

Sohio Beaufort well approved

Sohio Petroleum Company can proceed with plans to drill an exploratory well for oil and gas in the Beaufort Sea, according to an announcement by the Corps of Engineers.

The Corps of Engineers announced last week that a permit has been issued to Sohio to allow the oil company to construct a gravel drilling pad near the Savavanirtok River Delta east of Prudhoe Bay.

Sohio plans to construct the pad and begin drilling this winter. The permit requires the oil company to complete its drilling at the site or suspend activities prior to spring breakup.

According to the announcement, the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) has advised the Corps that no significant impact would result on the bowhead whale or its habitat, but NMFS said no further permits should be issued for drilling until further study is done.

Colonel George R. Robertson of the Corps said he plans to conduct public hearings on future exploration activity in the North Slope communities of Barrow, Nuiqsut and Kaktovik during February. The Corps stated that Robertson "hopes to learn first hand what concerns the people of the area may have about future activities that might involve Corps permit consideration."