

**International Bering Sea Forum
Second Annual Working Meeting
April 2005
Seward, Alaska**

The Second Annual Working Meeting of the International Bering Sea Forum was held in April 2005 in Seward, Alaska. Ten Russian forum members and twelve U.S. members attended the meeting along with Pacific Environment staff and several observers and guest speakers from Anchorage. The International Bering Sea Forum (the Forum) was established in 2003 to bring together scientists, indigenous leaders, environmentalists, and small-scale fishermen from Alaska and Russia who are working toward sustainable, international management of the Bering Sea.

The Forum's Second Working Meeting offered clear affirmation of the group's successful growth. Forum members shared conservation achievements from the past year and offered updates on timely issues affecting their various regions and areas of interest. Each of the five working groups – addressing fisheries, indigenous issues, pollutants and resource extraction problems, protected areas, and international policy – developed specific action plans for the coming year. The Forum also moved toward strengthening its outreach strategy in order to garner the public and political support needed to effectively create policy change in the Bering Sea. Forum members discussed the importance of establishing partnerships with additional stakeholder groups, including commercial fishing groups, native organizations, and the scientific community.

The Working Meeting opened with presentations on key issues affecting both sides of the Bering Sea as well as updates and notable achievements from forum members. Since last year's Working Meeting, the Forum successfully drafted and distributed a statement calling for the creation of an International Agreement on Bering Sea management as well as a statement calling for intergovernmental efforts to restrict bottom trawling in areas designated as "sensitive habitat." Pacific Environment worked with Forum members to distribute the statements to lawmakers, environmental organizations, fisheries management agencies, native communities, and media in the U.S. and Russia. The Forum used this Working Meeting to further strategize on distribution and follow-up for these statements. A third statement – calling for the limiting of driftnetting in the Russian Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) – was also approved by the Forum in April and is currently being distributed to the appropriate agencies.

The Forum heard presentations on indigenous issues around the Bering Sea, lobbying the Bering Sea Agenda in Washington, DC, the status of fish stocks in the Western Bering, and the Shipping Safety Partnership, formed in response to the December 2004 Selendang Ayu oil spill off of Unalaska.

Next Steps

The Fisheries Policy Working Group plans to actively promote economically and environmentally sustainable community-based fisheries on both sides of the Bering. As a part of this initiative, the group is planning an exchange bringing Russian fishermen to Alaska to learn about commercial fish processing and marketing.

The Oil, Gas and Pollutants Working Group discussed the Forum's continued involvement as members of the newly created Shipping Safety Partnership (SSP), which advocates for an increase in shipping standards and a reduction of risk across the North Pacific, particularly along the heavily traveled shipping route through the Aleutian Islands. This Working Group also made plans to conduct research on historic pollution incidents in the Bering and to look into and publicize specific current problems affecting the region.

The Forum's Indigenous Working Group drafted a letter of concern to the International Polar Year (IPY) Committee regarding the role of Arctic community-based organizations in research programs. The statement emphasized the importance of organizing partnerships with appropriate community-based local or indigenous organizations during the coming International Polar Year.

Although the Protected Areas Working Group did not formally convene at the Seward meeting, the Working Group continues to actively engage officials in Chukotka to move toward the restoration of protected status to the Tumansky Wildlife Refuge, a vital wetlands for migratory birds, and toward creation of a fisheries *zakaznik* (protected area) that would protect the habitat from further degradation. The Protected Areas Working Group is also partnering with the Pollutants Working Group to send a letter in support of the creation of a protected fisheries zone off the coast of Western Kamchatka to protect vital fisheries from the impacts of offshore oil and gas development

The International Agreement Working Group approved and discussed the statement supporting an international agreement that would unify existing species-specific bilateral agreements on Bering Sea management issues and promote sustainable management with an ecosystem-based approach. The statement also asks Russian and U.S. governments to create a council for sustainable management of the Bering Sea. The Forum will begin a distribution plan to gain the necessary political support from the Russian and U.S. governments. Members also plan to create broader alliances by developing partnerships with additional stakeholder groups including fishing, native, and industry groups.

This Working Meeting built on the momentum and successes from the past year and continued to lay the groundwork for the Forum's long-term viability. Forum members agreed the IBSF will continue to play a key role in advocating for sustainable management of the Bering Sea – across national boundaries – for years to come.

International Bering Sea Forum Participants:

Participants from Russia included Gennady Smirnov (Kaira Club, Chukotka), Igor Mikhno (Chukotka Fisheries Committee, Moscow), Tatiana Borisova (Forum Secretariat, Kamchatka), Nikolay Ettyne (Association of Indigenous Peoples, Chukotka), Vladimir Karpenko (Kamchatka Fisheries Research Institute, Kamchatka), Artur Maiss (ISAR-Living Seas Coalition, Vladivostok), Alexander Evstifeev (Aleut Regional Municipal Education, Kamchatka), Konstantin Zgurovsky (WWF, Vladivostok), Ivan Gutorov (Association of Indigenous Peoples, Kamchatka), and Lyubov Tayan (Inuit Circumpolar Conference).

Alaska participants included Walter Parker (Circumpolar Infrastructure Task Force), Whit Sheard (Environmental Consultant), Karen Pletnikoff (Aleutian Pribilof Islands Association), Pete Hendrickson (Alaska Marine Conservation Council), Ben Ellis (Institute of the North), Don Calkins (Alaska SeaLife Center), Ole Lake (Coastal Villages Regional Fund), Larry Mercurieff (Alaska Native Science Commission), Mark Spalding (Alaska Oceans Program, Alaska Conservation Foundation), Shannon Atkinson (Alaska SeaLife Center), Henry Mitchell (Bering Sea Fishermen's Association), Malin Pinsky (Wild Salmon Center), and Victoria Gofman (Aleut International Association). John Doyle of 64th Parallel International LLC, Suzanne Marcy of the National Park Service, and Shelley Johnson of the Alaska Oceans Network also attended the Meeting.