

May 21, 2008

Interior Issues Council - Climate Change Task Force Update

Mission

The Interior Issues Council Climate Change Task Force is a group of citizens and public employees collaborating to establish and build a sustainable climate resilient community through education, public outreach, and borough-wide actions.

The Situation;

We are already observing climate change in interior Alaska and scientists project this to continue. University of Alaska research has observed increased average air temperatures in Alaska over the past 40 years. Based on review of all scientific research to date, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change finds global climate warming “unequivocal.” Regardless of the initial cause of this warming, even with moderate gas emission scenarios, further temperature increases are projected in Alaska over the next 100 years. Two of the three most extensive fire seasons on record occurred in 2004 and 2005 and increasing temperatures will continue to bring more frequent large fire years. Other expected impacts include changes in vegetation, including potential invasive species and changes in wildlife habitat and migrations. Climate change will also bring economic opportunity. Scientists have already observed a 50% increase in growing season in the interior since 1904 and an increase in favorable weather for tourism. In addition, with increasing energy costs, Borough citizens and businesses will benefit from policy and action to implement cost savings and energy efficiency.

Expected climate changes include, but are not limited to be;

In the next century we can expect warmer temperatures, up to an average of 15° F warmer in Dec. and Jan., about 8-10° F warmer in July and August.

In the next 20 years we can expect twice as many 85° F summer days (to about a week total) and then by the end of the century this will double again to almost two weeks of 85 degree days in the summer.

Similarly in the winter, in the next twenty years we can expect the number of days (Dec - Feb) above freezing to increase from 3 to 5 days. By the end of the century, we'll have about 6 days above freezing in this same period, double what we have now.

We can also expect more precipitation year-round, especially late summer. However, because the temps are expected to increase, things will likely still get drier. As a result, we can expect an increase in extreme fire seasons.

We can also expect that flooding will be slightly more likely.

Interior Issues Council Climate Change Task Force 5 milestone plan;

1. Assess the current situation
(We are currently here, and are beginning to work on #2)
2. Prioritize areas that need attention
3. Create an action plan
4. Implement the action plan
5. Monitor the results and make changes as needed

Reports from the work groups;

- Natural resources; Forestry, hydrology, wildlife and fish, air quality, mining, energy production, and soils

- Built environment; vertical component (buildings), and horizontal component (roads, utility corridors, bridges, airports, railroads, sewers, etc.)

- Community Health and Social Services

- Growth and Economic Development

Questions and, hopefully, answers.