

Trip Report: Washington DC Lobbying Trip

Dates: December 12-14, 2022.

The 2023 federal lobbying trip was a joint session of the City of Unalaska, Qawalangin Tribe and the Ounalashka Corporation. This was the second year that the lobbying efforts were coordinated among the three entities, as part of the Trilateral Agreement.

Attendees from this group included:

Vince Tutiakoff Sr, Mayor of Unalaska & Chairman of Ounalashka Corp
Dennis Robinson, Vice Mayor & President of Qawalangin Tribe
Shari Coleman, Council Member
Chris Hladick, City Manager
Natalie Cale, Interim CEO, Ounalashka Corporation
Chris Price, CEO, Qawalangin Tribe
Dianne Blumer, Blumer & Associates
Brad Gilman, Sebastian O'Kelly & Rick Marks, Robertson, Monagle & Eastaugh

On the first day, we met with NOAA Senior Advisors Letise Lefair and Zach Penney to discuss the Heart of the Ocean sanctuary request, submitted by the Aleut Tribe of St. Paul. We emphasized the potential negative impact that designating a large, protected area could be on the Bering Sea fisheries. Ms. Lefair explained the process of such a designation, and that the request met the requirements for filing and that it is currently only in the inventory. Now NOAA will systematically follow the qualifying analysis, including the user group support. The process is likely to take several years.

Next, we met with Janet Coit, the Director of NMFS. Topics included the Heart of the Ocean and bycatch issues. We expressed our concern about the growing popularity to target the Bering Sea trawl fleet as the cause for the YK salmon collapse, and supported the continued need for scientific basis for management decisions. Ms. Coit said that they (NOAA) will be seeing a large federal appropriation soon but will be up to all divisions of NOAA on how the money will be divided.

Later we met with newly elected Representative Mary Peltola. As Rep. Peltola is a freshman member of the House, we broad stroked our community needs and economic position. Knowing that fishery concerns and the low salmon returns for Western Alaska are close to her, we pushed that action for more research and a scientific basis are needed for fundamental fisheries management, and not to focus on targeting the Bering Sea trawl fleet for quick answer.

On the second day, we met with Senator Lisa Murkowski. Sen. Murkowski has been instrumental in funneling federal monies for our channel dredging and geothermal projects in the Omnibus Bill. We expressed our gratitude for her efforts, as these projects will promote economic growth for the community. We also discussed the need for the Crab Fisheries Disaster relief, Arctic development, environmental remediation and fisheries issues. Sen. Murkowski is knowledgeable about our community and shows an undeniable desire to help in our efforts.

On the third day, we first met with Steve Kopecky of the USACE. Projects discussed were the channel dredging (appropriations sitting the Omnibus Bill) and completing of the CEM breakwater. Mr. Kopecky ready to move on the dredging project as soon as the funding passes. The CEM breakwater floats need to be redesigned, but the project was stalled by funding. Mr. Kopecky plans to take another approach with obtaining the monies to finally bring closure to the project.

Senator Dan Sullivan was next. Much of the discussion was focused on military presence in Unalaska, and how the community is poised as a prime location for an Arctic port. Sen Sullivan was excited about the possibility of an icebreaker stationed in Juneau, and a fuel depot in Adak and part of his efforts to position Alaska in the new development and military security of the Arctic. He did not outline anything specifically for Unalaska but did acknowledge our potential.

We travelled to the Pentagon to meet with Greg Pollack of the DoD, Arctic policy. This was more of a familiarization of our community. Mr. Pollack was interested in how we might feel threatened by foreign activities in the area. It was a good engagement and a chance to open some dialogue regarding military operations in the Bering Sea and Arctic Ocean.

We met on the phone with Lara Beasley, Environmental Chief from USACE. The topic was the continued FUDS clean-up operations.

Overall, I feel the lobbying efforts were successful, if for nothing less than making a positive impact on our legislatures and governing agencies. Finally, I want to note that we did hear time and time again how impressed people were that the City, Tribe and Corporation could come together as a united group with goals and motives for bettering the community. It was a highly successful approach to garnering support for projects and interest in the area.