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PRESS RELEASE

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State/federal coordination produces Alaska coastal mapping plan

(Fairbanks, AK) – State and federal officials have developed and adopted an Alaska Coastal Mapping Strategy to help meet the nation's need for accurate mapping of the state's coastline and nearshore regions, a Division of Geological and Geophysical Surveys (DGGS) official said today.

"Collaboration and communication among the state, federal agencies, tribal partners, and the public are key to efficiently collecting the data we need to produce the most accurate and useful maps we can of Alaska's coastline," said Marta Kumle, the coastal mapping strategist for Alaska. "We are very excited to see a concerted effort to map these important and dynamic areas."

The White House Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP) and Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) produced a Presidential Memorandum on ocean and coastal mapping in November 2019. It called for the development of two strategies: mapping the exclusive economic zones (the areas extending 200 miles off the nation's shores into the ocean) and mapping Alaska's shoreline and nearshore areas.

That memorandum required the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration to coordinate with the State of Alaska, and the Alaska Mapping Executive Committee (AMEC) to produce a strategy to map the shoreline and nearshore of Alaska. The Alaska Coastal Mapping Strategy released by the OSTP was developed in collaboration with, and supported by, the Alaska Ocean Observing System and the U.S. Geological Survey.

The strategy calls for invigorating partnerships, leveraging new technologies, engaging stakeholders, and improving coastal mapping data by 2030. Specifically, it calls for significant map upgrades though the acquisition of new, detailed orthoimagery and topography data onshore, and bathymetry offshore in shallow coastal areas.

The data will have broad benefits, providing support for Alaska's economy, security, communities and environmental resources, Kumle said. Detailed maps of coastal areas are important to many, including resource, maritime commerce, transportation, tourism and fishing industries, subsistence users, community planners, land and wildlife managers, and emergency responders. The integration of onshore topography with nearshore bathymetry is a crucial component to predicting tides and currents, storm surge impacts, erosion, and tsunami that affect these areas.

The coastal mapping strategy calls for the creation of an implementation plan. In May 2020, AMEC formed a coastal subcommittee whose main task will be to develop the implementation plan.

"[B]y promoting collaboration and coordination with state and federal agencies, academia, and the private sector, this strategy seeks to leverage partnerships to ensure success," said an OSTP/CEQ press release announcing release of the Alaska strategy and others.

Kumle said state and federal agencies hope to build on AMEC's success funding and completing the IfSAR (Interferometric Synthetic Aperture Radar) mapping of Alaska. This was a decade-long coordinated federal and state project that delivered more accurate digital elevation maps of the entire state, which have been a boon to Alaska's aviation safety.

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