

# **North and West Alaska Cooperative Ecosystem Studies Unit 5-year Strategic Plan**

**August 4, 2004**

## **Introduction**

The North and West Alaska Cooperative Ecosystem Studies Unit (NWA CESU) was added to the national network of CESUs in 2003. The NWA CESU is hosted by the University of Alaska Fairbanks, with nonfederal partners including the University of Alaska Anchorage, University of Alaska Southeast, University of New Hampshire and the Alaska Sealife Center. Federal partners include USDI National Park Service, USDI Bureau of Land Management, USDI Geological Survey-Biological Resources Division, and USDA Forest Service.

Alaska is unique. Within its borders Alaska contains ecosystems ranging from polar arctic to temperate rainforest, maritime to semi arid sand dunes, and 5580 miles of coastline. Its 233 million acres of federal lands (64% of total Alaska acreage) include the highest peak in North America, the largest National Park, and the 2 largest National Forests in the U.S. Alaska is home to 11 distinct Native cultures with 20 languages. Yet this diversity of resources is tied together by Alaska's isolation, its high latitude location, its ecosystem integrity and its political and economic systems. Half of Alaska's 650,000 residents live in three urban areas; the other half of the population is spread out across the state, many residing in communities that are not accessible by the road system. While people have inhabited this area for millennia, and traditional knowledge is extensive, there is a great potential for partnerships between federal agencies and academic partners to advance Western scientific knowledge in Alaska. The NWA CESU sees the opportunity to be proactive in research regarding the Alaska ecosystems, and to be innovative in envisioning educational partnering and mentoring opportunities for both agency managers and Alaska rural students.

## **April 2004 Executive Committee Meeting**

The first NWA CESU executive committee in-person meeting was held April 20 and 21, 2004 at the University Center, Anchorage, Alaska. A goal of this meeting included developing the mission, vision and 5-year strategic plan of the NWA CESU.

## **Mission**

To create a collaborative partnership between academic and federal partners that delivers high quality science and human expertise in Alaska's unique cultures and ecosystems to federal resource management, environmental and research agencies that have responsibilities or interest in northern latitude issues. Specific areas of emphasis are to include circumpolar natural resource, cultural resource and social science, boreal and marine issues.

## Vision

North and West Alaska CESU achieves the highest level of integrity and leadership expertise in unique circumpolar north, boreal and marine ecosystem science critical to the future of state, national and global issues by establishing:

- a) An integrated structural partnership that functions seamlessly to meet science needs
- b) A quality assurance and peer review mechanism that assures the integrity of the process, bringing accurate and current science to bear on policy issues
- c) A collaboration that is publicly visible in making connections and communicating research impacts at the state and national levels
- d) A program that draws from all cultures in Alaska, builds both agency and partner human resource capacity in Alaskan expertise for the future and connects this capacity with the national arena

## Goals

The North and West Cooperative Ecosystem Studies Unit has adopted the following goals:

**Goal 1.** Create an efficient partnership between federal and nonfederal partners that meets science, technical assistance and educational needs in a timely manner

### Action items

1. Create and maintain up-to-date website
2. Develop protocol for efficient use of NWA CESU by partners
3. Refine NWA CESU scope and define research areas of emphasis
4. Design seamless financial flow
5. Seek co-location of offices and staff
6. Implement an annual review to evaluate agency needs and NWA CESU system functioning

**Goal 2.** Design and implement a quality assurance and peer review mechanism that assures the integrity of the process, bringing accurate and current science to bear on policy issues

### Action items

1. Develop a protocol for peer review of projects conducted under the NWA CESU when appropriate

**Goal 3.** Develop outreach program to build awareness and support of NWA CESU through communication of research activities, results and their relevance

### Action items

1. Maintain an accessible database of research projects and publications
2. Create and implement a communication and education strategy

3. Establish standing committees for vision themes
4. Host an annual science symposium highlighting research conducted through the NWA CESU

**Goal 4.** Develop the NWA CESU program into one that draws from all cultures in Alaska, builds both agency and partner human resource capacity in Alaskan expertise, and connects this capacity with the national arena

Action items

1. Add NWA CESU academic partners to meet unique Alaska ecosystem needs
2. Create an “experts guide” of faculty expertise and interests available to federal partners
3. Create process to match nonfederal partners and research opportunities
4. Create an enduring education program that integrates academic, agency, rural Alaskan and Native interests
5. Build bridge between rural areas, the university system and federal job opportunities
6. Explore opportunities for students to intern with federal agencies
7. Develop an agency mentoring program for graduate students
8. Create a storefront where agencies could identify needs and graduate students could identify interests