



npr-a update

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BLM releases preferred plan

The Bureau of Land Management is proposing to make about 87 percent of the 4.6 million acres studied in the northeast corner of the National Petroleum Reserve-Alaska available for oil and gas leasing. The agency's plan would bar leasing and development in sensitive waterfowl and caribou habitat at Teshekpuk Lake and protect additional caribou habitat with special lease stipulations.

"This is a good plan, based on sound science and a very public outreach process," said Secretary of the Interior Bruce Babbitt. "I believe the Department has complied with the law and the intent of Congress when it designated this region a National Petroleum Reserve," he said.

Subsistence activities would be protected by a ban on oil and gas surface facilities around specific rivers and streams (exceptions are allowed for essential pipeline and road crossings). A subsistence advisory panel and an interagency research and monitoring team would also be established. The research and monitoring team would be made up of representatives of federal, state and borough government and would coordinate research and monitoring efforts measuring the effectiveness of stipulations.

The plan would also prohibit oil and gas facilities on Teshekpuk Lake and other locations important for fish and subsistence use.

Raptor habitat would be protected through a "no surface occupancy" zone for the Colville, Kikiakrorak and Kogosukruk rivers. The plan also restricts road construction to drilling units and establishes one-mile setbacks of no surface occupancy (other than pipelines and roads) around cabins and campsites.

"The plan merges the best science, the best technology and a fully open process to produce good management for this area," says BLM State Director Tom Allen. "I would like to thank all the people who have helped us develop this plan. We have benefitted greatly from the many thoughtful comments we have received at public meetings and in writing from hundreds of individuals and organizations," said Allen.

BLM will accept comments on its proposal through September 8, 1998.

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Background

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Northeast National Petroleum Reserve-Alaska (NPR-A) Integrated Activity Plan/Environmental Impact Statement (IAP/EIS) is designed to determine the appropriate multiple-use management of 4.6 million acres of the NPR-A, consistent with existing statutory direction for its management. **BLM is addressing two major questions:** (1) What protections and enhanced management will be implemented for surface resources such as wildlife; wildlife habitat; fisheries; and paleontological, subsistence, and recreation resources within the planning area? (2) Will the BLM conduct oil and gas lease sales in the planning area and, if so, what lands will be made available for leasing?

BLM, in partnership with the public and many federal, state, and North Slope Borough government agencies, has focused on the relationships of the current and potential uses of the planning area and the impact of those uses on the natural and human resources of the area. In this analysis, specific uses, resources, and portions of the planning area have stood out as especially significant.

Subsistence activities, particularly hunting and fishing, in the planning area are exceedingly important to local residents, including the Inupiat, the Native people of Alaska's North Slope. Subsistence hunting and fishing are central to the Inupiat's ages-old cultural system. Moreover, subsistence activities provide critical sustenance for these people who live in this remote region at an extreme distance from the nation's food-distribution system.

The potential use of the area for oil development is one focus of much of the analysis in the IAP/EIS. The Naval Petroleum Reserves Production Act of 1976 (NPRPA), as amended, encourages oil and gas leasing in NPR-A, while requiring protection of important surface resources and uses. North Slope oil production, centered at the massive Prudhoe Bay field, is key to the Nation's domestic oil supply. The North Slope contributes about 20 percent of America's current domestic production. The oil industry has discovered and developed other fields both to the east and west of Prudhoe.

Two portions of the planning area and their associated surface resources stand out as especially important. The area near **Teshkepuk Lake** has extraordinary wildlife. This wildlife-rich area also composes about half the area with the highest potential for oil and gas resources. It is the home of the Teshkepuk Lake Caribou Herd. The herd calves in the lands around the lake and provides much of the meat harvested by nearby North Slope villagers. In addition, large numbers of waterfowl, including in some years over 20 percent of the world's black brant population, spend the critical flightless molting period along the shores of dozens of lakes north and east of Teshkepuk.

