**STATE EMERGENCY RESPONSE COMMISSION**

**REGULAR MEETING**

October 13, 2023`

1:00 P.M.

Hotel Captain Cook

Anchorage, Alaska

**MINUTES**

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT

Co-Chairs

Commissioner Torrence Saxe, Department of Military and Veteran Affairs

Megan Kohler, Designee, Department of Environmental Conservation

State Department Members

Bryan Fisher Department of Military and Veteran Affairs

Present Department of Environmental Conservation

Sandra Moeller Department of Commerce, Community, Economic Development

Rick Green Department of Fish & Game

Gene Wiseman Department of Health

Adam Weinert Department of Labor & Workforce Development

Absent Department of Natural Resources

Lt. Ben Endres Department of Public Safety

John Clendenon Department of Transportation & Public Facilities

Public Members

George Vakalis SERC/LEPC/URBAN - Anchorage

Absent SERC/LEPC/URBAN - Wasilla

Absent SERC/LEPC/RURAL - Sitka

Michael Paschall SERC/LEPC/RURAL - Delta Junction

Casey Cook Local Government - MatSu Borough

Jason Bauer Local Government -

Absent Public Member-At-Large

Ex-Officio Members

Absent Department of Administration

Absent Department of Education and Early Development

Absent FEMA Alaska Area Officer

George Tollar Alaska Command

Angela Gebert U.S. Coast Guard

Mary Goolie U.S. EPA - Alaska Operations Office

**I. CALL TO ORDER - CO-CHAIR, COMMISSIONER SAXE,
 DEPARTMENT OF MILITARY AND VETERANS AFFAIRS (DMVA)**

 **A. Roll Call - State Emergency Response Commission (SERC) Coordinator**

 Mr. Dave Reilly, SERC Coordinator took roll call.

 **B. Quorum Determination - SERC Coordinator**

 A quorum was present to conduct business.

 **C. Administrative Announcements - SERT Coordinator**

 Mr. Reilly made announcements on how to make public comments and meeting documents will be posted on the website.

**II. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS - MEMBERSHIP**

 **A. Opening Comments by Co-Chairs - Commissioner Saxe, DMVA, and
 Acting Commissioner Emma Pokon, Department of Environmental
 Conservation (DEC) SPAR**

Co-Chair Saxe welcomed the panel and members of the public to the regular SERC meeting. He noted one Naval officer here today and it’s the happy birthday to the Navy. So, thank you for being here. We are going to have a report from the LEPCA. Mike Paschall has volunteered to lead the Work Plan Committee. So, when we get to Work Plan Committee on the Agenda, we will take a voice vote on Mike’s assignment. For New Business, we want to allow an opportunity for you to provide any lessons learned, identify any outstanding issues or needs. And just in general, we're open to feedback that you may have, and we want to make sure that for any questions that cannot be answered here in the room, we get back with you as quickly as possible.

Co-Chair Megan Kohler welcomed everyone to the meeting and stated she is happy to be here today. DEC will give some brief comments later and thanked Co-Chair Saxe for the introduction.

 **B. Member Introductions - Commissioner Saxe**

**III. APPROVAL OF PREVIOUS MEETING MINUTES**

Co-Chair Saxe stated that members should have received minutes to review in their packet. He asked for a motion to approve the minutes.

**MOTION:** Rick Green moved to approve the SERC meeting minutes from April 21, 2023, as written. George Vikalis seconded the motion.

Co-Chair Saxe asked if there were any objections to approving the minutes as written. There were none. Motion was **APPROVED** unanimously.

**IV. PUBLIC COMMENT**

Co-Chair Saxe asked if anyone from the public that would like to make a comment.

Jeremy Aamodt, Risk Manager, and David Engel, Emergency Program Manager, from the North Slope Borough introduced themselves. Mr. Aamodt stated that they are re-starting their LEPC in the North Slope Borough and they wanted to introduce themselves to the Commission.

**V. CONSENT AGENDA**

 **A. Approval of, and changes to, Agenda**

**MOTION:** Michael Paschall moved to approve the SERC consent agenda as written. Rick Green seconded the motion.

A voice vote was taken. Motion was **APPROVED** unanimously.

