

Aleut corporation wants to stop OCS sale

The Aleut Corporation has asked that a proposed Federal outer continental shelf oil and gas sale in the Bering Sea, north of the Aleutian Chain, not be held.

Agafon Krukoff, Jr., in comments delivered at a "scoping hearing" sponsored April 16 by Bureau of Land Management officials, said that the St. George Basin should be the last place for anyone to drill for oil and gas.

"I believe the area under consideration for oil and gas exploration known as the St. George Basin is the very last place on earth

anyone should risk drilling for hydrocarbons," Krukoff stated.

Krukoff said that it would be unwise to schedule OCS drilling in the region because of the threat to rich and crucial biological populations and the danger presented by unpredictable weather in the area.

"It is not too much to say that the very area proposed for leasing and exploration is one of the most important biological intersections in the world ... It contains a nutrient broth so rich that it attracts, and is in turn fed by, a cycle of

marine mammals, fish and birds unrivaled anywhere. The Bering Sea truly has it all, from plankton to blue whales," said Krukoff.

"It supports the richest fishery in the country with its resources. It entertains enormous subsea herds of crab, all five commercial salmon species, bottom fish of every conceivable description in incredible densities, birds, birds, and more birds, and overwhelming numbers of marine mammals including sea otters, sea lions, walruses, several kinds of seals (including over one million fur seals), porpoises, dol-

phins, and nearly every kind of whale that exists," added Krukoff.

"I submit to you that nowhere does the case against drilling have more validity than in the Bering Sea. There is an urgency to protect this area that trumps even the immense urgency to find more oil. The Bering Sea must be a sanctuary which cannot be violated by the kind of national gluttony which leads the nation to view Alaska as a giant 'dickhead' battery," Krukoff stated.

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The Aleut Corporation president said the biological importance of the area, coupled the severe and unpredictable weather patterns, makes Bering Sea OCS exploration an "insane" risk.

"To make matters far worse, to compound the risk of exploration incalculably is the utterly unpredictable nature of the Bering Sea weather. Taken together with the fact that the Bering Sea is a genuine living laboratory, it seems dead wrong, it seems insane even to blend the risk of oil exploration into this mixture. To do so, frankly, is to harness a time bomb to the fabulous clockwork of the Bering Sea," Krukoff said.

The Aleut leader suggested that a decision to stop Bering Sea OCS

oil and gas activity would be the best course of action.

Krukoff concluded, "I suggest, instead, erecting a giant stop sign at Unimak Pass. After all, the Aleutian Islands and the Aleut people have very graciously hosted the Russians, the Americans, three atomic bombs, and a world war. I believe now is an appropriate time for this very special archipelago and its people to finally play host to a landing force of common sense, understanding and wonder."

The position taken by the Aleut Corporation is similar to those adopted by villages of western Alaska and north slope communities.

While the Aleut Corporation expresses total opposition to Bering Sea OCS oil development, the Association of Village Council Presi-

dents (AVCP) last month adopted a formal convention resolution asking that a final decision on the Norton Sound and Navaron Basin OCS sales be put off until the end of the proposed five-year Federal leasing plan to allow full review of the proposals by affected villages.

Several north slope villages, and the North Slope Borough, have been involved in litigation in the

federal and state courts in opposition to oil and gas lease sales for the Beaufort Sea in the Arctic Ocean.

Leaders of several coastal Native regions in Alaska have recently expressed serious interest in developing a coalition of coastal Native areas to pursue common interests and concerns about proposed OCS oil and gas leasing activity.