

Interior extends ANWR deadline for comments

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The U.S. Department of Interior has decided to allow two weeks of additional time for comments on a draft report on proposed oil exploration in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge.

The extension of the Jan. 23 deadline had been requested by Gov. Steve Cowper, and spokesmen for the governor had said the request was denied. But Interior officials apparently reversed themselves.

Those who wish to send written comments on the report now have until Feb. 6. Comments should be sent to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Division of Refuge Management, 2343 Main Interior Building, 18th and C Streets, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20240.

Also requested by Cowper were two additional public hearings in Alaska on the report, besides those held in Anchorage and Kaktovik. In a Dec. 29 letter to Interior Secretary Donald Hodel, Cowper asked that additional hearings be held in Fairbanks and Arctic Village. Those hearings will not be held.

Congress will be considering this year whether the coastal plain of the wildlife refuge ought to be opened for oil and gas exploration, development and production. The ANWR report states there is substantial oil and gas potential in the coastal plain.