 **B. Local Emergency Planning Committee (LEPC) Appointments**

Tom Vaden, Co-Chair with Casey Cook of LEPCA. We had a meeting this morning and so a couple things came out of it. We're finalizing a written brief form to be completed and sent out to members ahead of our meeting. The intent is that if someone misses a point in the verbal briefing, they can refer to the written one. I think that's going to work. All the LEPCS are going to write letters to the LEPCA regarding funding of the Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) around the state. Then the LEPCA Co-Chairs are going to write a letter to Department of Homeland Security and Emergency Management (DHS&EM) and the state legislature in support of funding CERTs. Right now, as you hear the LEPCs verbal status reports, the common theme is we're reforming. There's very, very few LEPCS that are making it through without funding. Everybody's trying to figure out how to keep going forward, especially the smaller communities. So, we're trying to come up with a reasonable solution for that. That's all I have to report. Any questions.

Co-Chair Saxe asked if there were any questions from the room. Hearing none, he moved on.

 **C. SERT Meeting Dates**

Co-Chair Saxe stated that the proposed date of the next meeting of the SERT is April 12, 2024.

**VI. STATE AGENCY REPORTS**

 **A. DHS&EM Updates - Bryan Fisher, Director**

Bryan Fisher, Director of Department of Homeland Security and Emergency Management (DHS&EM) provided a few updates to the commission before bringing in one of his partners from the Alaska National Guard to provide a briefing as well.

The Division continues to respond to an unprecedented number of disasters across Alaska. We're averaging either a state or federally declared disaster once a month. With that in mind, there really isn't a break for any of us at either the state or local level. There is no downtime anymore throughout a given year for us to catch our breath. We're continuing to recover and perform mitigation activities in the midst of the next declared disaster that we're all responding to. So the pace continues to be pretty extensive. And the intensity of the disasters we're seeing up here continue to be more severe. The National Weather Service and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration talk about it. The water temperatures, the sea surface temperatures are warmer than they've ever been. That produces more energy. That creates more intense storms for us. So things aren't getting better in terms of the threats that we're facing. They're getting worse. And so they're happening more frequently and more intensely when they happen.

Since we met in the spring, we received both a state and federal disaster declaration for spring breakup flooding. Ice jam flooding along primarily the Yukon River and the Kuskokwim River also included a number of communities around the state that had extreme snowmelt flooding at the same time. The flooding events this year in particular in two communities in Alaska circle on the Yukon River and Crooked Creek on the Kuskokwim River. They had experienced catastrophic flooding in 2009, 2011, and 2013. And after recovering from those disasters, we took a substantial amount of mitigation activities with our local partners to try to elevate buildings to relocate homes away from where the floods impacted those times. And we thought things would be safe. This year, those two communities in particular, have the new flood of record. So things that we thought were going to be safe for the long term future were not.

We also have another declared disaster for the city and borough of Juneau, there was what's called a jokulhlaup. It's a glacier damned outburst flood with the Mendenhall Glacier and the Suicide Basin lake that has formed behind the glacier. Apparently, this has been building up for a decade. This year we saw an incredibly devastating and catastrophic flash flood event from the release of that basin this year. We weren't expecting it to be as bad. The science and trying to figure out just how much water could release out of that particular glacier damned lake is relatively new, and we're still working on the understanding. But it was absolutely catastrophic. The sheer amount of land that was eroded within minutes from the release of that lake. We're in the middle of responding to that state declaration and working with the Small Business Administration for homeowners and condominium associations to recover from that flood as well.

We continue to work with our partners at the Federal Emergency Management Agency. Mr. Valley couldn't be here today, he's TDY out of state. We’re improving the ability to work with FEMA to get grant funding into the state for mitigation activities. I met with the administrator of FEMA last week and her staff and told them mitigation is broken up here. It's too hard to get FEMA money, it's too complicated, and it's too slow and coming. So FEMA is working fairly hard within their own agency where they can influence regulation and internal policy to make changes so their programs are more accessible not only to our municipal communities, but our tribal communities as well. So we continue to work on that

Twice a year, I have been reporting back for the last couple of years on our agency having an incredible amount of turnover. I'm happy to report that I think that that has slowed down quite a bit. We have 60 positions in our agency, all based on Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson, and as of this morning, we have a single vacancy. I think that's as staffed as my division has been in years. We have a whole crop of new employees to new state employees or new to the division, as well as a number of our internal staff that were able to take advantage of promotions to move into supervisory positions. We're pretty happy that we have a very low vacancy rate for now. With the co chair's permission, I’ll invite Major Ryan Richard with the Alaska National Guard Joint Staff. The Commissioner wanted to provide a presentation and a briefing to the Commission on some of the things that are not disaster specific.

