

Federal government releases environmental study on Cook Inlet

Copies of the draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) concerning a proposed sale of oil and gas leases in the lower Cook Inlet are available today for public inspection. Announcement of the publication of the draft EIS focusing on 152 blocks, involving some 865,364 acres,

was officially made in the Federal Register by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) on July 13, 1976.

Publication of this document is the third in a series of steps involving participation by the public in the federal decision-making process on outer continental shelf (OCS)

matters.

The area selected after deliberations that involved, for the first time in Alaska, State officials as well as members of other federal agencies, covers about 0.9 million acres (0.35 million hectares). The location lies between Kalgin Island, on the north, and the Barren Islands, on the south.

It covers a region of about 110 miles (176 kilometers) in length and 70 miles (112 kilometers) in width.

This federally controlled area is somewhat less than one half that nominated by the petroleum industry following the call for nominations and

comments, issued September 22, 1975.

The environmental study just released today looks at an area that has, according to the U. S. Geological Survey, a fossil-fuel resource potential of from 0.09 to 2.6 million barrels of oil and from 0.6 to 3.3 trillion cubic feet of natural gas. About one third of the blocks proposed for leasing are believed to be gas prone, while the remainder are considered both oil and gas prone.

Of the areas offshore the South Alaska coastline, Cook Inlet is the only one where drilling for oil and natural gas has been underway since late

1959, with an initial State of Alaska sale of 25,721 acres of submerged lands. The last State sale was held on October 23, 1974.

Some of the sales proposed by the State in Cook Inlet in the 1960's were postponed when the federal government protested them on the basis of claimed ownership of the submerged lands. The jurisdictional dispute was settled by the U.S. Supreme Court in June 1975. According to the decision, because the State of Alaska proof was insufficient to establish Cook Inlet as an historic bay, the U.S. had paramount rights to the land beneath the waters of the lower, or seaward portion, of the inlet.

Single copies of the EIS, in draft form, are available from the BLM Alaska OCS Office, 800 A Street, (P.O. Box 1159, 99510) Anchorage, Alaska and from the BLM Office of Public Affairs (130), Main Interior Building, 18th and C Streets, N. W., Washington, D. C. 20240. Copies are on a first-come first-serve basis, and will be limited one to a particular office, company facility, or individual.

A public hearing concerning the oil and gas lease-sale proposal will be held in Alaska in late August.