This part of the planning area also is the summer breeding and nesting ground for waterfowl that annually migrate north from throughout the Americas. Spectacled and Steller's eiders, both recently added to the list of threatened and endangered species, are among the birds using the area. The area also provides fish for local residents.

The **Colville River** valley is the other particularly important portion of the planning area. It provides important habitat for raptors, including the Arctic peregrine falcon that, until 1994, was listed as an endangered species; neotropical migratory birds; moose; and fish. In addition, it contains world-class paleontological deposits and is an important all-season access corridor.



Alternatives

The Final IAP/EIS analyzes six alternative future management scenarios for public comment, including a Preferred Alternative. No Preferred Alternative was identified in the Draft IAP/EIS. The BLM wanted the public's thoughts on all the options offered in the draft document before it selected a specific plan. Comments received during the public comment period were considered in development of the Preferred Alternative.

Some elements are common to several alternatives. Stipulations would be imposed on authorized activities under all of the alternatives. These stipulations are designed to protect surface resources and subsistence uses; their scope increases with each alternative from Alternative A to Alternative E.

Alternative A is the "no-action" alternative which continues pre-existing management direction with no new lease sales. The stipulations which apply to Alternative A are ones that have been applied historically to permits for seismic and other non-oil and gas related activities. These stipulations also apply to Alternatives B through E.

Alternatives B through E progressively make more lands available for oil and gas leasing. Consequently, stipulations are added to the alternatives to mitigate impacts from the increasingly larger area and numbers and kinds of resources potentially impacted by development. For example, relatively few stipulations specifically protect caribou from oil and gas exploration and development under Alternatives A through C, because the most important caribou habitat is not made available under those alternatives.

Specific stipulations, such as restrictions on where and how oil facilities can be sited, are provided for caribou protection under Alternatives D and E, which make important caribou habitat available for leasing. A slightly [modified set of these stipulations](#) was developed specific to the Preferred Alternative, incorporating comments received from the public during the comment period on the Draft IAP/EIS.

Several alternatives recommend creation of **specially-designated areas**. The Secretary of the Interior is authorized to identify specific lands in the NPR-A as "Special Areas." Areas around Teshekpuk Lake and the **Colville River** were designated as Special Areas in 1977. Under some of the alternatives, BLM would recommend that the Secretary designate lands along the Ikpikpuk River important for their paleontological values as a Special Area and that the Secretary add the Pik Dunes, an unusual feature in the planning area of importance for caribou, to the Teshekpuk Lake Special Area.

Under several alternatives, BLM would have recommended that Congress designate the Colville River as a wild, scenic, or recreation river under the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act (WSRA). A review of the physical characteristics of the Colville River and associated resource values determined that the Colville River was "eligible" for designation under the WSRA. Based on comments received on the Draft IAP/EIS, the other landowners within the potential WSR corridor do not support designation and would be unwilling to cooperate in management of a wild and scenic river. Therefore, a determination that the Colville River is "unsuitable" for designation under the WSRA is included in the Preferred Alternative.

In several alternatives, BLM proposes to work with nearby land owners, including the State and the Arctic Slope Regional Corporation, to explore the potential for creating a **Bird Conservation Area** under the Partners in Flight Program. This designation would highlight consideration of this habitat for land managers. Should a new Special Area, a Wild and Scenic River, or a Bird Conservation Area result from the plan, BLM would draft specific plans or studies for these areas. Finally, under some alternatives, BLM proposes to undertake a plan to guide future studies of caribou and waterfowl populations in the **Teshkepuk Lake** area.

The alternatives presented in the IAP/EIS are consistent with the purposes of the NPR-A's governing statutes. Each alternative addresses a different balance between serving the "total energy needs of the nation" and protecting the surface resources, including providing "maximum protection" for resources in Special Areas, as required by the NPRPA.

