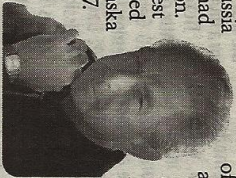


# Beringia

*For years the Federal government has been coordinating with Russia to create an International protected area (IPA) called "Beringia" that could include millions of acres within Alaska and the Russian Far East.*



By Dave Harbour

The Presidents of the United States and Russia in 1990 found they had something in common. Their common interest evolved from the United States purchase of Alaska from Russia in 1867. Because of Alaska, both countries now share an interest in the Arctic.

The two leaders found they were comfortable discussing a celebration of their Arctic lands, people and cultures. After all, they were situated on both sides of the Bering Strait on Asian and North American continents once joined by an ancient 'land bridge'.

That conversation between Mikhail Gorbachev and George H.W. Bush evolved into a "Shared Bering Strait region" created by Congress in 1991 to establish stronger ties between the residents, cultures and resources of the Russian Far East and Alaska. These areas encompass monster land masses surrounding the ancient and now submerged land bridge.

After spending many hours reading, researching and talking with contacts in various federal and Alaska state agencies, I find that 22 years later the concept of Beringia is alive and well.

In May 2011 Russian and American presidents issued a joint statement, "Calling for protection of the shared natural and longstanding cultural heritage of Alaska and Chukotka." Chukotka is the region immediately across from Alaska on Russia's Far Eastern border. While the statement made pronouncements about the Native people, culture and a common boundary, it also made clear an objective of being, "Consistent of the importance of cooperation to protect nature

and natural resources in the Bering Strait region and to apply effective strategies aimed at sustainable development of the Arctic regions of our countries." The statement also pays homage to "climate change" and other pressures on the common natural and cultural heritage of the Bering Strait region.

The Parnell Administration in both its Juneau and Washington D.C. offices has been keeping track of the Beringia program. Judging from a letter sent to then-Secretary of State Hillary Clinton on September 7, 2012, I sense that the Alaska governor was deeply concerned about seeing federal decrees affecting Alaska.

In the letter to Clinton, Parnell said the feds had not kept Alaska informed. He said that while he agreed with the cultural value of working together, that he does "remain concerned that designation of a new international protected area might limit the economic opportunity for rural Alaskans in the region. For example, such a designation could complicate future easement negotiations for the Red Dog Mine road, which runs through Cape Krusenstern National Monument."

The next day, on September 8, Clinton and her counterpart, Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, "...formally stated their intention to 'bridge' the Beringia Strait in a symbolic linkage of parks and lands." They also agreed to adopt a formal agreement before the 2013 New Year.

While the formal agreement hasn't been adopted, in January Russian Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev decreed creation of "Russian National Park, "Beringia", in the northeast area of Chukotka which the United States National Park Service (NPS) says in its literature, "...makes federal lands available on the Russian side for inclusion in an International Protected Area spanning the Bering Strait."

The land masses which the Russian and US diplomatic missions wish to unite are massive. The Russian contribution would be 4.5 million acres in the new Beringia Heritage National Park. Among the "most reasonable candidates" being considered by the NPS are the 6.5 million acres of Noatak National Preserve, 2.6 million acres in the Bering Land Bridge National Preserve, 1.7 million acres of the Kobuk Valley National Park and .6 million acre Cape Krusenstern Na-

tional Monument.

A humble writer's observations:

• Are Washington bureaucrats thinking of contributing more to the Beringia protected area than the Russians?

• Is the Administration seeking to put this matter before the Senate in the format of a treaty?

• Will the final agreement cover a number of agenda and/or an action plan that affects Alaska's ability to economically survive?

• Will the final agreement hurt or help human and natural resource activity and affect the public interest or national security or potential job creation throughout Alaska and the United States?

• Will Beringia rules in fact protect our parks and preserves more than they are now?

• How will the State of Alaska - in addition to our citizens on the northwestern coast - be full and active participants in this process?

The process is moving forward. This month, a delegation of federal officials and a few Alaska villagers will be flying a chartered plane across the Bering Sea to Anadyr, capitol of Chukotka, to join with citizens there in celebrating "Beringia Days" where it is assumed that there will be coordinating meetings and that understandings will be reached.

I honestly join with those who celebrate family relationships, ancient cultures and international goodwill.

But as an Alaskan I have to ask how this effort might be coordinated and how it will affect me and other Alaskans.

# Proposed Transboundary Area of Shared Beringian Heritage

Alaska Region  
National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior

Proposed Chukotskiy National Park Units	
Unit	Area (in km <sup>2</sup> )
Kolyuchinskiy	5,368
Chegitunskiy	3,124
Dezhnyovskiy	574
Mechegmenskiy	4,893
Providenskiy	4,240
<b>Total</b>	<b>18,199</b>

Established Alaska National Park Units	
Unit	Area (in km <sup>2</sup> )
Bering Land Bridge	11,269
Cape Krusenstern	2,628
<b>Total</b>	<b>13,897</b>



