

District Meetings



An Alaska Wilderness League volunteer presents South Dakota's Senators Tom Daschle and Tim Johnson with a copy of an ad thanking them for their help in keeping Alaska wild.

District meetings are a highly effective way to let your Representative and Senators know that their constituents are concerned about keeping Alaska wild. Many members of Congress come home each weekend and have time available to meet with constituents on Fridays and Mondays. In addition, Congress schedules recesses throughout the course of the year in February, April, Memorial Day, Independence Day, and for most of the month of August.

Making Your Appointment

Call your district office (you can find this information of the Member's webpage at www.house.gov or www.senate.gov) and ask for the appointment secretary or district scheduler to request a meeting when your Senator/Representative is at home. This person may ask for a letter with a formal request, you can use the sample letter below.

The appointment secretary will want to know what your meeting is about. Limit your agenda to just one or two topics. Polite but firm persistence, pursued through regular contact with the district office, is essential. If you can not get an appointment during the upcoming recess, express your disappointment -- and immediately request a firm commitment for the next time the Senator/Representative is back home.

Planning The Meeting

- **The group.** Small, diverse groups are best. You may want to have at least one spokesperson represent several organizations to strengthen the impression that you represent a number of constituents. Consider putting together a coalition with representatives from other local groups in the area. When possible, try to include members of other constituencies, for example, business, religious, sporting, or science communities.
- **Plan Meeting.** Before the meeting, get together and decide who will say what. Do not expect a lot of time with your Senator/Representative. Ask the staff in advance how much time you will have and be sure to cover your key points early. Ask your Senator/Representative for specific action. Try and find a local angle on national or regional issues. Make sure everyone in your group has an opportunity to speak. Remind everyone to begin by focusing on the specific action you'd like your Senator/Representative to take.
- **Pre-meeting meeting.** Hold a pre-meeting meeting. This helps everyone be on time and prepare for the most effective discussion. Bring along fact sheets and reference materials to leave with your

Senator/Representative. You should also leave a list with each group member's name, address, phone number and a summary of your agenda.

Meeting Etiquette

Be on time, dress nicely, and be polite. Never insult other Members of Congress. Introduce yourselves at the outset of the meeting. Have your leader give a brief introduction. State your reasons for seeking the meeting. Do not overstay your welcome; cover your points thoroughly and early. If the official is enjoying the meeting and lets it run over, fine. Be prepared to complete your agenda in the time allotted.

Follow-Up

Follow up promptly with a thank-you letter, and provide any information you promised during the meeting. Use these opportunities to continue to build a relationship with your elected official, and his or her staff. Invite your member to speak at an upcoming meeting or get-together.

Do not be discouraged if you do not see eye to eye with your Representative on every issue; there's always another piece of legislation down the road that he or she may be helpful on. If you didn't get the answer you wanted, keep trying. Be persistent! Remember that these kinds of visits provide an opportunity to gather information as well as air your point of view, so share what you learn with other groups in your region and please email a brief summary of the meeting to us at the League.

Sample District Meeting Request:

To: Representative Ben Ray Lujan

From: Liz VanDenzen

Regarding: Protection for America's Arctic, our nation's coasts and other special places across America

Dear Representative Lujan,

Congratulations on your new position representing us here in the 3rd District of New Mexico. On behalf of myself and over 12,000 Alaska Wilderness League member activists, I am writing to request a short meeting with you to discuss Alaskan public lands.

We would be grateful for any opportunity to meet with Representative Lujan during the upcoming Spring District Work Period.

I would like to discuss and share my passion for special places in Alaska such as the Coastal Plain of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, the Arctic Ocean, Teshekpuk Lake and other special areas of the National Petroleum Reserve-Alaska. This is a very important topic and I look forward to discussing it with Representative Lujan here in New Mexico.

Thank you very much for considering this request.

Sincerely,

YOUR NAME
YOUR CONTACT INFORMATION