Major Ryan Richard with the Alaska National Guard greeted everyone and directed their attention to the presentation on the screen. I was asked to come today and give an update on some of the National Guard’s recent efforts, our priorities, and where we're looking for things.

He stated that the Alaska Guard is ready to go anywhere globally and within the state. However, our focus and our eyes are turned westward to Asia and the Pacific rim. I'd like to talk about how this region has half the global population. An enormous amount of trade originates and transits through the region. Of the ten largest militaries in the world, seven are in this region. We have three key threat states, and we have five treaty alliances that we maintain those relationships with Japan, South Korea, Thailand, Philippines and Australia.

The Department of Defense (DOD) has said that China is our pacing threat. It's becoming more and more aggressive in its efforts to absorb Taiwan, one of our important allies and trading partners. Most of the world semiconductor chips are made in Taiwan, so disruption to that supply chain has an absolute impact on the global economy. You can see their objectives. And China is wanting to ensure the Communist Party retains control while increasing their political and economic influence at our expense. At its core, really, a clash of visions and competing viewpoints. For Alaska, some touch points are cyber attacks and social media information. According to news articles China is reaching into container port cranes that have started to go into a lot of the major ports on the West Coast. This gives China the ability to shut those cranes down in the event of a conflict. And you can imagine the impact on the West Coast ports not to move goods and what type of impact that would have on us here in Alaska.

There is also some aggression from China around military bases in the United States and Alaska. A lot of Chinese nationalists posing as tourists to surveil and try to gain access. And there also is some concern around China's telecom provider Huawei and how they've made some inroads into selling telecommunications equipment to a lot of rural Alaska telecommunication companies. So there's some concern that China can use that equipment to conduct espionage on nearby U.S. Military bases. China uses social media to spread misinformation. We saw that happen with the recent Maui fires. So that has the potential to increase as our natural disasters increase.

We see that from 1999 to today and onward to 2025, China has grown quite a bit in space-based assets and missile defense. The United States has been a little stagnant in this area over the past 20 years because our focus had been on other regions of the world while China has focused on this one region. We’re bringing our focus back to the U.S. North Korea continues to be a regional threat to South Korea and Japan, both key allies for the U.S. Kim Yong Un recently visited China, and that resulted in North Korea agreeing to supply munitions to Russia for their adventures in Europe.

Touch points for Alaska concern cyber-attacks around infrastructure. They're centered around financial gain, as they're focused on raising cash for the North Korean regime, very much like a criminal gang. So they're stealing crypto, stealing from banks, doing the whole ransomware--where they lock you out and demand payment. They have a history of doing it with hospitals, city government, universities, and so on. Their ICBM testing continues to increase. Pretty much all of Alaska is in range of their ICBMs,.

For Russia, Putin thinks the demise of the Soviet Union was one of the greatest mistakes of the 20th century. And Russia is looking to regain their former glory and their previous standing in the geopolitical order. For Alaska, Russia is very focused on regaining that Arctic dominance. They have a lot of infrastructure in the Arctic that Alaska does not have--roads, ports, and airports. A lot of friction points involve our military forces. They do something, we do something, they do something. A lot of that continued display of capability, trying to rattle swords to each other. And of concern is Russia and China are starting to collaborate in the Arctic with joint patrols in the Aleutian, joint patrols in the Arctic. Rather than a true bilateral relationship, though, that desire to confront us really is the connective tissue. The enemy of my enemy is my friend type of thing, is what we're seeing.

Concerning Israel and Hamas, this is really a constant source of friction for our policymakers. My personal perspective, I'm 50 years old, and I've grown up with this as a persistent conflict. So I think it's helpful for everyone to understand that the Palestinian Authority really consists of two elements, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. In 2007 Hamas won some elections and there is now a split control between the two. So Israel deals with the Palestinian Authority on the West Bank and with Hamas on the Gaza Strip. October 7 is the most recent incursion into Israel from Gaza. Around 20 Americans are either missing or are hostages, and Israel is slowly massing for a ground invasion of the area. For Alaska, the potential is for terrorism related events on both sides around large gatherings and then American citizens traveling to that region to engage in the conflict. Generally, what we've seen in open-source reporting is Israeli reservists that live in the United States are going back to join the fight. Haven't seen any reporting on the open source as far as Americans traveling to engage with Hamas like they did with ISIS. I’m available for questions.

Director Fisher wanted to recognize Colonel Matthew Kirby, Chief of Staff of the Joint Staff for Alaska National Guard. Many of you met him at our last meeting. Last week, the FEMA Administrator some testimony to the National Emergency Management Association, which is my professional group. And it’s on FEMAs web site, if you’d like to listen to it. Her testimony was nothing about disasters. It was all about what Major Richard just spoke about, the threat and the actual occurrence of this misinformation campaigns we're seeing around disasters that are heavily influenced by primarily China is a real thing. And Major Richard mentioned that we assess nationwide that the Chinese and to some degree the Russians and to some degree Iran have their fingers in our cyber systems in this country. They have the potential to flick a switch and turn off the lights or turn off the water. So it is very much a serious concern with the entire Department of Homeland Security and FEMA.

Concerning Israel and Hamas, there are no credible threats in the homeland or against the homeland with respect to the conflict, the war that's going on in the Middle East right now. The former chief of Hamas just a day or two ago called for today to be a call to jihad globally in support of the Palestinian cause. The Department of Public Safety, FBI, Joint Territory Task Force, we're all tracking the information that's coming in, but no specific threats to Alaska or to the homeland at this point.

Co-Chair Saxe asked if there were any questions. He commented that he wanted Commissioners to see a little bit of what he, and to some extent, Director Fisher think about every day. Even though Director Fisher has only one vacancy, we are still hiring. We are dealing with a record number of disasters around the state. And I want to thank everybody here for the LEPCS and Bryan and his staff, because what we are going through right now is not normal, and your efforts are incredible.

Ms. Moeller appreciated the presentation. It's good to have that front and center, as it's in the news. My question seems small now compared to that. But it's related to Mr. Fisher and working with FEMA. And you and I have talked about it before, but I wanted to raise the extreme need to have a coordinated communication between our Alaska residents, communities, entities, the state, and the federal partners that we have around the room. As we all know, communication is what's going to make things happen or not happen. And what I'm seeing at some of our communities, particularly to Merbok, is a lack of communication on our federal partners. I support communication. I don't know the magic bullet solution, but I'm just curious, Mr. Fisher, if you have any more to add on what you're seeing while working with FEMA as they look to improve their processes.

Director Fisher responded that, from my perspective, the good news is that the current FEMA administration is willing to come to Alaska and talk to us here. As a matter of fact, they don't even want to come to Anchorage or Juneau and talk to us. They want to get out into our communities and hear directly from our survivors and the communities impacted by disasters. That hasn't always been the case in the past. The staff don't understand Alaska. They don't understand that we don't have roads. They don't really understand or can't easily comprehend the cost of doing recovery and mitigation work in Alaska. If we're talking about freight on board for whatever it is, armor rock or rip rap or a two x four out to our rural communities, it's a constant education process to federal FEMA employees on the reality of the cost of doing business up here. The delays in the supply chain compounded by our short construction seasons complicate things. They don't see that in the lower 48, if you will. They see it to some degree in Hawaii, in the territories. So it's an ever changing process. The folks have been pretty stable in FEMA. Unfortunately, those administrations change when the federal administrations change, so it's a continuing education process. But I'm more hopeful than I've ever been.

