

# Native American Rights Fund

## Indigenous Peoples' Rights

<https://www.narf.org/cases/bering-sea-elders-group/>

## Campaign and Advocacy

An alliance of thirty-nine Yupik and Inupiaq villages that seeks to protect the sensitive ecosystem of the Bering Sea, the subsistence lifestyle, and the sustainable communities that depend on it.

Status: Active

The Bering Sea Elders Group is an alliance of thirty-nine Yupik and Inupiaq villages that seeks to protect the sensitive ecosystem of the Bering Sea, the subsistence lifestyle, and the sustainable communities that depend on it. NARF has designed a comprehensive plan to help this group of Alaska Native villages in their efforts to protect the area and become more engaged in its management. Subsistence is the inherently sustainable Native philosophy of taking only what you need. There are often no roads and no stores in rural Alaska, and so no other group of people in the United States continues to be as intimately connected to the land and water and as dependent upon its vast natural resources as Alaskas indigenous peoples.

NARF has been working with the Elders Group in their negotiations with the bottom trawl industry. These negotiations have resulted in the creation of a Working Group which will study various issues including seafloor habitat and subsistence uses of the area and make recommendations about changes that need to be made.

To read the Elders Groups publication, *The Northern Bering Sea: Our Way of Life*, which describes extensive areas where Alaska Native hunters and local fishermen harvest marine resources, visit [the Bering Sea Elder Groups website](#).

On December 9, 2016, President Obama signed a landmark [Executive Order](#) creating the Northern Bering Sea Climate Resilience Area. This was an incredible victory for the Bering Sea Elders Group, and the first protections of its kind for tribes anywhere in the United States.

The Executive Order established an important set of policies aimed at protecting the Alaska Native subsistence way of life in the face of increasing effects of climate change. It also, for the first time, created a formal role for the regions tribes in federal decision-making, so as to ensure that Native voices continue to be heard as they deal with the increasing pressure on their resources. The Executive Order elevated the voice of Alaska Native tribes and the role of indigenous knowledge in decisionmaking within the region by establishing a Federal Task Force on the Northern Bering Sea Climate Resilience Area (Bering Task Force) and directed the Task Force to establish and engage in regular consultation with a Bering Intergovernmental Tribal Advisory Council, which would have been primarily tribal government representatives with participation from Federal, state, and local officials for coordination purposes. As the White House noted, [t]ogether, these two groups will guide the incorporation of valuable traditional knowledge and science into Federal resource management in the northern Bering Sea region, thus preserving this unique ecosystem and the indigenous peoples who rely upon it. The entire Executive Order can be found here: <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2016/12/09/executive-order-northernbering-sea-climate-resilience>.

However, to our great disappointment, on April 28, 2017, President Trump signed an executive order called Implementing an America-First Offshore Energy Strategy. While the order was aimed at re-opening Arctic and Atlantic areas for offshore drilling, it also entirely revoked our Executive Order 13754. This reversal occurred without notice and despite all indications that the suite of northern Bering Sea protections including the focus on the role of Tribes in future decisions were not in danger.

BSEG responded immediately in the media and worked to restore the important conservation, economic, and cultural provisions that we achieved. After his election, the Bering Sea Elders Group asked President Biden to reinstitute the Northern Bering Sea Climate Resilience Area. We are proud to say that on his first day in office, President Biden signed an Executive Order on Protecting Public Health and the Environment and Restoring Science to Tackle the Climate Crisis. In this order was express language reinstating Executive Order 13754 and the Northern Bering Sea Climate Resilience Area. The entire Executive Order can be found here:

<https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/presidentialactions/2021/01/20/executive-order-protecting-public-health-and-environment-and-restoring-science-to-tackle-climate-crisis/>.

NARF and BSEG continue to work daily with the coalition of Tribes and Tribal Organizations in the Bering Sea on efforts to work with the Biden Administration on the implementation of the reinstated Executive Order 13754, specifically the creation of the Bering Sea Intergovernmental Tribal Advisory Council and the integration of Traditional and Indigenous knowledge into federal decision making processes. The Tribes in the broad Bering Sea region have formed the Tribal Advisory Council (TAC) and the TAC had its first inperson meeting in June 2022. Plans are in the works for the next meeting in fall 2022.

In addition to work implementing the Executive Order, NARF continues to assist BSEG with a variety of other programmatic work.

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