-CANADA JOINT STATEMENT

The March 10, 2016 Obama-Trudeau Joint Statement on Climate, Energy, and Arctic Leadership praises the 2015 Paris Agreement as “a turning point in global efforts to combat climate change.” The two heads of state announced their resolve to play a leadership role in international efforts to achieve a low carbon global economy. As part of that commitment, they pledged that by 2025 the two nations will reduce methane emissions from the oil and gas sector by 40-45 percent below 2012 levels. Eschewing any attempt to seek congressional concurrence or support, Obama instead directed the Environmental Protection Agency to begin developing regulations to implement the methane emissions reduction commitment.

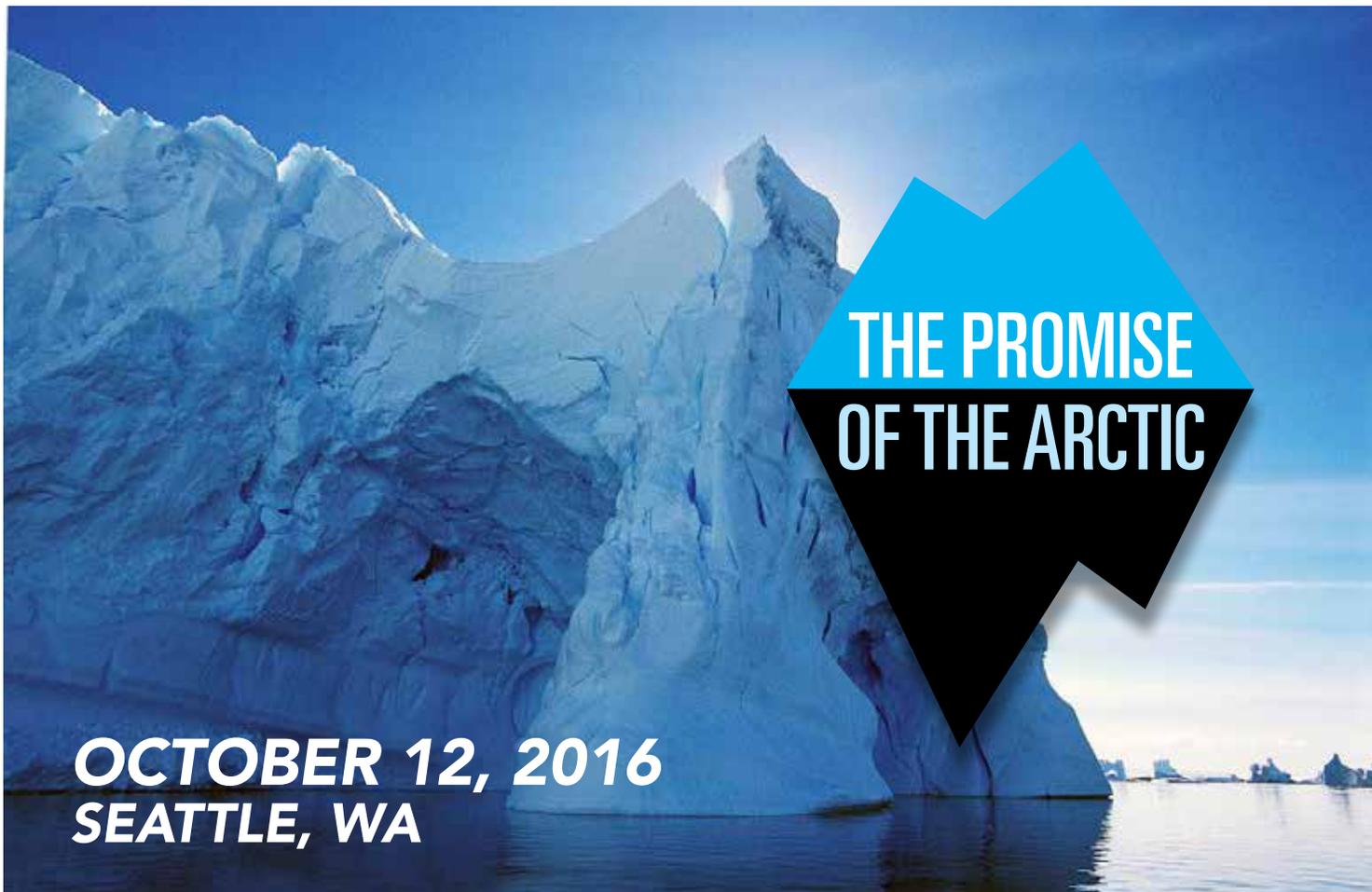


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As part of the leaders' commitment to a “shared Arctic leadership model,” the two set out four objectives: (1) conserving Arctic biodiversity through science-based decision making; (2) incorporating indigenous science and traditional knowledge into decision-making; (3) building a sustainable Arctic economy; and (4) sustaining strong Arctic communities. Within these four objectives are plans to establish “low impact shipping corridors” in the Arctic, work toward a binding international agreement to prevent unregulated fishing in the Central Arctic Ocean, and protect at least 17 percent of the Arctic land areas and 20 percent of Arctic marine areas by 2020, while taking additional “concrete steps to achieve and substantially surpass” those goals in the coming years. The US Marine Protected Areas Federal Advisory Committee's Arctic Working Group is expected to deliver its recommendations for establishing MPAs in US Arctic waters later this year.

The Joint Statement was criticized by many Alaskans, including Nils Andreassen, Executive Director of the Institute of the North (a co-sponsor of the annual Promise of the Arctic conferences). Andreassen pointed out that the president's NSAR identifies the state of Alaska and tribes as partners in US Arctic policy and implementation; however, the Joint Statement “doesn't reflect that commitment.” He went on to complain that “state of Alaska officials, indigenous peoples, local governments and indigenous landowners were surprised by the announcement, as were the members of Alaska's congressional delegation.” Some Canadians were similarly critical. Retired Canadian Coast Guard Captain David “Duke” Snider, now CEO of Martech Polar Consulting, expressed the concern that the Joint Statement was “too focused on climate change issues at the expense of balanced sustainable resource and economic development.” On the other hand, Snider praised the two leaders in their commitment to “establish consistent policies for ships operating in the region,”

When it assumed the 2015-2017 chairmanship of the Arctic Council, the United States announced that its organizing theme would be “One Arctic,” and that it would emphasize three focus areas: improving economic and living conditions for Arctic communities, Arctic Ocean safety, security and stewardship, and addressing the impacts of climate change. The first year of the chairmanship has spawned a multitude of meetings, conferences, summits, studies, and reports, and brought much-needed attention to the Arctic region and its peoples. Mitigating and adapting to global climate change impacts in the Arctic has received serious attention. As President Obama seeks to establish a legacy of, in the words of a Canadian observer, “unprecedented executive branch climate change activism” in the final year of his presidency, the federal government's focus will likely remain on climate change. At the same time, however, one is reminded of the theme adopted by Canada for its 2013-2015 Arctic Council chairmanship term: Development for the People of the North, and Canada's successful efforts to establish the Arctic Economic Council. Perhaps Finland, as the next Arctic Council chair, will find a way to combine the two themes and to balance the need for economic development in the Arctic with a commitment to preserve and protect the Arctic environment for future generations. **PMI**



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