

Conceptual and Institutional Frameworks for Protected Areas, and the Status of Indigenous Involvement: Considerations for the Bering Strait Region of Alaska

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Abstract The Bering Strait region of Alaska is a culturally, economically, biologically, and politically important area of the Arctic. Like the rest of the arctic, this area is experiencing rapid and dramatic changes, both climate- and development-related. From the perspective of many indigenous residents, there is a growing need for protections – particularly in relation to the marine environment – in the Bering Strait region. This chapter reviews some of the existing protections that are in place and the status of indigenous involvement in them. The pressing need for additional protected areas is considered in light of the diverse issues and challenges facing the area such as commercial fishing, increasing marine traffic, climate change and resource development. I argue that it is critical to include indigenous residents of the region in the development, creation and maintenance of protected areas. I also argue that effective methods for protection can extend beyond typical western understandings of the nature, process and meaning of protection as defining an area where activities are allowed or prohibited.

Keywords Bering Sea • Alaska • Indigenous • Climate change • Vessel traffic • Fishing

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1 Introduction

The western portion of Alaska is a remote and sparsely populated area in comparison to other regions of the United States. The Seward Peninsula region of Alaska is the westernmost portion of North America and is directly adjacent to the Bering Strait. Despite its comparative remoteness, the Bering Strait region is receiving increased, and in some cases unwanted, attention as an international strait at the center of expanding global marine commerce and resource development, as well as

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