

District Meetings

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 on 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 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 cannot 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. In addition, ask if you can meet with a district staff person in the meantime so that your concerns can be passed along to the member.

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 your 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 issue. 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 an 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 members of Congress or discuss campaign donations/election. Introduce yourselves at the beginning 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. The most important goal of a district meeting should be to build a relationship with your member of Congress and their staff. Relationships are the most important tool we have in advancing protection for Alaska's public lands and waters.

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 (info@alaskawild.org).

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,

On behalf of myself and more than 12,000 Alaska Wilderness League member activists, I am writing to request a short meeting with you to discuss public lands in Alaska. In addition, I work closely with other concerned organizations here in the 3rd district. We would be grateful for any opportunity to meet with Representative Lujan during the upcoming Spring District Work Period.

We would like to discuss and share our passion for special places in Alaska such as the Coastal Plain of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge and the Arctic Ocean. 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. I will follow-up with you to discuss a date and time for a meeting.

Sincerely,

YOUR NAME

YOUR CONTACT INFORMATION