



**IUCN/NRDC/UAF**

**Workshop to identify several viable options for the protection of Ecologically and Biologically Significant Areas (EBSAs) from the possible negative effects of shipping and other maritime activities in the Bering Strait Region**

## **Workshf**



# Workshop Report

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September, 2012

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from the possible negative effects of shipping and other maritime activities in the Bering Strait

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## **1. Introduction**

### **1.1 IUCN/NRDC/UAF Project on Expanded Shipping and Other Marine Activities and the Ecology of t**





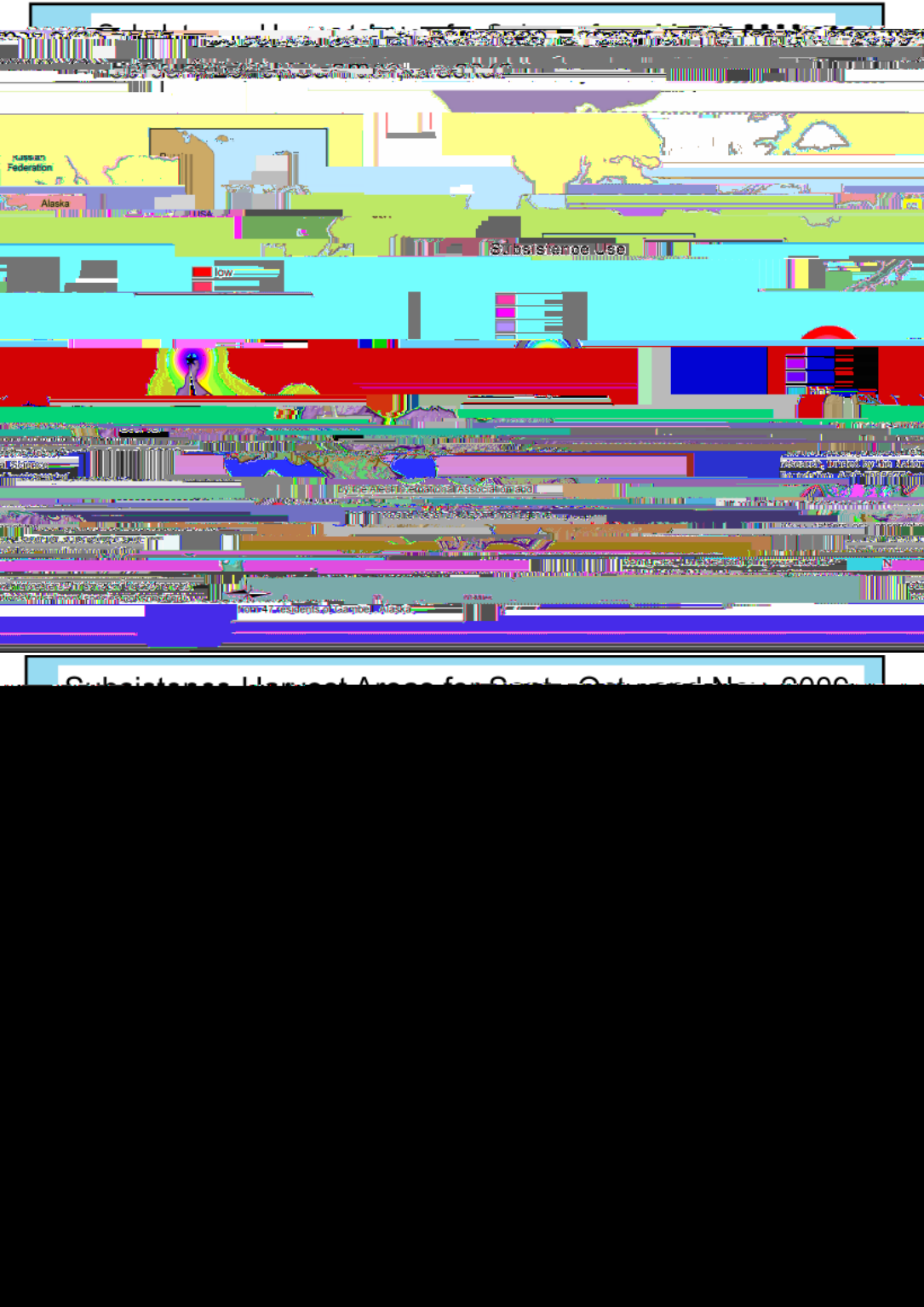


(without the buffer zone) was designated as a World Heritage Site. In 2009, the buffer zone was abolished by the regional government. laiesof t 7eoiol t R3(a4(eg3(r)-1(i6)o op)n6(.)JJ0 Tc 0 T917652 0 Td(

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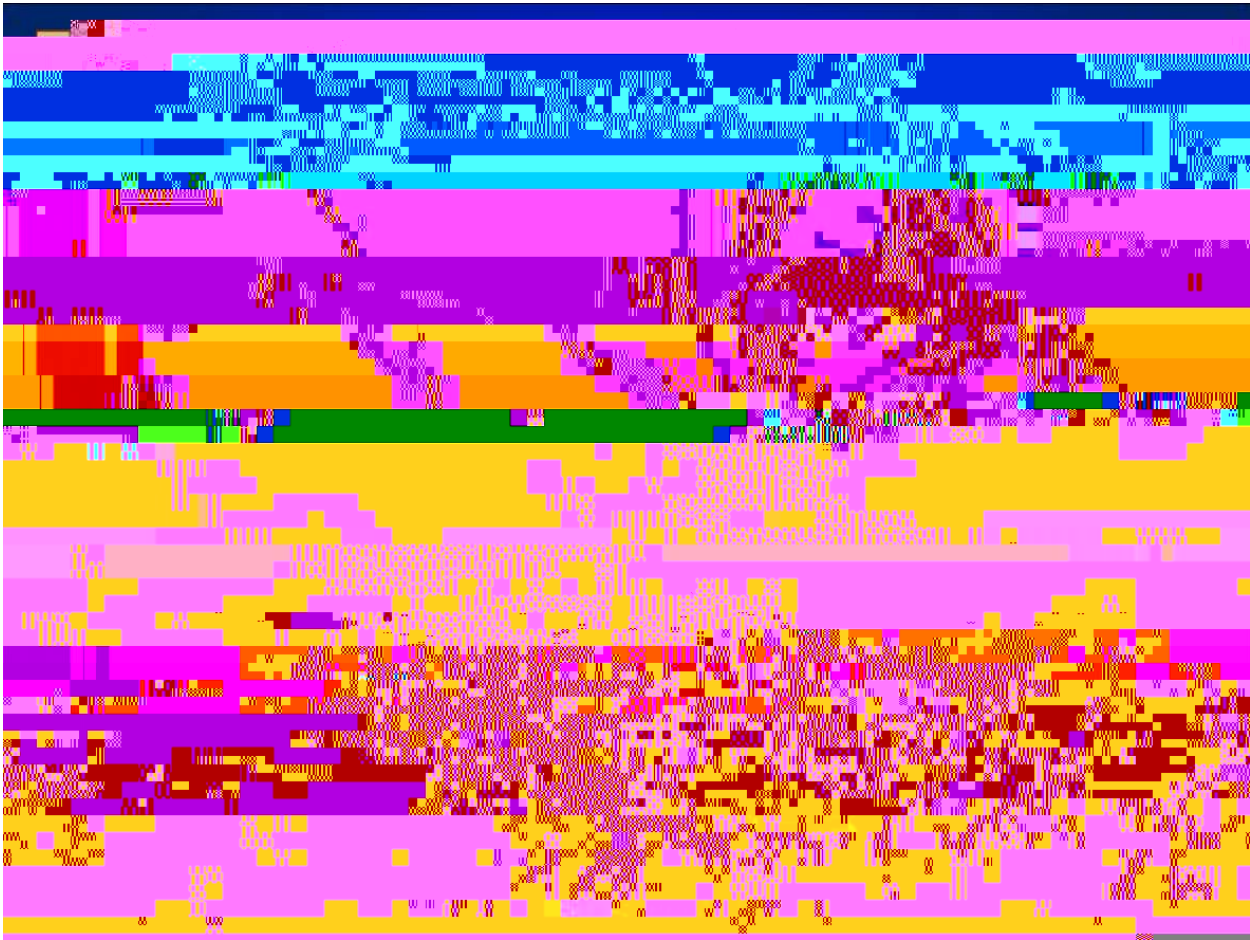
Two examples of the map products developed by this project are below:



Map 2 and 3: Subsistence Harvest Areas, Gambell, Alaska. Source: Gofman, Alessa, Kliskey.

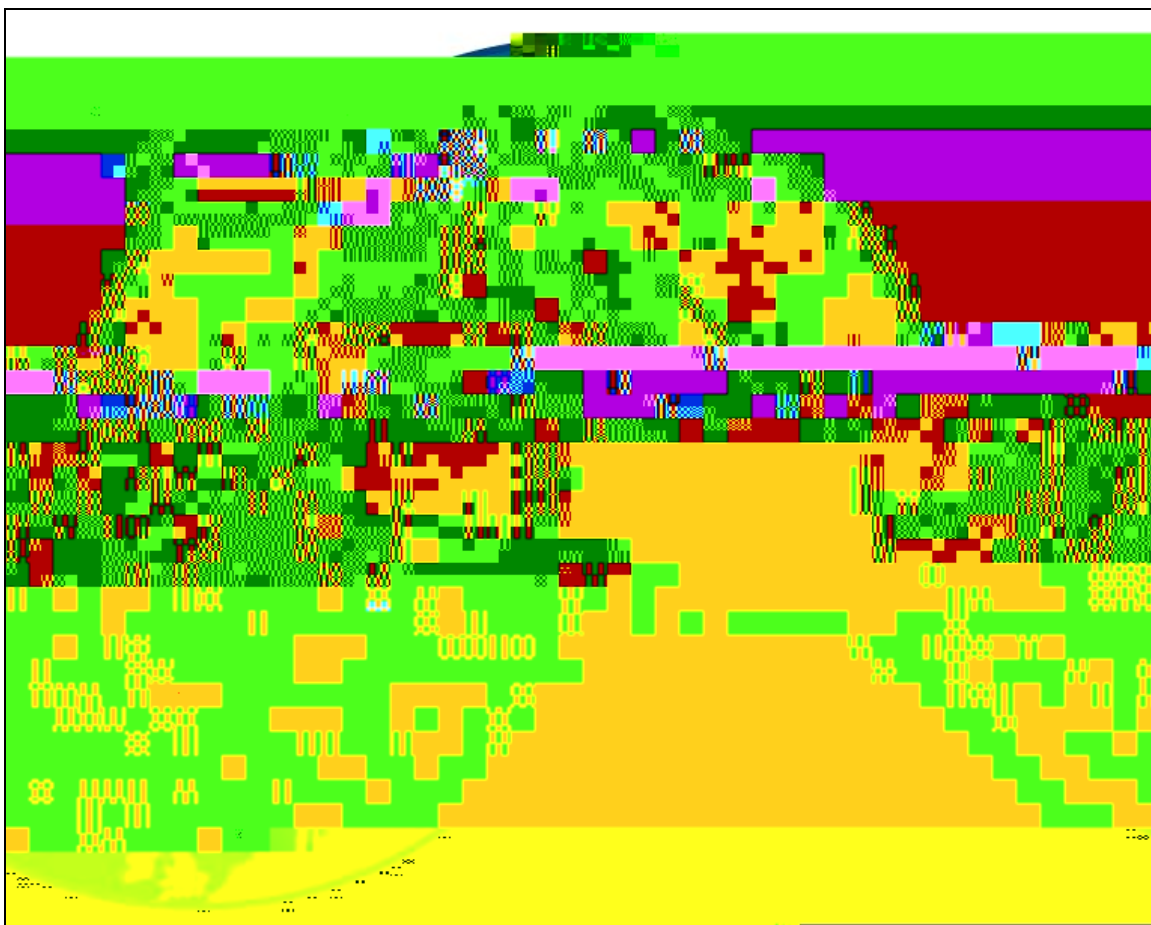
## **2.3 Shipping in the Bering Strait Region**