Co-Chair Saxe added that there is simply nothing better than getting people out to the communities, because it's not us passing along information, you hear it directly from the residents. We have fewer roads than Delaware, for example, and you really can't fly into a whole lot of places, and when you do, you're going to get stuck. The FEMA folks that we've taken out there, it's just so sincerely eye opening when they got boots on the ground.

Co-Chair Saxe directed the Commissioners’ attention to a slide for critical infrastructure within the State of Alaska. He asked commissioners to think about these big-ticket items and how we can refine the list in further conversations. What do we need to be more resilient. What do we need to get out to various places within the state in a timely manner. Also consider it doesn’t have to be a bad day in Alaska for it to be a bad day here. For example, 95% of our food comes from outside our state. So if Seattle, or anywhere on the west coast, has an earthquake and the ports shutdown, it can be quite a while for our food to arrive. So, while we plan for Alaska, we also need to plan for the west coast.

 **B. DEC Division of Spill Prevention and Response (SPAR) - Tiffany Larson**

Co-Chair Megan Kohler expressed her appreciation of that briefing. She invited Kara Kusche up to provide a briefing on some of the new changes in our department.

Kara Kusche introduced herself as the Prevention and Technical Support Manager with Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) Spill Prevention and Response (SPAR). We have provided written updates to the State Emergency Management Commission (SERC), however she wanted to highlight a few changes to our regulations that occurred recently.

Regulated facilities in Alaska are required to have the financial ability to respond to an oil spill at the planning standard volume. Our updated financial responsibility regulations became effective about a week and a half ago on October 1, 2023. The dollar amounts of proof of financial responsibility were adjusted in accordance with changes to the Consumer Price Index for Anchorage metropolitan area for the second half of 2022. Also keeping up with the times, the update also removed requirements for how certain documents must be signed now allowing for electronic submission. Another recent regulation project here at DEC was a repeal of the above ground storage tank registration requirements for Class 2 facilities. Those are facilities that store non crude oil in above ground storage tanks that have capacities greater than 1,000 gallons but also less than 420,000 gallons. These regulations were not specifically required by Alaska statutes and have not been enforced by the department since May, 2020. The regulations repeal become effective on October 18, 2020.

Two notable spills that have happened since we met last April are the University Lake Spill here in Anchorage and the Suicide Basin Flood Release in Juneau. Our written brief provides more details, but at this time I really want to emphasize and highlight the effective relationships we have with our partners. We work strongly with US Coast Guard, US EPA, Municipality of Anchorage, and so many other resource agencies on those and other spills. The open communication shared among these partners and our shared goals to protect human health and the environment really helped us respond both quickly and efficiently. We're grateful for all the collaboration that we continue to build in our work.

Speaking of staffing, I do want to mention that the department has filled our disaster coordinator position that is now filled by Erin Leaders, and she sits in the commissioner's office.

Lastly, and I think this is pretty exciting, I want to personally invite all of you to join us at DEC’s Division of Spill Prevention and Response (SPAR) open house at our warehouse which is located here in Anchorage. The open house will be on October 24, 2023, from 2:00-6:00 p.m. Staff will be there to answer questions, provide a tour of the warehouse. We'll have some hands-on activities featuring common tools that we use in our prevention, preparedness, and response work. The address is in your binders and you're certainly welcome to reach out to me or anyone on my team with any sort of questions. The official invitation has also been posted to DECs social media account. Thank you all for allowing me to provide the updates. Happy to answer any questions.

Co-Char Kohler asked if there were any questions for Kara.

Michael Paschall, Rural LEPCs, asked about the containers with spill response supplies that are staged around the state. Who has access to that material for spill response and how are they checked and monitored and that type of thing. Ms. Kusche responded that in addition to our main warehouse here in Anchorage, we have other smaller warehouses and then dozens and dozens of spill response conexes throughout the state. The State of Alaska spill response containers have a shared key with other agency personnel that are able to locate it. And then in addition, for each spill response container in a community, we have a local community custodian that we work with. That might be the harbor master or someone from the fire department, a community, tribal or government organization that will have keys and access to that. So the goal of those supplies and the containers are to be able to be used, of course, when we need them. It's a network of many partnerships that makes that happen.

