



EXECUTIVE OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT
COUNCIL ON ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20503

CHAIRMAN

May 9, 2014

The Honorable Lisa Murkowski
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Murkowski:

Thank you very much for taking the time to share your concern about the challenges facing the Alaska native Village of Shishmaref in your January 16, 2014 letter. I share your concerns for the future of this community and others like them. Members of my staff, along with staff from the White House Domestic Policy Council and Office of Intergovernmental Affairs and the Department of the Interior's Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), were also able to meet with representatives from Shishmaref during their time in Washington, and we are looking into how we can best address their requests. The Department of Interior's Office of the Deputy Secretary also hosted the Shishmaref representatives during their time in Washington, and the Office of the Assistant Secretary – Indian Affairs was represented at that meeting.

I agree with you that the challenges that Shishmaref and other Alaskan villages face are immense and warrant direct attention. The BIA has provided assistance in the past¹ and continues to pursue funding to help the Village of Shishmaref address the impact of climate change. As you know, the Department of Interior has led the development of an Integrated Arctic Management approach to address complex interagency and intergovernmental needs such as this. We hope that this framework will help all the involved parties advance a shared solution. We will be happy to work further with your office, the State of Alaska, Alaska natives, and other partners to determine roles and responsibilities in this regard.

As you know, many Federal programs that would provide the type of assistance the Shishmaref are seeking may be challenging to access for this community due to the local matching funds they require. That being said, we are committed to identifying available options to assist the people of Shishmaref as much as possible within existing executive authorities. To that end, we appreciate your support of enhanced funding included in the FY14 budget for the BIA to support the efforts of Tribes and Alaska Native Corporations to plan for and adapt to climate change in communities like Shishmaref. We are working with BIA and other agencies to utilize those funds in a way that provides the capacity and resources necessary to protect the most vulnerable communities from the worst effects of changing climatic conditions.

Additionally, one of the key tenets of the President's Climate Action Plan is supporting communities as they prepare for the impacts of climate change. As Acting Chair of the Council on Environmental Quality, I am committed to fulfilling President Obama's agenda, which includes implementing this plan and working to preserve our Nation's natural and cultural resources for many generations to come. One of the actions the Administration has taken to help us remove barriers to Federal assistance for communities across the country is the establishment of the State, Local, and Tribal Leaders Task Force on

¹ Title IV BIA funds for design of an erosion-control project in the Village of Shishmaref were provided from FY05 to FY07. As of Dec 2011, the Village of Shishmaref is a part of the Kawerak Consortium, who now have an agreement with the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) for the funding of their Tribal Transportation Program (TTP), including docks and waterways, and related erosion-control projects. Also, the BIA Regional Office recently submitted a Notice of Intent (NOI) for Emergency Relief for Federally Owned Roads (ERFO) funding for 17 west coast Alaskan Native communities damaged in the storms of November 2013, and the Village of Shishmaref is one of those communities.



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Climate Preparedness and Resilience through EO 13653, which I co-chair. The Task Force held its first meeting in Washington D.C. on December 10, 2013, with a focus on disaster preparedness and response, and their second meeting, which was held February 13, 2014 in Los Angeles, focused on built systems and infrastructure.

Alaska natives are represented on the Task Force by Mayor Reggie Joule of the Northwest Arctic Borough. The voice of Alaskans and Alaskan natives is critical to develop a climate preparedness strategy that is designed to meet the needs of all Americans, not just those in the lower 48. I am certain Mayor Joule shares your concerns, and will bring them to the Task Force for consideration. The Task Force is scheduled to provide recommendations to President Obama by November 1 of this year. These recommendations will focus on how the Federal Government can and should:

- Remove barriers, create incentives, and otherwise modernize Federal programs to encourage investments, practices, and partnerships that prioritize resources and facilitate increased resilience to climate impacts;
- Provide useful climate preparedness tools and actionable information for states, local communities, and tribes, including through interagency collaboration; and
- Otherwise support state, local, and tribal preparedness for and resilience to climate change.

In the meantime, BIA remains in contact with Village representatives, and they are working with them on the concerns raised in the January meeting. Representatives of the Village of Shishmaref indicated to BIA that they are still evaluating the efforts that should be undertaken to address their situation. We will continue working with the Village representatives and other partners to identify a path forward. We look forward to working with you to help the people of Shishmaref, and other Alaska native communities, meet these complex challenges associated with climate change while still maintaining their traditional ways of life.

Thank you again for your interest in combatting the coastal erosion threatening Shishmaref and native communities throughout Alaska.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Michael J. Boots".

Michael J. Boots
Acting Chair

cc: Elizabeth Klein, Associate Deputy Secretary, Department of Interior
Kevin K. Washburn, Assistant Secretary – Indian Affairs, Department of Interior