

Offshore lease sale schedule accelerated

The U.S. Department of Interior has announced it plans to accelerate the oil lease sale schedule for Alaska's coastal waters, including sales in Bristol Bay, Norton Sound and the Chukchi Sea.

In addition, the revised timetable added six new sale areas to the 10 already scheduled from 1982 through 1986, but an Interior spokesman said the additions were merely subdivisions of areas already scheduled for sale.

The announcement last week brought a round of disapprovals even from Alaska's Republican congressional delegation and the governor's mansion.

Gov. Jay Hammond was particularly critical of the impending North Aleutian Shelf and Navarin Basin sales in the Bris-

tol Bay area. Hammond said there was a potential for "enormous adverse impacts" in Bristol Bay which encompasses one of the world's richest fisheries, not to mention other marine life in the bay.

"The small villages of that region are not now prepared for the oil terminals and staging areas which inevitably accompany offshore oil and gas development. Accidental oil spills and even the routine pollution which intentionally occurs from offshore activity, pose a grave risk to what has appropriately been called the richest fishery, marine mammal and bird environment in the world," he said.

Earlier this year state officials had proposed Interior Secretary James Watt postpone plans for oil sales in the Arctic Ocean and

the fishing waters of the North Aleutian Shelf until advances in technology could make drilling and production safer for marine life.

In making his announcement last Friday, Watt said the Outer Continental Shelf program already had "an excellent environmental record" with "since 1970, only two spills of greater than 1,000 barrels."

Watt left a comment period on a revised schedule open until May 1 and hoped to make the plan final in October when a revised environmental impact statement on the sales is expected to be finished.

In their criticisms of the revised sale schedule, Sen. Ted Stevens, U.S. Rep. Don Young and Hammond all said they had hoped the federal government

would turn toward onshore oil reserves instead of accelerating the potentially more dangerous offshore exploration.

Said Hammond, "While the Department of Interior launches on an effort to industrialize Bristol Bay for little gain, the far greater promise of the onshore areas of our state remain unrealized. It seems to us far preferable for the admittedly limited resources of the oil industry to channeled toward the great potential reserves of the National Petroleum Reserve where more oil can be produced far quicker and at far lower economic and environmental costs."

The new timetable changes the following offshore Alaska lease sales:

--Navarin Basin sale No. 83

from December 1984 to December 1983;

--Beaufort Sea sale No. 71 from February 1983 to October 1982;

--Norton Basin sale No. 57 from September 1982 to May 1982;

--Chukchi Sea sale No. 85 from March 1985 to February 1985, and

--North Aleutian Shelf sale No. 65 from October 1983 to April 1983.

In an Interior Department fact sheet distributed last week, the revisions was described as an effort to boost exploration in areas of "high potential--all of which are in frontier areas offshore Alaska."