Meeting purpose: Discuss FY2016 budget allocation and priorities for the year, plan for big annual meeting in April 2016, consider application from Aleut Community of St. Paul to join Steering Committee.

Roll Call and Introductions
Carol Fairfield – Steering Committee Chair, Bureau of Ocean Energy Management
Tahzay Jones – Steering Committee Vice Chair, National Park Service
Karen Pletnikoff – Steering Committee Chair, Aleutian Pribilof Islands Association
Grant Hilderbrand – Steering Committee, U.S. Geological Survey
Jeremy Littell – Steering Committee (alternate), USGS Alaska Climate Science Center
Shannon Fitzgerald – Steering Committee, NOAA
Jeff Williams - Steering Committee, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service
Robb Kaler, Steering Committee, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service
Chris Price – Steering Committee, Qawalangin Tribe of Unalaska
Melissa Good – Steering Committee, Alaska Sea Grant
Aaron Poe – Staff, Science Coordinator
Douglas Burn – Staff, Coordinator
Lauren Divine – Aleut Community of St. Paul
Amanda Robertson – Coordinator, Northwest Boreal LCC
Libby Logerwell – NOAA
Susanne McDermott – NOAA
Pamela Lestenkof – Aleut Community of St. Paul Island

Review and approval of agenda
Agenda was adopted without revision

Steering Committee Membership
On December 3, 2015, Amos Philemonoff Sr., President of the Aleut Community of St. Paul Island (ACSPI) wrote to request admission to the ABSI Steering Committee. Both Lauren Divine and Pamela Lestenkof, who are co-directors of the ACSPI Ecosystem Conservation Office, were able to participate in the meeting. After some discussion, the ACSPI was welcomed to the Steering Committee without objection. The tribe will be represented by Lauren, with Pamela serving as an alternate.

Someone asked about the State of Alaska, who did not send anyone to the meeting. Doug responded by saying that they had been invited to attend. We continue to encourage the State to join the ABSI Steering Committee.

Funding outlook for FY2016
Doug briefly recounted the saga of the House and Senate appropriations bills for the Department of Interior, which had initially called for approximately a 50% reduction across the LCC Network. The omnibus bill passed in December 2015 only reduced funding to the Network by $1M, however. During several planning sessions, the four Alaska-based LCCs (ABSI, Arctic, Northwest Boreal, and Western
Alaska) had put together a recommended allocation plan that would allow ABSI to cover salary, administrative, and travel costs, as well as funding our two highest priority operations: a sea otter vulnerability assessment in the Aleutians ($50K) and sponsorship of the Aleutian Life Forum ($20K).

Doug said that this process differed from past years in that rather than having our LCC budget determined by Washington DC, the Alaska Region of the FWS had the latitude to recommend how our allocation would be distributed here. Grant asked if this represented a new business model for the LCC Network, and Doug replied that he didn’t think it would be likely that we would revert to the old system of budget allocation. He added that the next challenge would be to influence how much money comes to the Alaska Region to support our four LCCs. Amanda Robertson, Coordinator of the Northwest Boreal LCC, pointed out that in previous years, the Arctic and Western Alaska LCCs had been accustomed to getting more funding, and that may not be the case in future years.

Karen asked if the Alaska LCCs were still focused on outreach and delivery of science eproducts was still a priority. She added that the upcoming coastal resiliency workshops (beginning with Nome in May 2016) would provide a venue for two-way communication, information sharing, and identification of shared priorities.

Tahzay asked whether an emphasis on multi-LCC priorities might leave some things behind. Doug replied that it’s a matter of balancing the two, and that if something is a high priority for a single LCC, it’s not going to get left behind. Doug suggested the Steering Committee consider planning for a meeting in the fall to discuss priorities for F2017 so that we would be prepared for the budget allocation conversation next year.

**Vulnerability Assessments (VA)**

Aaron summarized the purpose of our vulnerability assessments as an effort to identify which species vulnerable, as well as why they are vulnerable. Vulnerability assessments combine exposure and sensitivity to estimate risk, which is then mitigated by adaptive capacity to arrive at overall vulnerability.

**Aleutian and Bering Climate Vulnerability Assessment (ABCVA)**

Aaron briefly recounted the history of the ABCVA, which brought together a team of 26 subject matter experts. This VA identified the major climate drivers and species of concern, as well as 35 priority climate-related research questions and data gaps. In FY2015 ABSI focused its Request for Proposals (RFP) on four of these questions, funding one last year and another this year.

Aaron also highlighted the work of the seabird team that conducted a geospatial analysis of climate projections and Important Bird Areas (IBAs). The work was funded by outside soruces, and identified areas of future change that may be of importance to bird populations. Melanie Smith of Audobon is scheduled to present the results of this work on Wednesday during the Alaska Marine Science Symposium (AMSS).

**Invasive and Introduced Species**

Our project with the Alaska Natural Heritage Program (newly renamed as the Alaska Center for Conservation Science) was completed recently. This project created geospatial data layers for 17 species of terrestrial mammals that occur in the ABSI region. Each species was assigned an “invasiveness score” that considered multiple criteria. The Norway Rat received the highest score, as it occurs on numerous islands, is difficult to eradicate, and can have profound impacts on nesting seabirds. Foxes, mice, and feral cats were other high-scoring species.

