



Alaska Power Association 2024 Federal Legislative Conference Washington, D.C. June 4-6, 2024 Trip Report

The annual Alaska Power Association Federal Legislative Conference brings a concentrated group of electric utility leaders from across the state to meet with federal officials and Alaska's congressional delegation each year in June.

Through the sweltering heat and humidity in Washington, D.C., this year's trip saw 14 Alaskans traipse and Uber across the capital to share the story of Alaska's electric utilities and the challenges and opportunities in our great state.

And while traveling to Washington, D.C. is a time and financial commitment, the face time with decision makers within the federal government can pay dividends into the future. The old saying is "out of sight, out of mind," and the APA Federal Legislative Conference exists to make sure that doesn't happen.

This year's conference received a great assist from the Arctic Energy Office. By working with the office's director, Erin Whitney, and its chief-of-staff, AnneMarie Horowitz, APA was able to have targeted meetings at the Department of Energy with key officials who are working on programs that can be of great benefit to APA's member utilities.



The APA group starts the 2024 federal fly-in at the Department of Energy headquarters.

Those meetings, along with meeting with Alaska's congressional delegation, among others, made the D.C. conference a great success in terms of professional connections, continued advocacy, and awareness of our issues.

Those in attendance this year were: Arthur Miller, CEO, Chugach Electric Association; Trish Baker, senior manager of government and business affairs, Chugach Electric Association; Travis Million, CEO, Golden Valley Electric Association; Linda Freed, director, Kodiak Electric Association and APA President; Julie Estey, chief strategic officer, Matanuska

Electric Association; Brian Hickey executive director, Railbelt Regional Coordination; Alec Mesdag, president and CEO, Alaska Electric Light & Power; Robert Siedman, CEO, Southeast Alaska Power Agency; Jaime Matthews, CEO, Copper Valley Electric Association, Brad Janorschke, general manager, Homer Electric Association; Gary Hennigh, city administrator, City of King Cove; Curtis Thayer, executive director, Alaska Energy Authority. From APA – Crystal Enkvist, executive director, and Michael Rovito, deputy director.

What follows is a brief travelogue of the 2024 APA Federal Legislative Conference:

Day 1

The historic Phoenix Park Hotel has been the home base for the APA Federal Legislative Conference for many, many years. Just down the street from the capitol building and the jumble of House and Senate offices, the hotel's location is prime real estate to begin each day.



Sometimes you have to pack into an Uber. Especially when it's in the upper 80s. Way too hot for Alaskans!

To kick off the conference, APA invites representatives from the national trade associations to brief our group on their main issues in front of Congress and the federal agencies. This year, we were joined by Hannah Hardin, senior manager, legislative affairs with National Rural Electric Cooperative Association (NRECA), Matthew Allen, director of legislative affairs with the National Hydropower Association (NHA), and Desmarie Waterhouse, vice president of government relations and counsel with the American Public Power Association (APPA).

The briefings are a great chance for APA and the national trades to exchange information, so each party knows what is important to the other. It's also always a good idea to check in with the national trades who spend their days deep in Washington, D.C. advocating for many of the same issues APA works on.

Following the briefings, we braved temperatures in the upper 80s with probably 100 percent humidity to head to the Department of Energy (DOE) headquarters (ok, we took Ubers. It was way too hot for us Alaskans to walk in that!).

With the help of the Arctic Energy Office, APA and our members were able to meet with the leadership of key offices within DOE. Our first meeting was with the [Grid Deployment Office](#) (GDO). That meeting saw the group engage with Maria Robinson, the director of the GDO and someone who definitely has a grasp of Alaska issues.

The meeting focused on the variety of grant programs administered by GDO that seek to assist electric utilities with infrastructure buildouts. APA and our members were able to give constructive feedback not only about the grant programs, but about how GDO might be helpful in the future and what kind of needs exist in the state.

Following the GDO meeting, leadership from the [Office of State and Community Energy Programs](#) (SCEP) met with the APA group to discuss their funding and technical support opportunities.



Meeting with Sen. Lisa Murkowski in her Senate office.

The SCEP works with state, local, and Tribal governments, nonprofit organizations, schools, and community partners to provide technical assistance and invest in place-based clean energy projects that aim to catalyze local economic development and create jobs, reduce energy costs, and avoid pollution. It was productive to meet with the SCEP staff and we came away with a better understanding of the kinds of programs available. Every bit of information gleaned in D.C. can be helpful in the long run.

From DOE, it was another air-conditioned Uber right to the Hart Senate Office Building to meet with Alaska's senior senator Sen. Lisa Murkowski. APA as a statewide association focused on three main policy areas during this trip:

1. The EPA Power Plant Rule – although Alaska has a “deferment” from this rule right now, the EPA has made clear they are watching the state and may determine at a later date to bring any new coal power plants or natural gas plants under the EPA Power Plant Rule. NRECA has recently filed a lawsuit against the EPA's rule, calling it unlawful, unreasonable, and unachievable.
2. Catastrophic Wildfire Mitigation – Alaska, like many western states, is dealing with longer wildfire seasons and increased conditions ripe for wildfires. In many areas, Alaska also contends with trees killed by spruce bark beetles, creating a dangerous

situation where those trees abut powerline rights-of-way. APA advocated for some specific legislation included in the annual Farm Bill that would address wildfire mitigation, but also for more federal funding and engagement from the federal government to remove spruce bark beetle killed trees on public lands that pose a threat to electric infrastructure.

