Alaska's Natural Resources

The state of Alaska is blessed with abundant natural resources, and with this abundance comes a tremendous responsibility. In order for these resources to be a part of Alaska’s future we must work towards using them wisely and sustainably. We are faced with many challenges in managing these resources due to a growing population which has resulted in an increased demand for food and energy. I believe that with the implementation of innovative idea's and technology through research and development, we can better manage and utilize these resources for future generations.

Due to Alaska's isolation and high latitude, it is faced with a unique challenge in meeting the growing demand for food. Many Alaskans, particularly Alaska Natives, have historically subsisted on the natural resources that the land has provided. Alaska has an abundance of species of fish and wildlife such as salmon and moose. With the growing population, there is more pressure on these resources to meet the increasing demand. Alaskans need to come up with alternatives in producing and obtaining more of our own food in order to relieve some of the pressure on the natural resources we have relied on in the past.

Another challenge that Alaskan's face, is the growing demand for energy caused by new development and the tremendous amount of energy it takes to live in Alaska year-round. Alaska has abundant fossil fuels, but unfortunately uses them somewhat inefficiently. For example, in the process of generating electricity there is usually large amounts of "waste heat" being produced. Through the use of new technology we could utilize this wasted energy and turn it into something useful.

I believe we need to be creative and look for ways to relieve the pressure on some of these resources by better utilizing others. One area that has potential for growth is agriculture. Though good agricultural land is scarce and takes time to develop, farmers growing selected crops have been successful. I believe through continued research, more crops can be successfully grown. For example,
research on the use of high tunnels (unheated greenhouses) as a tool for extending our growing season in Alaska, has the potential to produce more locally grown food. There are also alternative ways of providing our meat such as raising livestock suitable for the arctic climate.

One way to help meet the rising demand for energy in some parts of the state and reduce our consumption of fossil fuels is to look towards renewable energy resources such as wind and tides. Some communities are already taking advantage of wind as an energy resource by installing wind turbines to produce clean energy. Another renewable resource available to coastal communities are changing tides. Alaska has a great resource in its coastal tides, and new technology has made it possible to harness energy from the changing tides. In addition to looking at renewable resources we could look for ways ensuring that the energy we do consume is used more efficiently. For example, "waste heat" from producing electricity could be used to heat a greenhouse and grow fresh produce. Not only are you using energy that would otherwise be wasted, you are providing fresh food alternatives which may be in particularly high demand in rural Alaska.

These are just a few of the ways in which we can implement innovative ideas and technology to better utilize our resources and become more sustainable. Although there are many difficult management challenges to overcome, I believe through focusing on how we can more efficiently and responsibly use and manage our resources we can meet the demand of a growing population. If we use and manage our natural resources wisely we can help guarantee they will be available for generations to come.