

Wilderness study shelved

A decision to eliminate about 1.5 million acres of public land from further wilderness study along the proposed natural gas pipeline route was announced by Bureau of Land Management State Director Curtis V. McVee.

During the assessment, 4.7 million acres along the gasline route from Prudhoe Bay to the Canadian border and another 181,000 acres along the proposed Golden Valley powerline were evaluated. Almost 2 million acres are state and private lands, or under the jurisdiction of other agencies.

Of approximately 2.5 million acres of BLM managed lands, 1.5 million acres were found to clearly lack wilderness values while the remaining acres need further study.

The existence of the oil pipeline, haul road, airfields, camps, bridges and highways all impact the wilderness qualities of the area. Lands affected by these intrusions were dropped from further studies.

McVee said the wilderness review for the rest of Alaska's BLM managed lands will be deferred until authorized by the BLM director.

Public comments will be considered through May 5.