3. Hydropower Licensing and Relicensing Reform – this is an ongoing issue that APA and many utilities and other associations from across the country have advocated on for many years. The timeframes and costs to license and relicense a hydropower project are unreasonable. Multi-year and multi-million-dollar processes are a significant hit to Alaska communities where often times the only alternative to hydropower is diesel generated electricity. APA is advocating for Congress to legislatively designate the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) as the lead agency for hydropower licensing and relicensing with the power to set timeframes that must be followed by other federal agencies to avoid delay to project approvals. There was broad recognition of this issue in our meetings, however it's unclear what the sausage making of Congress might come up with.

We discussed these issues and more with Sen. Murkowski and her staff. The senator discussed ongoing energy issues in Congress and listened as the electric utility members in the room discussed their projects and goals. It is always great to meet with Sen. Murkowski and to reinforce the issues of Alaska's electric utilities.

From the Hart Senate Office Building we cruised down Independence Avenue to the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) building to meet with [Rural Utilities Service \(RUS\)](#) Assistant Administrator Chris McLean.



Meeting with the Office of Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy (EERE). This was a high-level meeting.

Chris is an old friend of APA and Alaska's electric utilities. You might recognize his name from APA's 2023 annual meeting in Valdez, where Chris presented on a variety of RUS programs. And that's just what we talked about in D.C. RUS is currently operating numerous programs authorized and funded in the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and the Inflation Reduction Act. The RUS has been around for almost 90 years, first constituted as the Rural

Electrification Administration in 1935, so their experience and work in rural America and with electric utilities has a lot of history.

Day 2

Day two of the APA Federal Legislative Conference dawned just as hot and muggy as day one. Building Washington, D.C. on a swamp wasn't the best choice for summertime comfort.

The APA group jumped into our morning conveyances for the trip back to the DOE headquarters for more meetings with key offices. We began by meeting with the [Office of Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy](#) (EERE). EERE says they have five goals: decarbonizing the electricity sector, decarbonizing transportation, decarbonizing industry, reducing the carbon footprint of buildings, and decarbonizing the agriculture sector.

One of the individuals in our meeting was Alejandro Moreno, the associate principal deputy assistant secretary of EERE. Alejandro is someone APA has come to know over the years, and he noted that our visits to D.C. during the annual fly-ins are impactful to people like him. Alejandro has been to Alaska numerous times, and our visits help reinforce what he sees in our state.

Following a very robust meeting with EERE, we huddled with the Arctic Energy Office for a mid-conference debrief. This was a good meeting for our electric utility members to explain some of the challenges they may have with federal programs and to give and get feedback from the Arctic Energy Office folks about working with federal agencies.

After a quick food break it was time to meet with the leadership of the DOE [Office of Electricity](#). The Office of Electricity leads the Department of Energy's research, development, and demonstration programs to strengthen and modernize the nation's power grid to maintain a reliable, resilient, and secure electricity delivery infrastructure. That mission fits perfectly with what APA's electric utility members work on every day. While information on programs can be researched online, there is no substitute for having



Meeting with Sen. Dan Sullivan.

the very people who administer these programs with us in person to really dig down into what would be most helpful.

Finally, we had a quick drop in with the stakeholder engagement manager for the [Office of Clean Energy Demonstrations](#) (OCED). The OCED office was created in 2021 with a mission

of scaling emerging technologies to commercial viability. As we always say, if it works in Alaska, it can work anywhere.

With all of our DOE meetings now finished, we went back up the hill to the Hart Senate Office Building again to meet with Sen. Dan Sullivan. During that meeting, we focused on the three policy issues mentioned above, and our members in attendance were able to give updates from



Meeting with the Grid Deployment Office earlier in the conference.

their own utilities. Sen. Sullivan was keenly interested in the interactions between APA's electric utility members and federal permitting agencies and encouraged us to call his office if we have any issues getting results when pursuing permits or other items.

Day two ended with a productive meeting with Rep. Mary Peltola's energy staff. Unfortunately, we were unable to align our schedule with Rep. Peltola's, but the meeting with staff was successful since we were able to get into the weeds on some issues where Congressional action would be helpful.

After a day packed with six different meetings, it was time to reenergize that night and get ready to finish strong on day three.

Day 3

With the end of the advocacy trip in sight, APA trekked on a blissfully cooler (though not cool) day to the Dirksen Senate Office Building for a meeting with Pat McCormick, the minority chief counsel for the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee. Pat previously worked under Sen. Murkowski when she chaired the committee, and he is very

aware and supportive of Alaska's issues. Just like advocacy efforts in Juneau with the state, building and keeping relationships at the federal level is just as important.

During the meeting, we hit on APA's three federal issues with examples and expertise from our members. We learned that many other states have similar issues, so it was good to add Alaska's perspective to the heap as some in Congress try to remedy the problems.

The last stop of the 2024 APA Federal Legislative Conference took place in the Hall of States. There, we visited Jerry Moses, the director of state and federal relations for the state of Alaska. Jerry is an Alaskan himself, so he was aware of many of the issues we brought to his attention. Ending with Jerry was a good way to recap what we learned, what we advocated for, and what we still need help with.

Conclusion

Advocacy on the state and federal level can often feel tedious. In Washington, D.C., the federal government is complex, and it deals with many issues far outside the realm of electric utility policy. But just like hiking a long trail, or building a cabin by hand, with enough perseverance and work you can really make progress.

The APA Federal Legislative Conference is one of the most significant tools in APA's federal government relations toolkit to bring our message to the people who need to hear it. Braving the heat of D.C., the security lines, the traffic, and the crowds pays dividends when our message is heard and noted.

Through meeting with our congressional delegation and all the agency leaders we spent time with, this year's conference was a success. Alaska's electric utilities provide power in some of the most challenging conditions on Earth. We have our challenges, but we also have successes. By coming all the way to Washington, D.C. and talking about them, more people know about it and can become our allies in the daily mission to provide safe, reliable, and affordable power to all Alaskans.



Most of the APA group stops for a photo in front of the capitol building.