

Comments about NPR drilling sought

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Workshops to learn peoples' feelings about the effects of proposed oil and gas leasing in the National Petroleum Reserve on the North Slope are to be held in Barrow, Atkasook, and Wainwright in the first week of April.

The hearings are being held before an environmental impact statement is written on the proposed leasing schedule to learn about what people who live in the areas feel could be harmful about the leasing, according to Keith Bennett, environmental specialist on the NPR staff.

The workshop will be held in Atkasook on April 5; in Wainwright on April 6, and in Barrow on April 7. All hearings will be at 7 p.m.

Some 526 tracts of land in the National Petroleum Reserve are scheduled to be leased within years and the workshop organizers seek to find out residents' beliefs about that leasing schedule on their subsistence lifestyles, according to Bennett.

The reserve holds numerous forms of subsistence fish and game habitats including major caribou calving areas, critical moose habitats, waterfowl habitat, geese molting areas, beluga whale summer high use and calving areas, spotted seal summer and fall high use areas; bowhead whale fall concentration areas, and black brant

molting and staging areas, according to an information from the NPR office.

(See maps, pages 11,12,13, and 14)

The reserve also contains the critical migration routes of caribou and with development comes the potential for the pipeline to cut off those routes which is why the comments are being sought, said Bennett.

Oil and gas development of the reserve will follow larger clusters of oil wells rather than having individual wells on individual pads, said Bennett. He said the cluster development is planned to avoid as much intrusion into the area as possible.

He said there are some reserves which have well pads at 160-acre intervals which "create a perimeter" around critical habitat and reduce game and fish in the area.

A sample map of a possible model for oil development shows as many as nine oil or gas pads in the area but Bennett said fewer pads are likely. Those pads tend to be in the far north and far south of the reserve and would be connected in some manner to the Trans Alaska Pipeline System.

Public comment could in some manner change the way which the pipelines were connected, said Bennett.

The workshop sessions will not be very structured, said Bennett, to allow residents to "take control of the meet-

ings to discuss among themselves, their concerns. We don't want to tell them things and structure the meeting."

Bennett said there are several alternatives for the proposed sites to be drilled. They include:

- * Specific rivers, lakes, coastal areas or wild areas could be deleted from being leased at all if development would harm subsistence hunting and fishing;

- * Areas could be designated to be leased but no development could be done on "any sensitive area";

- * Phased leasing could be conducted so that if an area were dedicated to be a critical wetland, not all of the land could be leased at one time. Under this option an entire field might be drilled over a period of time but not all at once;

- * There also is the option for seasonal drilling restrictions similar to the seasonal restrictions on the Beaufort Sea in which oil companies are only allowed to drill during the winter months to avoid the noise disturbing the whales and to avoid the chance that an oil spill will occur during bowhead whale migration.

A seasonal restriction on land might be enforced by reducing the field's output so fewer people are needed in the field therefore less human noise would be caused, said Bennett. Another alternative

might be to limit the maintenance done on fields, again reducing the amount of human contact to the area, he said.

He said in one oil field in Texas, one entire oil field is shut-down for 45 days during a critical time for the area wildlife.

Designed solutions to problems might include "space age technology," said Bennett. Such technology might include having cameras attached to the pipeline to run along each side the length of the pipeline to view the terrain for oil leaks. This would mean in person human observation or low-flying observation planes would not be necessary.

Another "space age solution" could be for equipment to monitor the oil flow at short checkpoints to see how much oil is flowing all along the pipeline. In this way, if a leak occurred between checkpoint

A and B, repairmen could know precisely where it was and the extent of the leak without a human entering the general area.

Then, said Bennett, there is the factor of balancing the damage that the oil would do to the tundra as opposed to the damage that humans repairing the leak could do if the leak occurred during, for example, a critical calving time.

Technicians, for example, could decide that a 15 barrel leak per day might not be as damaging to the environment

Bennett said that his department is forecasting "an extra high probability" that oil will be found in the reserve and because of the complexities of the areas in terms of wildlife and its importance to the people on the North Slope they are very concerned about getting as much public comment as possible.