Mr. Paschall asked if local agencies have access to them? Ms. Kusche responded yes, either directly or indirectly. On our website, we do have a GIS map that lists all of our containers, and then each container has an inventory of supplies. And when you click on that and you look at the inventory, it gives the contact information for how to access that container. And then as with any spill, when a spill is reported and it comes into our spill response hotline, the person that answers that hotline will be able to connect the local folks with access instructions in live time. And then addressing your question about how those are checked or inventoried, as our staff travel throughout the state, either on exercises, inspections or spill responses, part of their normal routine duties is to check on those containers. Check on the supplies, inventories, condition of things, and then they bring that information back from their trip. We have a program support unit that works on logistics to repopulate any supplies that are missing or used.

Kathy Shea, DEC, I just want to add one thing about the containers. Mr. Paschall asked if anybody is able to use it. We have a cost recovery program. So the responsible party (RP) would also be responsible for paying back the cost of those materials that they used. So the conexes are there for people to have quick access to response equipment and we work on recovering costs to replace that material later.

Co-Chair Kohler asked if there were any other questions. She added that the conexes are staged around to help our remote communities because, as the general mentioned, one of our challenges is with distance and making sure that we have equipment out to communities in rapid time.

I also wanted to touch on Kara's comments about partnership. I look around this room and I see very few agencies that I can't immediately think of how we have teamed together. And I wanted to thank you guys on that. We are not just spill prevention and response, we also have drinking water, wastewater, solid, waste, food safety within our department. All of whom have worked on the responses that are in the documents and that Brian has touched on as well. So I want to thank you all for your teamwork and looking forward to continuing our relationships. Knowing that it is freeze up season for our water and our wastewater, as well as fall seas storms, we’re all getting ready for that. So thank you.

**VII. LOCAL EMERGENCY PLANNING COMMITTEE ASSOCIATION (LEPCA)**

 **A. Status Report**

There were no additional reports from LEPCA. The Agenda and minutes are in the meeting packet.

 **B. LEPCA Agenda**

 **C. LEPCA Previous Meeting Minutes**

**VIII. LOCAL EMERGENCY PLANNING COMMITTEE STATUS REPORTS**

In the meeting packet.

**IX. OLD BUSINESS**

 **Committee Reports (Written reports provided)**

 **A. Finance Committee - Mr. George Vakalis, Chairperson**

 **B. Work Plan Committee - Mr. Michael Paschall**

Co-Chair Saxe announced that Mike Paschall has volunteered to serve as the committee chair. He asked for a voice vote to approve this appointment.

**The appointment was approved unanimously.**

 **C. Interoperable Communications Committee - Mr. John Rockwell,
 Chairperson**

 **D. Citizen Corps Committee - Ms. Michelle Torres, Chairperson**

Michelle Torres, CERT State Coordinator with the Division of Homeland Security and Emergency Management, introduced herself and shared a few things happening with CERT around the state right now.

This past year our Fairbanks team did some very amazing work with the Haystack fires. In fact, the incident management team in Fairbanks for the Haystack fires called and told me what an amazing job the CERT team did and that they wanted them to be recognized for a job well done. They CERT team was also very involved with the search and rescue for two out of state hikers that got lost by the hot springs.

Just this week, the Division signed a memo of understanding (MOU) to partner with the Alaska Forum, an organization that does a lot of rural community training. They received a grant to provide CERT trainings in rural communities over the next two years. So we expect to bring in over 100 rural community members for training. In fact we just had our first skills training with folks from Fort Yukon, Russian Mission, Chignik Lagoon and other communities. I wasn’t sure how it was going to turn out, if they took the class four months ago, are they going to remember what they learned in skills? I was super impressed. We'll be putting on another skills training class in April with our partner, Alaska Forum.

We also partnered with the State’s Independent Living Council with CERT. They're going to be bringing CERT into their teams with disabilities. So I'm really looking forward to that moving forward. We're starting to see a huge increase in communities wanting to have CERT training, and also state agencies are asking for CERT training. We have campus CERT in Alaska through UAA and UAF. And so I just wanted to highlight all the good work that we're doing, and if anybody has any questions, I'm here to answer them.

Co-Chair Saxe asked if there were any questions. There were none, so he moved on.

