

Whales cause concern for Bering OCS sales

The North Slope Borough Mayor's Office this week released a statement expressing concern that the Norton Sound and other Bering Sea areas should possibly be classified as habi-

tat for the bowhead whale, a development which may raise serious questions about plans for off-shore oil and gas lease sales in the area.

Jon Buchholdt, Mayorial Assistant, said to-

day in Anchorage, "The presence of large numbers of bowhead and other whales in the Bering Sea and Norton Sound, and the possibility of spending summer there, raised many ques-

tions about plans for oil and gas development in the area."

The ice blocking the traditional migration of the bowhead whales at Bering Straits and the possible summering of the bowhead herds in the Bering Sea and Norton Sound could well classify the area as a habitat for the whale, he added.

"In view of the fact that Norton Sound Outer Continental Shelf (OCS) sale Environmental Impact Statement fails to deal with this situation and views bowhead use of the area as transitory, North Slope Borough officials see this year's events as positive demonstration of the fact that ice conditions occasionally cause the bowhead to spend time in the Norton Sound area," continued Buchholdt.

The Borough official noted that the North Slope Borough, arctic slope villages, and environmental groups have held up the Beaufort Sea Oil and Gas Lease Sale because of similar concerns about impacts on the bowhead whale.