Condensed descriptions of all alternatives are found on page 7. We have reproduced [Figure II.C.1](#) from the Final IAP/EIS showing the Preferred Alternative.

The **Preferred Alternative** protects habitats important to molting geese and the Teshkepuk Lake caribou herd by making them unavailable for leasing or by strict restrictions on oil and gas surface occupancy.

In addition, surface use restrictions and other stipulations are applied to other habitats identified as having high surface resource values, including areas identified by North Slope residents as important subsistence use areas, such as **Fish and Judy creeks**, and the **Ikpikpuk and Miguakiak rivers**. Similar restrictions and stipulations are applied to the **Colville, Kikiakrorak, and Kogosukruk rivers** to protect raptor nesting and subsistence. Areas along the latter two rivers are added to the Colville River Special Area and the **Pik Dunes** would be added to the Teshkepuk Lake Special Area under the Preferred Alternative.

Leasing would be allowed on 87 percent of the planning area. Stipulations would ensure that oil and gas activities would be conducted in a manner that is consistent with the protection of the surface resources. In addition to geographic and seasonal restrictions on certain activities, the Preferred Alternative requires a thorough **consultation** with affected communities, the establishment of a **Subsistence Advisory Panel**, and creation of an **Interagency Research and Monitoring Team**. This team would coordinate research and monitoring efforts related to the effectiveness of stipulations and surface resource impacts. No roads connecting the planning area with the established road system (other than temporary ice roads) would be allowed. ([more information on stipulations](#))

Impacts

The **Preferred Alternative** may produce the following impacts in the planning area:

Birds- Because surface oil and gas activities (other than winter seismic operations) are prohibited in the important goose molting area, there would be insignificant or minor impacts on bird populations. Displacement of birds is expected to increase slightly in the southern two-thirds of the planning area in which surface oil and gas activity would be allowed. This would not significantly affect populations. Crude and refined oil spills would likely result in the loss of a small number of birds.

Caribou- Caribou calving and migration near Teshekpuk Lake would not be affected by oil and gas exploration or development. In areas near ground activities, including those associated with oil and gas facilities south of the lake, caribou would be displaced by 1-2 kilometers. Crude and refined oil spills could result in the loss of a small number of animals, with recovery expected within 1 year. Herd populations would not be significantly affected.

Subsistence- Short-term, localized, and generally nonlethal impacts on populations and distributions of subsistence resources (e.g., caribou, fish, waterfowl, bowhead whales) would have little effect on the subsistence harvests of any village in or near the area and negligible impact on subsistence resources and uses outside Alaska's North Slope.

Economy- At \$18/barrel for oil, the Preferred Alternative is estimated to create 500 production jobs, \$5 million in royalties for both the federal and state treasuries annually, \$9 million in severance taxes for Alaska annually, and \$500,000 annually in state property taxes and \$2 million annually for the North Slope Borough in property taxes.



Preferred Alternative Stipulations

The 79 stipulations applicable to the Preferred Alternative are based on those developed in the Draft IAP/EIS for Alternatives A through E. They will attach to all permits and other approvals from BLM required of users of the public lands in the planning area. The major actions in the planning area which require BLM's authorization are land use occupancy, commercial guiding, overland moves, seismic surveys, exploratory drilling, and oil and gas development. Generally, independent recreational users, people flying over the area, and subsistence users do not require any authorization from BLM.

BLM may grant exceptions to a stipulation if the agency finds that implementation of the stipulation is (1) technically not feasible, economically prohibitive, or an environmentally preferable alternative is available and (2) the alternative mitigation measure proposed fully satisfies the objective(s) of the stipulation. In addition, exceptions may be granted in emergencies involving human health and safety.

Some of the Preferred Alternative stipulations are summarized below.

