

ALERT

U.S.-Canada Arctic Partnership Calls for Collaboration with Native Americans, Alaska Natives

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HIGHLIGHTS:

- » In early March, the United States and Canada entered into a new partnership to confront the challenges of a changing Arctic.
- » The partnership calls for the involvement of key stakeholders – including Native American and Alaska Native communities – to incorporate science and traditional knowledge into important decision-making, environmental assessments and resource management related to climate change.
- » On March 23, 2016, the U.S. Department of the Interior announced that it will award \$6.5 million to Native Americans and Alaska Natives to promote climate change adaptation and ocean/coastal management planning projects.

President Barack Obama and Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau announced in early March 2016 a new partnership to confront the challenges of a changing Arctic. The partnership calls for the involvement of key stakeholders – including Native American and Alaska Native communities – to incorporate science and traditional knowledge into important decision-making, environmental assessments, and resource management related to climate change. The U.S. and Canada hope to extend this partnership to Mexico in the near future.

U.S. and Canada Arctic Priorities

While the partnership is primarily focused on establishing best practices and regulations for reducing carbon and methane emissions, it also addresses the importance of:

- » building a sustainable Arctic economy
- » ensuring compliance with highest safety and environmental standards
- » developing science-based standards to monitor the impacts of commercial activities
- » conserving Arctic biodiversity
- » addressing the intersection of climate change and security in terms of foreign relations, defense purposes and developmental emergency response measures
- » creating innovative options for housing and infrastructure
- » promoting the development of renewable energy

Criticism of the New Partnership

Many have applauded the partnership of the U.S. and Canada in their plan to move forward with climate change responses in the Arctic. However, Alaska's Governor Bill Walker remains skeptical. In a press release issued on March 10, 2016, Walker expressed concern with the failure of the Obama Administration to consult with and include Alaska stakeholders in planning prior to announcing the objectives of the partnership.

"It is important to consider the interests of all stakeholders in the region – whether it be focused on marine and wildlife preservation, international travel and shipping, or natural resource development," Walker said. "In doing so, we will ensure Alaska and the United States remain at the forefront of a flourishing Arctic economy." After all, he said, Alaska is the "only Arctic region" of the United States.

Funding Available for Combating Climate Change Impacts

The Interior Department's Acting Assistant Secretary – Indian Affairs Lawrence Roberts announced on March 23, 2016, at least \$6.5 million in funding for tribal projects promoting climate change adaptation, as well as ocean and coastal management planning. Of the \$6.5 million provided by the Tribal Climate Resilience Program, \$4 million will be available for climate adaptation planning, \$2 million for ocean and coastal management planning, and at least \$500,000 for youth internships and engagement. The funding announcement followed last year's week-long tour of Alaska by President Obama and members of his administration. The trip included visits to Alaska Native villages that are at the front line of climate change.

Proposals must be submitted on or before May 23, 2016. For more information or assistance with the proposal process, contact a member of Holland & Knight's Native American Law Group.

Information contained in this alert is for the general education and knowledge of our readers. It is not designed to be, and should not be used as, the sole source of information when analyzing and resolving a legal problem. Moreover, the laws of each jurisdiction are different and are constantly changing. If you have specific questions regarding a particular fact situation, we urge you to consult competent legal counsel.

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