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Fairbanksans tapped for group studying Alaska climate change

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The state's Climate Change Sub-Cabinet has picked more than 100 people from around the state, including a number from Fairbanks, to help shape strategies for dealing with, and taking steps to help curb, global warming.

The advisers will be arranged into various workgroups this spring — technical support teams will meet monthly before forwarding advice to broader advisory teams, which are in turn charged with drafting recommendations for the sub-cabinet. The sub-cabinet will then submit a broad climate change strategy for Gov. Sarah Palin to consider.

Gwen Holdmann, who directs a new center at the University of Alaska Fairbanks investigating energy options for the state, is part of a team focusing on potential energy sources. She said the sub-cabinet's project will let specialists from a variety of fields and backgrounds help state officials assess the state's options. She expects her team's effort to include a look at renewable-energy technologies to decide which might be cost-effective investments for communities.

"I'm glad to see the state taking an active lead on renewable energy and how this takes a role in future state planning," Holdmann said.

Department of Environmental Conservation Commissioner Larry Hartig, who chairs the Climate Change Sub-Cabinet, said the participants were either nominated to help with the project or volunteered.

"Many people very much want to be part of the effort," Hartig said in a news release. "We had a truly exceptional group from which to choose, all willing to devote valuable time and expertise to developing a long-range climate change strategy for Alaska."

The technical groups are focused on both helping the state adapt to warming temperatures — addressing possible impacts to buildings, ports and runways — and reduce emissions of greenhouse gases.

Palin formed the sub-cabinet, which consists largely of commissioners from the state's various

departments, in 2007 to recommend policies and guide the state's participation in local, regional and national efforts to curb global warming.

Also among the scores of advisors on the advisory and technical groups are David van den Berg, executive director of the Northern Alaska Environmental Center; Luke Hopkins, a member of the Fairbanks North Star Borough Assembly; Charlie Boddy, a vice president at Usibelli Coal Mine; Lori Hanemann, a local coordinator with the environmental center; Buck Sharpton, a vice chancellor for research at UAF; John Binkley, owner of a riverboat tour company and a former state senator; Billy Conner, who directs the Alaska University Transportation Center at UAF; Jeff Cook, a vice president of external affairs at Flint Hills Resources oil refinery; Jack Hebert, a builder and president of the Cold Climate Housing Research Center; and Tony Nakazawa, a former Fairbanks-based director for the Cooperative Extension Service at UAF.