 **E. All-Hazards Plan Review Committee - Mr. Richard Hildreth, Chairperson**

 **F. Training Committee - Mr. Jeff Lafferty, Chairperson**

 **G. Disaster Search and Rescue Committee - Lt. Ben Endres, Chairperson**

 **H. Statewide Mutual Aid Compact - Mr. Casey Cook, Chairperson**

**X. NEW BUSINESS**

 **A. Work Plan Committee update with solicitation for new membership -
 Mike Paschall**

Michael Paschall referred commissioners to Tab 10 and the draft work plan in the front of your binder. Looking for people from the SERC, state agencies, the LEPCs or anyone interested to participate on the committee. The challenge with the work plans, it involves everybody else and how much time there's been to actually reach out and talk to people. I have talked with division staff, tried to take my 15 years’ experience of attending LEPCA and SERC meetings, and my observations of what the SERC does and doesn't do. We’ve got a start on developing a work plan for the SERC to move in a direction that, I believe, is more productive than the current situation. I'm open for any input now or later and the committee will be as well.

Co-Chair Saxe thanked Michel for stepping up and asked if anyone had any questions for him. Hearing none, he moved on to the next item.

 **B. Proposal for moving SERC meeting to one virtual (Fall) and
 one in-person meeting (Spring)**

Co-Chair Saxe stated that there is a proposal on the agenda for moving the SERC meeting to one in the fall, which would be virtual, and one in the spring, which would be in-person. So we'll need a motion to go forward for discussion.

**MOTION:** Rick Green moved that the commission approve holding the spring meeting of the SERC in person and the fall meeting virtual. Sandra Moeller **seconded** the motion.

***Discussion:***

Michael Paschall stated I object to the idea tremendously. Every report we've heard today has indicated more activity and the need for more preparedness and better coordinated response. And considering the number of people that participate, which in this group as committee members, and there should be others here, I think it's a move in the wrong direction for preparedness in the state.

Casey Cook asked what's the reasoning behind the proposal. I don't remember seeing that or hearing that. Is there some justification for us to look at? I don't necessarily agree with it, but I'd like to hear what whoever was proposing it was thinking.

Co-Chair Saxe stated that his understanding is to have one big event every year that may be easier for people statewide to attend. In my opinion, the onus for how we go forward should not necessarily be on people who live in the bigger areas, but on the people who live in the more outlying areas, because it's more difficult to get here. But the flip side of the argument is, of course, as you've already mentioned, there is nothing that substitutes for in person conversation. This would be a good one to get your opinion in on.

Casey Cook stated just looking around the table at the commissioners in the room. Appreciate the delegates in the room. But there are people who are supposed to be here who are not. So we're doing this twice a year and maybe they show up 50%. If we do it once a year and they don't show up, then we've missed out on them 100% for that year. I'd hate to limit the amount of opportunities that state commissioners or state departments have to come talk about this stuff and lessen it.

George Vikalis stated that he had several thoughts on this. Everyone in this room has been on Zoom sessions for years now. I would contend, and I've already heard it, there is nothing like face to face. Because when you get these people around in one room together, they communicate, they talk. They talk about where they're from. They talk about some of the issues and everything else. And also it's a good forum for folks to be able to come up with ideas amongst themselves. So that's number one. Number two on this particular commission, when at the very, very outset they were quarterly meetings and they were all in person, and then we went to two times a year. And the reason we went to two times a year was because of funding, not because there was a lack of interest, but it was because of a lack of funding.

And so that's why, to save money, so that the LEPCs would have more money available to them and not usurp it for travel, that's why we went to two. I would hate like heck to see us do less than two in person. I think there's so much to be gained by an in-person meeting, I really do, especially if the right people are here.

Sandra Moeller stated that she would respectfully disagree. We've been on Zoom calls for many years now. In our division, we've successfully implemented hybrid. I think by having it Zoom virtual, it allows folks to be more engaged. We get a wider audience. We've seen that we've done trainings in person and in Zoom, and we actually have more attendance on Zoom. I'm wondering if we do something like two in person and add a virtual so that we have three. I do think we're going to be addressing more and more issues as we come with the emergency response, definitely on the flooding and storms and stuff like that. I think we're going to see that. So there's going to be issues we're going to have to address. I guess I would propose at least one virtual. And that's why I was supporting going from one in person and one virtual. I absolutely agree in person, but I don't think it needs to be exclusively in person. Thank you.

