

Opening Remarks

Peggy O'Dell, Deputy Director for Operations, National Park Service, Washington, D.C., U.S.

Good Morning....on behalf of the National Park Service, welcome to the 2011 Beringia Days International Conference. Let me begin by thanking you all for being here, and a special thank you to Mayor Michels for her warm welcome to Nome. In fact, I have been so warmly welcomed to Nome that it is hard for me to believe that it can ever get so cold outside.

Nome is at the very center of the international Beringia region, and I am pleased to be here for the first time. This is also the first time that this conference is being held in this delightful city on the edge of the Bering Sea. We are honored to have our colleagues from Chukotka join us this year, and we thank them again for hosting us at the last Beringia Days in 2009 in Anadyr. Your participation is crucial to the success of this conference.

I also want to acknowledge the unprecedented number of participants this year from villages in the Beringia region, both in Alaska and in Chukotka. Your willingness to travel here and to devote your time and energy to this conference is greatly appreciated; we look forward to hearing your views and engaging in discussions with you.

The Beringia Program was created in 1991 at a joint summit between Presidents George H. W. Bush and Mikhail S. Gorbachev to celebrate and protect the shared natural and cultural resources of Alaska and Chukotka. Today, in the face of political, geographical and environmental changes, this program continues to stand as an example of international cooperation between local residents, scientists, educators and governments. At Beringia Days, we highlight these

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partnerships and projects and explore ways in which we can deepen cooperation and collaboration between our two countries.

This is the 20-year anniversary of the Shared Beringian Heritage Program. Over the years, the funding provided by the National Park Service through the Shared Beringian Heritage Program has advanced both scientific and cultural, governmental and non-governmental initiatives between Alaska and Russia – far beyond expectations. The U.S.-Russia partnerships created through this program have proved to be lasting, widespread and resilient. Today we can say that work accomplished through the Shared Beringian Heritage Program has not only strengthened ties between our respective governments, but has created educational links and even reunited families.

As a testament to the breadth and success of the Beringia Program, in response to our 2012 Request for Proposals, we received 19 proposals ranging from reindeer to murrelets on the scientific side, and from dancing to eco-

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The Beringia Program is, at its heart, about this region and the people who live here, on both sides [of the Bering Strait]. The program would not be sustainable without support and involvement from Beringia residents in Alaska and in Chukotka. By being here, in this place at this time, we are recommitting ourselves to involving the people of Beringia on both sides of the Bering Strait in the projects, activities and planning of the Beringia Program.

tourism on the cultural side. We are proud of the accomplishments and benefits realized through this program and look forward to continued and productive projects and partnerships with our American and Russian collaborators.

Several themes stand out at Beringia Days this year, and I would like to touch on two of them. Both are a wonderful complement to themes that the National Park Service is emphasizing nationally as we prepare to begin our second century of conservation and stewardship a few years from now. The connections between parks and communities are integral to our success. So too is engaging youth to learn and care about what the National Park Service does. Here in Nome, Superintendent Jeanette Pomrenke is doing a superb job, bringing creative energy and thought to how the National Park Service can be a more meaningful presence with local residents who care passionately about the landscapes and cultural history we help protect.

One theme this year is the involvement of local residents. As one of the world's truly ancient crossroads, Nome is an ideal and symbolic venue to discuss cooperation between nations, regions and colleagues. The decision to hold the conference here this year was due in part to a desire to increase and deepen involvement in the Beringia Program by the people who actually live in Beringia. The Beringia Program is, at its heart, about this region and the people who live here, on both sides. If the residents of Beringia are not an integral part of this program and its projects, then we have not met the goals envisioned in 1991 when the program was created. The program would not be sustainable without support and involvement from Beringia residents in Alaska

and in Chukotka. By focusing on local involvement and indigenous participation, we ensure the continuing relevance of the program and the durability of the ties developed in the past 20 years. Once again, I would like to thank the people of Nome, and especially our partners at Kawerak, for welcoming us to the region. By being here, in this place at this time, we are recommitting ourselves to involving the people of Beringia on both sides of the Bering Strait in the projects, activities and planning of the Beringia Program.

The second theme I would like to mention briefly today is this year's inclusion of young people in Beringia Days. We are including them in several new and important ways. As you may have seen on the agenda, a special "Youth Showcase" session is scheduled after lunch today. This session will highlight Beringia projects involving youth. In addition, a Youth Forum is being held concurrent to the main conference. The Youth Forum will conclude with recommendations for future Beringia projects, which the youth will present to you during a session tomorrow afternoon before the close of our conference.

A number of the youth you will meet here were nominated and selected by their communities to participate in the Youth Forum. I congratulate these young people on their achievements, and I congratulate their parents and communities for encouraging and supporting these young leaders.

I cannot emphasize enough how important youth are to the future of Beringia. We are turning to the future, both figuratively and literally, by engaging local youth in Beringia projects and in program planning. We must recognize and nurture the involvement of young community leaders. Please join me in welcoming and engaging the youth participating at this year's Beringia Days.

The Beringia Program and this event represent the enduring friendship between our two nations in general and the inhabitants of this region in particular. Our time together these next two days provides an opportunity to

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discuss the future of cooperation to promote our shared heritage. With the increased attention to the region brought by the recent presidential declaration, we have the opportunity to inform people in both countries about the phenomenal resources and people located in the Beringia region. We also have the opportunity to show concrete examples of our greatest challenges – things such as climate change and associated environmental and cultural changes; sustainable, safe resource development; and the decline of traditional indigenous culture in the age of technology and rapid, impactful change. While these challenges can seem overwhelming, it is my sincere hope that the residents of Beringia and the participants in this program in both the U.S. and Russia will continue to work together successfully to address these and other challenges with a common purpose, mutual trust and continuing mutual support.

Thank you.



Irina Ryabukhina, Head, Committee for Sports and Tourism, Chukotka Autonomous Okrug, Russia

Hello, from the people of Chukotka! On behalf of the Chukotka government, I would like to express our greetings. It should be noted that this meeting of the Beringia Days Conference consolidates the ties between the two northern regions of Russia and the United States. Our regions are not only common in geographical location but also share the same ecological, cultural and social traits. Our common desire for collaboration will help diversity in the arctic north.