

Global Warming News from Alaska: October 15, 2005 – **Reporting from Ground Zero**

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Dear Friends,

Best wishes from Alaska.

Since I last wrote, there have been many important developments on the global warming front. In this report, I will highlight the latest scientific developments in Alaska, as well as a report about our latest storm; then I will mention several significant national and international developments. At the end of the report I will summarize recent conferences and mention upcoming events.

Alaska Global Warming News:

1. **Dramatic Glacier Retreat.** One of the world's most visited and photographed glaciers, the magnificent *Mendenhall Glacier near Juneau, lost 656 feet in 2004 and 269 feet this year.* According to University of Alaska glaciologist Roman Motyka, the Mendenhall Glacier could come entirely out of the beautiful lake in front of it “in the next few years or less.” Motyka’s mass-balance measurements demonstrate that the glacier is retreating because less ice is accumulating at the top of the glacier. Approximately 366,000 people visited the Mendenhall Glacier this year. (Anchorage Daily News, October 8, 2005).
2. **Kenai National Wildlife Refuge Drying Significantly.** According to recently published research, the Kenai National Wildlife Refuge has changed dramatically in the last five decades. Methodically comparing aerial photos from 1950 with photos from 1996, Eric Klein and his colleagues found that *wetlands have decreased by 88%, open areas have decreased by 35%, and water/lakes have decreased by 14%.* Bushes, such as dwarf birch and blueberries, have now grown up in areas where wetlands existed for 8,000 to 12,000 years. Co-author Ed Berg notes that “When you dig down into the peat, you don’t see any stems or shrubs. Had they grown there in the past, they would have been preserved.” (Anchorage Daily News, October 4, 2005) Klein further notes that “There is an overall environment shift occurring in Alaska...it’s a bioindicator of climate change and what is happening to the planet as a whole.” (ENS September 28).
3. **Huge Storm Destroys Alaska Shorelines.** While the nation focused on hurricanes in the Gulf of Mexico, Western Alaska experienced a brutal storm in late September, adversely affecting 34 communities. The storm surge in Nome was 9 feet above normal high tides with waves of 12 to 15 feet. Newtok saw 5 to 10 feet of beach disappear along with equipment like a 1,000 gallon fuel tank (Newtok has lost 2 – 3 miles of land between it and the ocean in the last 40 years). Unalakleet lost 10 to 20 feet of beach. (Anchorage Daily News, September 28, 2005).
4. **Arctic Sea Ice Melting Sets Record.** According to scientists at NASA and the National Snow and Ice Data Center, there was a record low amount of sea ice this summer in the

Arctic Ocean. It is as if an area the size of Texas had melted away since 1979. The biological and other ramifications are stunning, and if the sea ice continues to shrink at the same rate, the Arctic Ocean could be completely ice-free well before the end of this century. Notes climate researcher Mark Serezze: "My view is it's getting increasingly difficult to argue against the notion that what we're seeing is a greenhouse gas effect taking hold." (Anchorage Daily News, September 29, 2005)

Key National News –Not So Good News

1. **2005 On Track to Be Hottest On Record.** Using temperature readings from 7,200 weather stations from around the world, climatologists at NASA have concluded that 2005 will be the hottest year on record. Observes scientist Ted Scambos, "Change is really happening in the Arctic"...Because the Arctic helps keep global temperatures down, any warming there can mean "you're going to change (the world's) climate significantly." (Washington Post, October 13, 2005). Alaska is projected to have a winter that is 2 to 3 degrees above normal, according to NOAA. (Anchorage Daily News, October 13, 2005).
2. **It's More Than Temperatures, It's Also Acidification of the Oceans.** A study published in the September 29 issue of Nature analyzed the impacts of greenhouse gas emissions on cold water ecosystems and concluded that if atmospheric carbon dioxide continues to rise, by the end of this century, the entire Southern Ocean and part of the North Pacific would become so corrosive that planktonic mollusks and cold-water corals may not be able to grow their shells. Of note, for every 24 pounds of carbon dioxide that is emitted into the atmosphere, approximately 9 pounds is taken up by the ocean, forming an acid.
3. **Americans Appear to Need More Convincing.** In a Washington Post-ABC survey, 47% said that the problem of climate change must be studied further before government acts, while 41% said it requires immediate action. (Anchorage Daily News, October 2, 2005). (My note: This is why continuing to get the word out about the real, measurable, adverse impacts on Alaska and elsewhere is so important!)
4. **Surprise – US Summit on Global Warming Postponed.** The promised first meeting of the Bush Administration's "alternative" to Kyoto, the Asia-Pacific Partnership on Clean Energy Development, has been (surprise!) postponed. It was scheduled to be held in November. (Duluth News Tribune, October 11, 2005).

Key National News –On the Brighter Side

1. **Many Insurers are supporting measures to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.** (Washington Post, October 10, 2005)
2. **Wall Street, too, is Increasingly Concerned About Global Warming.** Firms like Goldman Sachs and JP Morgan Chase are telling U.S.clients for the first time that climate change poses financial risks.
3. **Researchers make Advances in Thin-film Solar Efficiency.** An inexpensive, flexible plastic made of a polymer blend would revolutionize the solar market, and very recently a

team achieved a solar energy efficiency level of 5.2 percent, meaning that it may be only 4 or 5 years before these solar cells are available to consumers. (Renewable Energy Access, October 12, 2005).

Recent Conferences and other Developments

In the last two weeks, there have been two significant conferences in Alaska that have highlighted global warming: the 8th *World Wilderness Congress* (WWC) and the *Snowchange Conference*. At the WWC, with over 1200 international delegates in attendance, there were two plenary sessions on global warming, including one I had the honor of moderating. At that plenary, Dr. Glenn Juday announced numerous new findings, further reinforcing the scope and magnitude of global warming in Alaska and the world. The proceedings from the WWC conference will be published, and I will announce their availability in a subsequent monthly report. At the Snowchange conference, indigenous peoples from throughout the Arctic attended and spoke about the dramatic adverse impact that global warming is having on their environment and cultures. Susanne Fleek was very involved in the conference. A report will be issued, and, once again I will notify you when it is available.

Virtual March on Congress – Please Sign Up. I hope that you will take an opportunity to sign up for the: Stop Global Warming Virtual March on Washington”. www.StopGlobalWarming.org. When you do so, please read Senator John McCain’s travel log from his trip to Alaska and Canada – which convinced all of the members of his trip (Senators Clinton, Collins, and Graham) that global warming is real and happening now. www.stopglobalwarming.org/campaigns/sgw/newsroom. Indeed, Alaska IS the evidence. We just need to continue to get the story out.

Save the Date: During the first full week of February (6th through 9th), there will be an excellent series of global warming presentations at Alaska’s largest environmental conference, the *Alaska Forum for the Environment*. Mark the date and join over 1200 people from throughout Alaska and the nation who will be focusing on this issue.

Best wishes to all of you. Together we can address one of the, if not the, greatest threats to Alaska, the nation, and the world.

Yours,

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