Aircraft Use

- Aircraft shall maintain an altitude of at least 1,500 feet when within a 1/2 mile of cliffs used for raptor nesting from April 15 to August 5.
- Fixed-wing aircraft use will be limited within caribou calving and goose molting areas during critical calving and molting periods.
- Helicopter flights for BLM-permitted activities are prohibited in the goose molting area from June 15 through August 20.

Overland Moves and Seismic Work

- These activities may begin only after the ground is frozen to a depth of 12 inches and the average snow cover is 6 inches deep. These operations must cease when the spring melt of snow begins (about May 5-15).
- On-the-ground activities shall employ low ground pressure vehicles. Tracked vehicles will not execute tight turns by locking one track.
- Activities are prohibited within 1 mile of known polar bear dens.
- Seismic work is prohibited within 1,200 feet of any known, long-term cabin or campsite.
- Operators shall use best available technology or other appropriate spill containment measures to prevent fuel migration from fuel or chemical storage areas due to overfills and spills.

Waste Prevention, Handling, and Disposal

- Lessees shall prepare a waste management plan and meet specific pollution prevention requirements.
- Burial of garbage and attracting wildlife to food and garbage is prohibited.
- All pumpable wastes shall be disposed of by injection.
- Petroleum products and liquid chemicals shall be stored within an impermeable lined and diked area and shall be located at least 500 feet from any waterbody.
- Fuels shall not be stored on an active floodplain and, with the exception of motorboats, floatplanes, and skiplanes, refueling of equipment is prohibited within 500 feet of any waterbody.
- Lessees shall plan and conduct a major spill-response field-deployment drill annually.

Ice Roads and Water Use

- Winter ice roads shall be offset from year to year to minimize vegetative impacts.
- Water withdrawal from streams and rivers during winter is prohibited. Winter water withdrawal is prohibited from lakes less than 7 feet deep if they are connected with or subject to seasonal flooding by fish-bearing streams. Water withdrawal from fish-bearing lakes greater than 7 feet deep is limited to 15% of free-flowing water.

Oil and Gas Exploration and Development

- Exploratory drilling is only allowed in winter. Construction of permanent oil and gas facilities during exploration is prohibited. Exploration is not allowed within 1,200 feet of any known, long-term cabin or campsite.
- Pipelines and roads must be separated by at least 500 feet and should be laid out to minimize delaying or deflecting caribou movement. Within the Special Caribou Stipulations Area, oil field development will be laid out to minimize adverse effects on caribou movement and buried pipeline or ramps may be required.
- Above-ground pipelines shall be elevated at least five feet.
- Except for essential pipeline and road crossings, permanent oil and gas facilities are prohibited within 1/4 mile of important fish-bearing lakes, 1/2 mile from Teshekpuk Lake, Ikpikpuk and Miguakiak Rivers, and Judy Creek and upper Fish Creek, 1 mile from the Colville, Kikiakrorak, and Kogosukruk rivers, and 3 miles from lower Fish Creek. Facilities must be sited at least 500 feet from the active floodplain of any waterbody for which a specific setback is not provided.
- Permanent road connections to a road system outside the planning area are prohibited.
- Roads and pipelines must be sited at least a 1/4 mile from known, long-term cabins or campsites. Other oil and gas facilities must be sited at least 1 mile from such cabins and campsites.
- During calving and the period which follows when caribou seek relief from insects, road traffic in oil development areas will be limited. Measures include speed limits, ceasing travel when caribou crossings appear imminent, convoying, and bussing.

Subsistence and Other Activities

- Oil and gas lessees shall consult with local subsistence communities, the North Slope Borough, and the Subsistence Advisory Panel prior to exploration or development to identify potential conflicts with subsistence hunting and fishing and to identify means to prevent unreasonable interference with subsistence harvests. Subsistence users will be allowed reasonable access to oil fields for their activities.
- All personnel involved in an exploration and development project shall receive orientation training regarding environmental, social, and cultural resources and concerns in the area.
- Exploration and production activities are prohibited within 1/2 mile of occupied grizzly bear dens. Lessees are required to prepare and implement bear interaction plans to minimize bear conflicts.
- Upon abandonment or expiration of a lease, oil field facilities must be removed and the site rehabilitated.
- Lessees must conduct a cultural and paleontological resources survey prior to any ground-disturbing activity.