Arctic marine shipping has been the focus of considerable attention and study in recent years. The most comprehensive study to date is the Arctic Marine Shipping Assessment of 2009, prepared under the auspices of the Arctic Council. The summary Report of this study was adopted by the Arctic Council. The study addresses the full range of relevant topics, including: Arctic marine geography, climate and sea ice; history; governance; current use; scenarios for 2020 and 2050; human dimensions; environmental impacts and infrastructure. The report makes seventeen



**Map 4: Bering Strait Region – Traffic 1 May – 26 October 2010**  
Source: Marine Exchange of Alaska

The Northern Sea Route (NSR), along Russia’s Arctic border from Kara Gate to Bering Strait, has a history which stretches back to 1525, when the idea was first expressed by a Russian diplomat (D. Gerasimov). The first west to east NSR transit was accomplished in 1878-79 by the Swede Nordenskiöld in his ship *Vega*.



**Map 5: Northern Sea Route.**

Source: AMSA

The Northern Sea Route was officially designated as a national seaway of transport and communication in 1990, at which time a set of governance rules were adopted by the Soviet government. The route has the potential benefit of a significant reduction in days at sea in summer for vessels on trans-Arctic voyages. The NSR most importantly facilitates the shipping of natural resources out of the Russian Arctic to global markets. There are, however, significant draught and beam limitations for vessels. Most vessels are escorted in convoy by Russian icebreakers as an integral part of the NSR operational system.

In summer 2011, the tanker *Palva* (DW 74,940 tons) with 59,313 tons of gas-condensate and a speed of 14 knots, made the transit in 6.5 days. On August 30, 2011, the large-capacity tanker *Vladimir Tikhonov* (DW 160,000 tons) completed an NSR transit of 2,200 nautical miles in 7.5 days.

As reported at the workshop, some experts estimate 1000 vessels per year by 2017 and up to 2000 ships by 2021 could pass through the Bering Strait, using the NSR.

## **2.4 Concerns related to increased ship traffic in the Bering Strait**

Along with the increase in traffic are other concerns about the impacts of shipping on marine ecosystems and the people who depend on them for subsistence as well as cultural and spiritual well-being. Issues discussed at the workshop include:

a. Ship spills and accidents

The potential for spills and accidents in this relatively narrow Strait raises serious concerns, given that containment and cleanup operations can remove only a small percentage of oil spilled in the ocean even under the best of circumstances. High winds, poor visibility, sea ice, major storms and the lack of spill response infrastructure in the Bering Strait region will likely render effective response extremely difficult if not impossible, especially if the region is ice-covered. Spills would pose considerable risk to human health given the high levels of marine mammal consumption in the region, the important role of marine mammal oils in local diets, and the potential for contaminants to bioaccumulate in marine mammal blubber. Related issues surround possible measures that could become necessary in the event of a spill to restrict subsistence hunting to protect human health or affected marine animals.

### **3. Workshop Outcomes**

The workshop identified four broad categories of potential activity, including:

1. Communications/outreach;
2. Tools for area protection;
3. U.S./Russia bilateral opportunities; and
4. The polar code for ships being developed by the International Maritime Organization (IMO)

In addition, valuable recommendations were made for a set of miscellaneous activities.

#### **3.1 Communications/Outreach**



## 3.2

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Conservation of Polar Bears, 1973), as well as progress on visa-free travel by indigenous groups were pointed to as examples of local successes.

On a broader level, President Obama and then-President Medvedev issued a joint statement in 2011 signaling their desire to expand on cooperation in the Bering Strait region:

[We] declare an intention to deepen cooperation between the United States of America and the Russian Federation in the cross-boundary Bering Strait region, including the expansion of interaction between the national agencies that are responsible for the specially protected natural territories/areas of both countries in the State of Alaska and the Chukotka Autonomous District, including their commitment to developing a dialogue with native peoples to help determine the specific goals and methods for such cooperation.<sup>6</sup>

Russian participants did point out, however, that the engagement of federal officials (i.e., Moscow) was generally required to produce the appropriate commitment by local or regional governments. It was also noted that the approach of a high level bilateral summit often encourages the signing of lower level agreements.