Michael Paschall stated he would agree wholeheartedly to that approach. I think right now this commission is not as active as it needs to be in interfacing between the multiple agencies and the state, federal and local agencies and individuals. And there's a need for more communication, not less. So again, I don't believe it's the right time to go more virtual.

**AMENDED MOTION:** Rick Green moved that the commission approve holding two meetings of the SERC in-person and one meeting virtual. Sandra Moeller **seconded** the motion.

***Discussion:***

Mary Goolie asked if anyone is online today. Staff responded no. Sitting next to my partner, Angela Gibert (ph), Coast Guard RRT Coordinator, we have team meetings twice a year and then we have in joint with DEC partner as well. Our four area subcommittee meetings across the state are all hybrid. And we so value the in person because I hated the COVID times when we weren't meeting in person. It was hard to get moving ahead with our drills and planning. We did okay on our responses, I think, but the other part suffered.

It's hard with the funding to do more than two meetings. Just throwing that out there. We know we've had our technology challenges. There's different formats to use. Sometimes we like Zoom, sometimes we hate it. We use Teams for a lot of our smaller meetings, Zoom for larger GoTo webinar. There are tools out there. So just for conversation, continue with the two, but that everything's hybrid to encourage virtual participation.

Director Fisher wanted to point out that if you change the frequency of your meetings, your bylaws and policies and procedures have to change. At this time, the bylaws of the commission state that you will meet twice a year, one of which can be teleconference. If it is the will of the commission to make a change, we would have to come back to you at the next meeting with proposed changes to bylaws and policies and procedures manual.

Co-Chair Saxe stated we will vote on the motion to meet three times a year and then we’ll vote to maintain the status quo.

**Who approves going to two in-person and one virtual meeting with the understanding that for the in-person meetings, there will always be the option to go hybrid and attend virtually.**

Voice vote was taken. Motion for the amendment **FAILED.**

**Who approves going forward with the status quo of two meetings per year, one spring, one fall, in person, with the understanding there will always be the option to go hybrid and attend virtually.** Rick Green **seconded** the motion.

Voice vote was taken. Motion was **APPROVED** unanimously.

So status quo for now with in person emphasis, but for whatever reason, if you can't attend, we'll add the virtual component.

**XI. OTHER STATE AGENCY AND EX-OFFICIO REPORTS**

 **A. FEMA Region 10 ex-officio report (written report provided)**

**XII. INFORMATIONAL ITEMS (provided only as reference material)**

 **A. SERC Policies and Procedures Manual 2018**

 **(includes Ethics information for Members of Boards and Commissions)**

 **B. SERC Bylaws**

 **C. State Homeland Security Grant Allocations 2023**

**XIII. PUBLIC COMMENT**

There were none.

**XIV. COMMISSION MEMBER CLOSING COMMENTS AND ADJOURNMENT**

Co-Chair Saxe asked if there were comments from anyone.

Casey Cook stated it's in our written report for the Interstate Mutual Aid Compact notes, but I wanted to formally thank you. In our last meeting I made some comments about the activities of that subcommittee and the work, and you took that on. And over the course of the last six months, a lot of progress has been made. So I want to say thank you to you, say thank you to Bryan in front of the SERC, to Jeff Mackenzie and Jeff squared So, again, thank you to you and your staff for moving that along.

Co-Chair Kohler thanked everyone for coming today and encouraged folks to continue those offline discussions and knowledge sharing.

Co-Chair Saxe thanked everyone for the team effort and for everything that everyone does here. I use the mantra, Team Alaska, but I really do mean that sincerely. We're all in this together, and I like to think of Alaska as a real big island. We all work together, and things go better. So I appreciate your attendance today and appreciate all your efforts.

Rick Green moved to adjourn. Sandra Moeller seconded. Co-Chair Saxe adjourned the meeting at 2:04 p.m.

**Next Meeting**

**Recommended date, Friday, April 12, 2024 in Anchorage**