

State Department announces priorities for Arctic Council chairmanship

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On October 23, the U.S. State Department announced that climate change adaptation and mitigation will be top priorities when the U.S. assumes the chairmanship of the Arctic Council in 2015. To meet this priority, the U.S. plans to focus on monitoring pollutants, increasing resiliency in Arctic communities, continuing climate research, and establishing new marine protected areas. Environmental organizations have expressed their support for these actions, but other stakeholder groups have suggested the State Department should focus on other issues, particularly resource development.

The Arctic Council was established in 1996 under the Ottawa Declaration as an intergovernmental forum to promote cooperation on issues such as sustainable development, environmental protection, and natural resource management within the Arctic Circle. Chairmanship rotates between the eight member countries.

During its first chairmanship from 1998 to 2000, the U.S. focused on human health, launching the International Circumpolar Surveillance, a project led by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to monitor disease spread and prevention in the unique Arctic environment. In 2004, the U.S. also initiated the Arctic Climate Impact Assessment (ACIA), the first comprehensive scientific study of climate change in the Arctic.

Sources: The Arctic Council, E&E News

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