

WHAT DO YOU DO WHEN YOUR COMMUNITIES COULD VANISH OVERNIGHT? THE STATE OF ALASKA'S RESPONSE TO SIX COMMUNITIES IN PERIL FROM CLIMATE CHANGE

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What do you do when Climate Change induced coastal erosion, thawing permafrost, and flooding poses imminent threats of loss of life, loss of infrastructure, loss of public and private property, and health epidemics to your coastal communities? Answer: You take Immediate Action in parallel with setting up a process to create a long-term strategy.

The Immediate Action Workgroup of the (Alaska) Governor's Executive Sub-cabinet on Climate Change was established in September 2007 to address known threats to communities caused by increasing coastal erosion and flooding from storm surges due to loss of near shore sea ice during the storm season, thawing permafrost, and fires. What began as a series of scheduled meetings with representatives from state agencies, non-government organizations, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in open, public meetings that successfully encouraged participation by community and tribal representatives, quickly evolved into a collaborative, cooperative working relationship with each participant providing useful information and ideas on innovative ways to expedite projects as well as practical, on-the-ground know-how.

By April 2008 recommendations regarding the actions and policies that should be taken in the next 12 –18 months to prevent loss of life and property in six Alaskan communities was submitted to the Sub-Cabinet. By May state funding was secured with additional federal funding arriving in August to implement the actions. And by September many projects and a planning grant program were well underway.

Originally disbanded after the issuance of their 2008 report, the IAW has been reconstituted to identify the next steps for the original six communities as well as identify the next set of communities needing to be addressed. Lessons from their ongoing process are insightful for

improving coastal resiliency, community planning, and best practices for climate change adaptation.

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