

Beaufort Sea sale reviewed

Public comment on the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) for the proposed December Beaufort Sea oil and gas lease sale is scheduled for mid-May and June. The North Slope, the area most affected by the sale, has reservations whether the sale should go forward as planned and is critical of the DEIS released in March. The region's views on the sale and the impact statement were prepared by the North Slope Borough's public information office and are printed as submitted below. Further comment is invited on this major issue which affects all Alaskans. Ed.

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for the Tundra Times

The office of BLM's Alaska Outer Continental Shelf has announced the hearings to be held to receive official public commentary on the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) for the proposed Beaufort Sea Federal/State Oil and Gas Lease Sale scheduled for this December.

Hearings are set in the following places: the new community center at Kaktovik on May 15; in the all-purpose room of the school building at Nuiqsut on May 16, in Fairbanks on May 17; and in the assembly room of the North Slope Borough headquarters in Barrow on June 4.

Public hearings on the North Slope Communities will start at 7:30 p.m. The hearing in Fairbanks will begin at 9 a.m. in the Schaible Auditorium at the University of Alaska.

Presiding officer for the hearings will be Hank Nolden, chief of the Environmental Assessment Branch in the Minerals Division for BLM in Washington, D.C.

The Draft Statement

The DEIS consists of two volumes containing 387 pages of text along with 200 more pages of bibliography and appendices plus some 12 separate maps. It is available on a first-come-first-served basis at the OCS Office, 700 A Street, in Anchorage. The statement concerns the environmental impact of the proposed sale which involved 86 blocks consisting of 514,193 acres of mostly submerged lands in the near-shore area of the Beaufort Sea. The acreage lies between the Canning River and the Simpson Lagoon. Because of the jurisdictional dispute over some of the property, the Federal government and the State of Alaska have decided

to hold the sale jointly and resolve the jurisdictional disputes at a later date.

In summary, the DEIS states that all blocks pose some degree of pollution risk to the environment. The risk potential is related to adverse effects on the environment and other resource uses which may result principally from accidental or chronic oil spills. Socioeconomic effects from onshore development will have State, regional, and local implications.

The report remarks by way of introduction:

Several mitigated measures may be applied which will reduce the type, occurrence, and extent of adverse impact associated with this pro-

(See BEAUFORT, Page Seven)

Beaufort

(Continued from Page One)

posal. Other measures, which are beyond the capability of this agency to apply, have been identified. In spite of mitigating measures, some impacts are considered unavoidable. For instance, oil spills are considered statistically probable, some disturbance to fishery and wildlife values will occur, and some onshore development will occur in undeveloped areas.

The Summary statement lists the following "Alternatives" to going ahead with the sale, some of which have already been proposed by residents and officials of the North Slope:

- A. Withdraw sale.
- B. Hold the sale in a modified form. Deletion of blocks for protection of biologically diverse and geographically distinct area known as the boulder field.
- C. Delay sale.
 - 1. Pending completion of "Project Whales" study.
 - 2. Pending decision on the Marine Sanctuary proposal.
 - 3. Pending approval of the Alaska Coastal Management Plan and the North Slope Borough Coastal Management Plan.