

Top of the World Telegraph: 1/11/12 column
By Mead Treadwell, Lt. Governor

For Arctic states across the globe, the accessible Arctic Ocean poses the opportunity of a lifetime.

Consider the following: The U.S. Geological Survey estimates that 13% of the world's undiscovered oil and 30% of its undiscovered gas will be found in the Arctic, and six of the eight Arctic nations are already engaging in offshore energy exploration. Sea ice retreat has beckoned major new shipping in the North, and Russia sent at least nine vessels via the Northern Sea Route in 2011. That includes a gas condensate tanker which transited the route in a record eight days. I also recently read that Norway gained approval from Russia to ship liquefied natural gas via the Northern Sea Route, right past Alaska's front door to our traditional customers in Japan. In preparation for this huge opportunity in energy transit, Russia, China, Sweden, Finland, Canada, the European Union, Japan and Korea are beefing up their icebreaker fleets.

The Arctic's energy resources, minerals, tourism and shipping potential make this increasingly accessible region a classic emerging market. Billions of public and private dollars will be invested in its development. New infrastructure will increase our physical access to the Arctic, and commercial expansion will follow.

We are witnessing an exciting Arctic renaissance. Just as the International Polar Year 2007-2009 revealed that the Arctic is not static but is constantly changing, Arctic borders are likewise on the move. Lingering border disputes, issues regarding new territory, and implementation of the Law of the Sea Treaty are among the sovereign challenges we're working to resolve in the region. Among Arctic neighbors, it's an ongoing balancing act between competition and cooperation.

I'm most excited about the cooperation. Through my participation in meetings of the U.S. Arctic Research Commission, the Russian Geographical Society, the Northern Forum, the Northern Research Forum, the Arctic Council and its predecessor, the Arctic Environmental Protection Strategy, I've been privileged to see us build a real neighborhood at the top of the world.

The Arctic needs outside partners who share our vision of opportunity and respect for the people and wildlife that have always lived here. The best partners favor cooperation, transparency and respect as we engage in the rulemaking and resource development of our region, and they bring science and investment to the table. I'm especially proud of the Arctic Council's Arctic Marine Shipping Assessment (AMSA), which was a first-time collaborative effort among eight Arctic nations, gathered to discuss cooperation on safe shipping in their region. As a result, further cooperation is taking place among Arctic partners on multiple fronts to implement the recommendations of AMSA:

- A historic search and rescue agreement was signed at the 7th Annual Arctic Council Ministerial in Nuuk, Greenland in May 2011. The first implementation meeting was a Canadian-led search and rescue exercise that took place just several months following. Such exercises expose our deficiencies in equipment, mapping, ice forecasting, ports and other aids to navigation. They also foster cooperation among military and civil responders in the Arctic neighborhood;
- Arctic partners have advocated that the International Maritime Organization adopt a mandatory polar code to set minimum standards for ships operating in polar waters;
- The Arctic Council is negotiating an international agreement on Arctic marine oil pollution and response;
- Joint discussions on the development and upgrades of common Arctic security infrastructure, including deep-water ports, vessel tracking systems, Polar-class icebreakers, telecommunications and high-resolution mapping and ice imagery, are underway.

Let us hope that these developments lead to the kind of coordinated investment that is the hallmark of the St. Lawrence Seaway System, a model established between the U.S. and Canada for that shared waterway on our common border.

In addition to the international cooperation taking place, the State of Alaska is doing its part to contribute to Arctic infrastructure development and security. The state actively supports the marine safety, life safety, and pending Arctic marine and aviation infrastructure work of the Arctic Council. The state supports, and has offered funds, to help the U.S. Coast Guard's efforts to bring forward basing to Alaska's North Coast. It participates extensively in research fostered by the U.S. Arctic Research Commission at the University of Alaska. The Alaska legislature's Northern Waters Task Force is making recommendations on mitigation strategies, infrastructure, regulatory and research needs in the Arctic. With the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the State of Alaska is conducting a port study to foster investment to establish a deep-water port in Western Alaska. With the Marine Exchange of Alaska, the state is also sponsoring and implementing the Automatic Identification System receiver network which provides location data and advanced warning to emergency responders of all ships approaching state waters.

As the Top of the World Telegraph highlights the historic events in a changing Arctic, I encourage your continued readership and engagement in these significant issues.