

Young seeks lease delay

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Anchorage — Although he's been a consistent supporter of accelerated oil and gas leasing off Alaska's coast, Congressman Don Young on Monday asked for a delay in the sale of acreage near Bristol Bay.

In his first meeting with

new Interior Secretary William Clark, the Republican lawmaker asked that the North Aleutian Shelf sale be pushed back from 1985 to 1988.

"We have to balance the importance of domestic energy production with the jobs and resources in the fishing industry in the area," Young said. Bristol Bay helps support the world's largest red salmon run. The sale area also is rich in other fish and marine mammals.

Young said Clark agreed to review the schedule. In 1981, former Gov. Jay Hammond took Clark's predecessor, James Watt, on a tour of the area and convinced him to postpone the sale, which then was scheduled for 1983.

Bill Hopkins, executive director of the Alaska Oil and Gas Association, said industry officials always are disappointed when lease sales are postponed.

The U.S. Geological Survey estimates the area could contain from 200 million to 1.2 billion barrels of oil and 1 trillion to 5.6 trillion cubic feet of natural gas.

In a survey conducted by the Interior Department in the late 1970s, the oil industry ranked the Bristol Bay area fourth, just behind several areas of the Beaufort Sea, among places they'd most like to drill.