Several near-term opportunities for strengthening U.S.-Russia cooperation were identified. These include:

- Hold a workshop of Russian local community and indigenous groups, similar to the Nome workshop, in the Chukotka region, drawing on both the participants and the lessons learned from the meeting agenda;
- Seek Russian cooperation on and participation in the development of the above-mentioned voluntary measures for regional shippers, based on information developed on subsistence use. If such measures were to be supported by both governments, the impact is likely to be significant, even if the measures are voluntary in nature. Such an exercise could lead to a "Joint Vessel Traffic Handbook," or a virtual manual. Recent Duma decisions changing the designation of the NSR from a national to an international waterway may create a window of opportunity in this regard;
- Develop a bilateral PSSA proposal to the IMO. A constructive exploratory step in this regard would be to seek bilateral cooperation on the conduct of a preliminary transboundary risk assessment in the Bering Strait region;
- Expand the USCG Port Access Route Study (PARS) to be bilateral;
- Explore opportunities for increased scientific cooperation (difficulties in marine research access approvals have been a constant irritant in scientific research in Russian maritime zones);

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- Explore possible common approaches to the creation of marine buffer zones for Wrangel, Diomedes and St. Lawrence Islands; and
- Explore the possible use of the 1990 U.S.-USSR Agreement on the Beringia transboundary park as a vehicle to promote greater cooperation.

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## **Annexes**

### **Annex 1 - Participants List**

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**Skaridov, Alexander**, Dean of the Law Faculty, Admiral Makarov State Maritime Academy

**Smith, Melanie**, Landscape Ecologist, Audubon Alaska

**Speer, Lisa**, Director International Oceans Program, NRDC

**Springer, Alan**, Marine Ecologist, University of Alaska

**Stishov, Mikhail**, Arctic Biodiversity Coordinator, WWF Russia

**Thomson, Jorgen**, Director of Conservation and Sustainable Development, MacArthur Foundation

**Thurston, Dennis** Bureau of Ocean Energy Management, Alaska Region

**Topkok, Meghan A**, Beringia Center of Culture and Science Intern, Kawerak, Inc.



## Annex 2 – Workshop Agenda

### TUESDAY, 26 JUNE

- |              |  |
|--------------|--|
| 8:30         | Welcome and Introductions<br><i>Denise Michels, Mayor of Nome</i><br><i>Thomas Laughlin, IUCN</i>  |
| 9:15-9:35    | Description of the Areas<br><i>Lisa Speer, NRDC</i>  |
| 9:35-9:55    | Results from Interviews with Bering Strait Region Seal and Walrus Hunters<br><i>Lily Ray, Kawerak</i>  |
| 9:55-10:20   | Shipping Activities<br><i>Lawson Brigham, UAF</i>  |
| 10:20- 10:45 | COFFEE BREAK   |
| 10:45-11:10  | Traffic Patterns<br><i>Ed Page, USCG Ret</i>   |
| 11:10-11:30  | Port Access Route Study (PARS)<br><i>James Houck, USCG</i>   |
| 11:30-12:00  | Indigenous Concerns and Proposed Measures<br><i>Martin Robards, WCS</i><br><i>Vera Metcalf, Kawerak</i>  |
| 12:00 – 1:15 | LUNCH  |
| 1:15-1:35    | Understanding Subsistence Location Dynamics for the Development of New Regulation<br><i>Victoria Gofman, Collaborative Research &amp; Consulting</i> |
| 1:35-1:50    | Multilateral Options-IMO<br><i>Drummond Fraser, Transport Canada, Office of Boating Safety</i>   |
| 1:50-2:05    | Bilateral Options<br><i>Ray Arnaudo, US Department of State</i>  |

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