Thank you for inviting me today to the Eighth Polar Law Symposium. I understand this is the first time the Polar Law Symposium has been held on North American soil making me honored and humbled that you would invite me to share a few thoughts.

This is an exciting time for Alaska and the Arctic. If my father, Walt Parker, were alive he would be at every meeting engaging in as many of the issues as possible. And he would have wondered why President Obama hadn't met with him while visiting earlier this month. While he is not here with us physically he is still providing guidance to many he mentored, taught and loved.

Alaska, its people, and its beauty offer many opportunities. As Alaskans we fight hard to make sure this land we love is protected while allowing us the ability to maintain our lifestyle. While people in Washington DC and others give the impression that Alaskans believe in ‘rape, ruin, and run’ this is far, far from the truth. We treasure this land upon which we live and enjoy every day, which is why we remain – to continue to work to protect the land and the resources, and provide for our people.

Many of us have seen great change occur over the years – this change has impacted communities all around the state – from the smallest village to large metropolitan areas like Anchorage. For the indigenous Alaskans who have been here thousands of years – the change they have seen has been staggering. As a lifelong resident even I have noticed change in our landscape – more people, more roads, more homes, less open space – at least here in the Anchorage

Lisa Parker

Lisa Parker is a member of the University of Alaska Board of Regents and President of Parker Horn Company, Soldotna, Alaska. She served as Government and External Affairs Manager for Cominco Alaska (Teck) from 1984 to 1991.

1 The US Department of State hosted, and President Barack Obama attended, the Conference on Global Leadership in the Arctic: Cooperation, Innovation, Engagement and Resilience (GLACIER), in Anchorage, Alaska on 31 August 2015. See http://www.state.gov/e/oes/glacier/index.htm, accessed 13 July 2016.
area where I grew up. In the early 1990’s I moved with my family to the Kenai Peninsula. I commented to my young son to observe what the area looked like then for over the years he might notice changes in the landscape. And there has been change, but with change also comes growth and opportunity – positive growth if done properly.

I was privileged early in my career to have the opportunity to help in developing the renowned Red Dog Mine in Northwest Alaska and work with the people of the NANA region.  

I would like to share a bit of the history – from the developer's perspective about this amazing project that after 25 years “. . . continues to be an economic engine for this remote Arctic region and ensures sustainable benefits for the region and its people.” What NANA and its leaders envisioned in the early 1980’s when it established the partnership with Cominco (now Teck) serves as a positive model for how responsible economic development can be done while residents maintain subsistence lifestyles.

As background, NANA selected the Red Dog Mine area as part of its land entitlement under the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act. After the people of the NANA region decided they wanted to develop the mine, they solicited proposals from a number of different companies. In the end NANA, as the landowner, selected Cominco to be the mine developer and operator entering into what is today called a ‘landmark agreement.’ This agreement has served as a model for indigenous people not only in many regions of the Arctic but also in the southern hemisphere.

After the Cominco-NANA agreement was signed, there were many hurdles to overcome along with the normal things that must be completed when attempting to develop a project – like completion of an environmental impact statement and obtaining permits, lots of permits. Some of the hurdles that needed to be overcome included finding financing for a road, port, and mine site facility; negotiating with the State of Alaska about the possibility of providing financing for the transportation infrastructure; determining what was going to be the most appropriate route to get the mine concentrates from mine site to the determined delivery point; getting access through a relatively new National Monument, Cape Krustenstern, one of the new conservation system units set up under the 1980 Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act; and then there was a boundary issue.

2 NANA Regional Corporation, Inc. (NANA) is a Regional Alaska Native corporation formed in 1971 under the Alaska Native Land Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA).