

**DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY  
U.S. ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS**

**COMPLETE STATEMENT OF**

**COLONEL PHILLIP J. BORDERS  
COMMANDER, ALASKA DISTRICT  
U.S. ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS**

**BEFORE**

**SUBCOMMITTEE ON COAST GUARD AND MARITIME  
TRANSPORTATION**

**UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

**ON**

**The Cost of Doing Nothing: Maritime Infrastructure Vulnerabilities in  
an Emerging Arctic**

**May 8, 2019**

## INTRODUCTION

Chairman Maloney, Ranking Member Gibbs and distinguished members of the subcommittee, I am Colonel Phillip J Borders, Commander of U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Corps) Alaska District. Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to discuss the role of the Corps in support of commercial navigation in the Arctic. The Corps works in collaboration with other federal agencies, and with state, local, and tribal entities on this issue.

I will provide you an overview of the involvement of the Corps in Alaska's port development, and an update on our soon to be published Draft Integrated Feasibility Report and Environmental Assessment for the Port of Nome Modification study.

## THE CORPS OF ENGINEERS NAVIGATION PROGRAM IN ALASKA

Since 1902, when Congress authorized the Corps to perform preliminary examinations of Wrangell Channel in southeast Alaska, the Corps has played an important role in support of commercial navigation in the state. Due to few connections to Alaska's road system, many of the state's coastal communities rely on ports and airports for transportation. The Corps of Engineers has improved the channels at 62 ports in Alaska over the last 117 years. Fifty-seven of these ports are in use today. The Corps recently completed projects to deepen the ports of Valdez and Port Lions.

A 2013 Corps report, entitled "Alaska Deep Draft Arctic Port System Study", noted that "[m]ore than 3,000 vessels use the Great Circle route through Alaska's Unimak Pass each year and there are over 400 Bering Strait transits annually. The opening of Arctic waters to maritime traffic is presenting new challenges with respect to maritime safety and environmental protection as well as opportunities for greater efficiencies for shippers." This ability of vessels to transit into and through the Arctic has increased in conjunction with the lengthening of time of open water/ice free conditions, currently about May to November of each year.

## PORT OF NOME MODIFICATION STUDY

Over the past 10 or so years, the Corps has been evaluating the costs and benefits of options for channel improvements at one or more ports in western Alaska. In the first phase of that effort, we explored 14 potential sites and concluded that a proposal involving two of these ports (Nome and Port Clarence) had the best potential for justification based on a further analysis. By February 2015, the Corps had dropped Port Clarence from consideration. It has focused since then on options for the Port of Nome.

The Corps first improved the Port of Nome in 1923. It modified that project in 1954, and again in 2006 to its present configuration. Located 737 miles north of Dutch Harbor, Nome is the largest port in western and northern Alaska. Its main commercial docking area is in waters with a depth of -22ft MLLW.

Currently, multiple government vessels, large cruise ships and larger research vessels conduct business in Nome while anchored offshore in deeper water. This business includes the transfer of personnel and equipment to and from the ships. In addition, large fuel tankers anchored offshore of Nome lighten their load by offloading it to smaller vessels for delivery to Nome and other small communities of the area.

Mr. Chairman and subcommittee members, this concludes my statement. Again, I appreciate the opportunity to testify today and look forward to answering any questions you may have.