Comparison of Alternatives

Alternative A

- Continue current management activities, such as authorizing winter overland supply moves, scientific studies, and Special Recreation
- Permits for commercial guides
- No oil and gas lease sales
- No new designations would be proposed
- Two options, one allowing and one prohibiting seismic surveys

Alternative B**

- Continue current management activities
- About 53% of planning area available for oil and gas lease sales
- Recommends
 - creating the Ikpikpuk River Special Area
 - designating the Colville River a "wild" Wild & Scenic River

Alternative C**

- Continue current management activities
- About 72% of planning area available for oil and gas lease sales
- Recommends
 - creating the Ikpikpuk River Special Area
 - designating the Colville River a "scenic" Wild & Scenic River

Alternative D**

- Continue current management activities
- About 90% of planning area available for oil and gas lease sales
- Recommends
 - creating the Ikpikpuk River Special Area
 - designating the Colville River a "recreation" Wild & Scenic River

Alternative E**

- Continue current management activities
- All of the planning area available for oil and gas lease sales
- Recommends
 - creating the Ikpikpuk River Special Area

Preferred Alternative**

- Continue current management activities
- About 87% of planning area available for oil and gas lease sales
- Prohibit oil and gas leasing or impose significant restrictions on development in subsistence use areas and caribou, waterfowl and raptor habitat
- Establish an Interagency Research and Monitoring Team
- Recommends
 - adding two rivers to Colville River Special Area
 - developing Colville River Management Plan

The Final Plan/EIS contains six alternatives, including a preferred alternative, and an analysis of the anticipated impacts.

**** Note:** Alternatives B, C, D, E, and the Preferred Alternative all include:

- establishing a subsistence advisory board
- proposing a bird conservaton area along the Colville River
- adding Pik Sand Dunes to Teshekpuk Lake Special Area

What happens next?

BLM will accept comments from individuals or organizations concerned with the plan. Comments should be postmarked by September 8, 1998 or can be sent electronically by the same date to:

NPR-A Planning Team **via the internet at:**

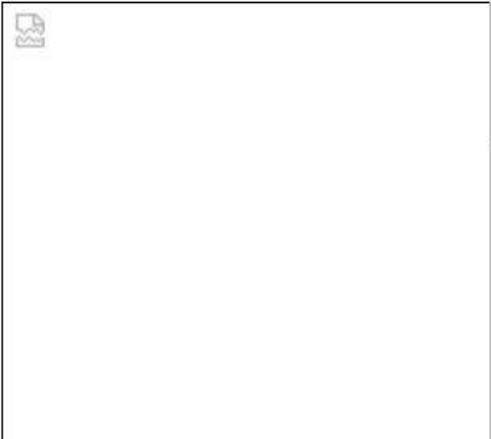
Bureau of Land Management jducker@ak.blm.gov

Alaska State Office
(930)

222 W. 7th Avenue, #13 **via the NPR-A website at:**

Anchorage, Alaska [http://aurora.ak.blm.gov](http://aurora.ak.blm.gov/npra/)
99513 /npra/

Your comments will be considered prior to issuance of the final decision document of the IAP/EIS, which is called the Record of Decision.



Nuiqsut mayor Leonard Lampe and Sara Kunakuana study maps provided by BLM at one of the formal hearings held last January.

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Key dates coming up

August 7, 1998

Final Plan/Environmental Impact Statement released.

August 10, 1998

Final Plan/EIS distributed by mail.

August 10, 1998

Final Plan/EIS released on the Internet.

September 8, 1998

Last day to comment on the preferred alternative.

Fall 1998

Record of Decision document released.

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