**Marine Vessel Traffic**
Doug presented an update on this project, adding that he would be giving a presentation about the results on Wednesday at AMSS. Of particular note was that the five Areas to be Avoided in the Aleutians took effect on January 1, 2016. He also added that ABSI collaborated with members of industry (Alaska Chadûx, the Alaska Maritime Prevention and Response Network) and the Arctic Domain Awareness Center (ADAC) at the University of Alaska Anchorage to submit a proposal to the North Pacific Research Board to expand our work beyond the Aleutians.

Contaminants and Pollutants
Aaron described our ongoing work with the faculty at the University of Alaska Anchorage, and more recently the FWS Anchorage Fish and Wildlife Field Office and the Alaska Maritime National Wildlife Refuge. This work is pulling together disparate contaminant data sets from across the ABSI region, and will support a mercury synthesis for this area. This effort involves no new data collection.

Future Integration – “Open Standards for the Practice of Conservation”
Amanda Robertson delivered an overview of Open Standards for the Practice of Conservation (OS). The OS were initiated by 13 environmental NGOs, and are now in use by approximately 80 organizations including state wildlife agencies. OS was used by the World Wildlife Fund and The Nature Conservancy to develop a Strategic Action Plan for the Bering Sea Ecoregion (2004). The ABSI staff is proposing to focus our April 2016 meeting on a facilitated workshop to apply OS to the integration of our four vulnerability assessments.

The application of OS uses the following steps:
1. Summarize what you want to conserve
2. Understand current & desired condition
3. Identify and rank threats
4. Develop a general model of socioeconomic-ecological system
5. Identify strategies based on the general model
6. Define theories of change to show how strategies will work
7. Implement the strategies, checking as you go
8. Adjust

To illustrate the process, Amanda presented an example of marine turtle bycatch in commercial fisheries. The application of OS at landscape scales is functionally equivalent to Landscape Conservation Design (LCD). Amanda added that LCD is more than just “landscape planning,” and that the end goal is landscape conservation.

Amanda also described how OS can be scaled to fit agendas of different duration. Because we have done a lot of the foundational work in ABSI, a 1-2 day workshop agenda would be feasible. Doug added that we could take a “modular” approach, initially focusing on what we know the most about first in order to learn the process. Amanda added that the use of OS makes decisions transparent and understandable.

Karen asked if the process could also identify financial gaps (it can). Jeremy added that the success of a process like this critically depends on the SC commitment back to their respective agencies. Amanda added that it can be a challenge to implement OS when it’s just one person sitting at the table. Doug suggested that perhaps the LCC core staff could help carry the results back to the partner organizations. Aaron added that conducting briefings with key staff could also be helpful.

There was some general discussion that ended with agreement to focus our April 2016 Steering Committee meeting on applying OS to our work in ABSI.
Atka Mackerel presentation
Susanne McDermott (NOAA) gave a presentation on “Atka Mackerel Abundance in the Aleutian Islands.” Atka mackerel are a prey species of Steller sea lions, and NOAA has invested considerable effort investigating the role of prey type and abundance in the decline of that species. Atka Mackerel have the largest biomass in the Aleutian Islands commercial fishery, and several areas were opened to fishing in the Western Aleutians in 2015. The research program includes tagging thousands of Atka mackerel, and also tagging Steller sea lions to look at foraging areas. Preliminary results of these studies indicate that there may be more overlap between sea lions and the Atka mackerel fishery than previously thought. One missing link in the picture is fish abundance in shallow water where the charter vessel cannot sample. NOAA is also using an underwater stereoscopic camera to survey and measure Atka mackerel with mixed results so far.

Coastal Resilience Workshop Update
The first Coastal Resilience Workshop is schedule for May 2016 in Nome, Alaska. The second will be held in Unalaska during the same week of the Aleutian Life Forum (August 15, 2016). Other workshops in King Salmon and Kotzebue are tentatively schedule for later in 2016. Aaron vowed that he would send the Coastal Resilience brochure to the Steering Committee “…if it is the last thing I do.” Chris encouraged everyone to help spread the word about the Aleutian Life Forum, and invite people to participate. The “Call for Abstracts” would go forth soon. Given that funding is limited, some sort of official letter of invitation to participants might help with their justification to attend.

April Meeting Preparation
Doug and Aaron planned to meet with Ian Dutton to see if he would be interested and available to help coach us through the application of OS to the integration of ABSI vulnerability assessments. Doug would send a Doodle Poll to get the meeting scheduled and also find a suitable location.

Wrap-up and Action Items
- Send letter to Aleut Community of St. Paul Island welcoming them to the ABSI Steering Committee.
- Send “Climate-Smart” training class information to Steering Committee.
- Send Open Standards handouts to attendees not present in person.
- Send Coastal Resilience brochure to Steering Committee.
- Set dates for April Steering Committee meeting.

Aaron reminded everyone that the ABSI social event would be Wednesday night from 6:00 – 8:00 PM at the Axiom Consulting offices.

Meeting adjourned at 12:00 noon