



DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

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PUBLIC HEARING SCHEDULED FOR PROPOSED WILDLIFE-LAND LEASING RULES

The Department of the Interior will hold a public hearing on regulations that were recently proposed relating to oil and gas leasing on Federal wildlife lands, Secretary Fred A. Seaton announced today.

The public hearing will be held at 9:00 a.m. on Monday, December 9, 1957 in the Auditorium of the Department of the Interior Building, 18th and C Streets, NW., in Washington, D. C. Assistant Secretary (Public Land Management) Roger Ernst and Assistant Secretary (Fish and Wildlife) Ross L. Leffler will be joint chairmen of the hearing.

The subject of the hearing will be proposed regulations relating to the leasing of wildlife refuge lands, game range lands, Alaska wildlife areas, and Federal-State cooperative areas for oil and gas exploration and development. The proposed regulations were published in the Federal Register on October 11, 1957 (Volume 22, Number 198, pages 8088-8089), at which time interested parties were given a 30-day period in which to submit any written comments or suggestions, the Department said.

"In view of the widespread interest shown by the general public and many requests for an extension of the time within which to submit written comments, or be heard orally on the subject, it appears appropriate to hold a public hearing," Secretary Seaton said.

All written comments or suggestions which have been received and any that are submitted prior to the date of the hearing will be considered by the Department. People attending the hearing may also submit comments at that time, the Department said. Persons desiring to submit their views at the hearing should notify the Director, Bureau of Land Management, Department of the Interior, Washington 25, D.C., prior to December 9.

Secretary Seaton noted that the proposed amendment of the regulation would establish a new policy regulating oil and gas leasing on Federal wildlife lands. It would not permit leasing on certain wildlife lands.

At the time the regulations were proposed Secretary Seaton stated that the proposed amendment of the regulation recognizes four separate classes of wildlife lands. These include wildlife refuges, game ranges, Alaska wildlife areas, and Federal-State cooperative lands.

Under the proposed regulations, all oil and gas leasing would be forbidden on wildlife refuge lands under the complete jurisdiction of the United States Fish and Wildlife Service, except where the Government has determined that the lands are being drained of oil and gas by nearby wells. If the Geological Survey, an agency of the Department of the Interior, determines that the lands are being drained of oil from operations on adjacent lands, the Bureau of Land Management may, upon the concurrence of the United States Fish and Wildlife Service, process an offering inviting competitive bidding. Leases for such lands would be issued only upon the approval of the Secretary of the Interior and would contain such stipulations as are necessary to assure that activities on oil and gas development would not damage wildlife resources. There are an estimated 4,418,000 acres of wildlife refuge lands in the continental United States.

On game range lands, the Bureau of Land Management and the United States Fish and Wildlife Service would jointly determine which lands will not be subject to oil and gas leasing. Actual leases on game range lands available for oil and gas leasing would require the approval of the Secretary of the Interior. Under the proposed regulations, these special areas would be treated the same as lands in an established wildlife refuge. The remaining lands in each game range would be open to oil and gas leasing under such conditions as are determined necessary to insure that leasing activities and drilling will not interfere with the value of the lands for game range purposes. Under the regulations any areas that are closed to leasing within a game range will be shown on maps available to the public. Game ranges embrace an estimated 4,616,000 acres.

Oil and gas leasing on Federal-State cooperative lands and on Alaska wildlife areas would be handled under the same principles as game range lands. Any areas in which leasing would be forbidden, except when there is drainage present, would be determined by the agencies having jurisdiction over the lands. The remaining lands in these areas would be open to oil and gas leasing under such stipulations as are deemed necessary to protect wildlife resources. There are approximately 502,000 acres in Federal-State cooperative areas and about 7,885,000 acres within Alaska wildlife areas.

After the public hearing and after the Department has had an opportunity to thoroughly study and review the comments received, the regulations will be published in the Federal Register in their final form.

The hearing will be open to anyone interested.

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