



# DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

## news release

INTERVIEW BY INTERIOR SECRETARY DON HODEL  
ON NBC "TODAY" SHOW  
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Jane Pauley: Should Congress permit drilling for oil and gas in Alaska's Arctic National Wildlife Refuge? The Wildlife Refuge is a 19 million acre tract of land in northeast Alaska. The Interior Department has recommended that exploratory drilling be allowed in the million and a half acre coastal plain. Some estimates hold that the area may be as big an oil field as nearby Prudhoe Bay. Conservationists oppose development however, feeling that irreparable damage to the environment and to the Refuge's wildlife especially the caribou herds. Over the next two weeks Interior Secretary Donald Hodel will be taking three Congressional committees through the refuge to make the argument that conservation and development are not incompatible. Secretary Hodel joins us this morning from our Washington newsroom. Good Morning, Mr. Secretary.

Secretary Hodel: Good Morning, Jane.

Pauley: Is it going to be a hard sell?

Secretary: For some it will be, but I really think it's clear that one of the reasons for taking people there is we can make the case that we don't have to choose between an improving environment and protecting the wildlife on the one hand and seeking perhaps another Prudhoe Bay on the other.

Pauley: Isn't it going to be difficult given that the Congressional committees are likely to see the caribou who could be threatened and they aren't going to see any oil; in fact, there might not be any oil there at all?

Secretary: That's true, there may not be any and we don't know of course until we look. And, in fact, this time of year there shouldn't be very many caribou there. The caribou are in that area of the refuge only 6 to 8 weeks a year usually during the calving period. That's one of the reasons we think it is compatible because we can restrict human activity during the calving period. We've done this successfully at Prudhoe Bay. In fact, the caribou herd at Prudhoe Bay tripled in number since the establishment of the development there.

Pauley: You still don't mean to say that you know what will happen to this caribou herd. But that is still speculation whether you say it could be in trouble or it might not be.

Secretary: There is no question about it. Until you do something, you can't be positive about the outcome, but insofar as we can be reasonably sure, based on experience, we have every reason to believe we can do it successfully here provided we proceed in an orderly fashion. I keep saying one of the great risks to this area would be if we turned our backs on it right now temporarily probably. And then in some emergency or crisis suddenly Congress and the American people demanded that we rush in and do things in a hurry instead of in an orderly process. We're talking about a 10, 12, 15 year process before this oil, if it's there at all, could even flow.

Pauley: Well, the odds are four to one against it. Are those very good odds?

Secretary: Those are very good odds. In fact, I've been told by people in the oil industry that if they had odds that good in other prospects in the world, they would be chasing them aggressively. It is a relatively small area. There are an enormous number of very high prospect structures that have been found seismically, the seismic work has found them. So the question is, can you go take a look and find out if there really is something there and if so, we already have a pipeline in place from Prudhoe Bay which is only 65 miles west of the 1002 area.

Pauley: It's always astounding how engineers can say, we don't know if there is any there, 4 to 1 odds there are but if there is oil there, there are X billion gallons of it. But the maximum estimate by some accounts would not take care of America's automotive needs for even a year. Is that a lot of oil to be worth the risk?

Secretary: Jane, the fact is that the oil that you and I consume as consumers in this country comes from hundreds of thousands of small finds, and this would be a gigantic find. To put it in perspective, Prudhoe Bay was a 9 to 10 billion barrel field. The next largest field ever found in the United States was West Texas at 6 billion, so when we talk about another field of that size, we're adding perhaps 20 percent to the domestic production capability, a very sizeable amount.

Pauley: You wrote an editorial saying that you were only talking about drilling in a fraction of one percent of the coastal plain. If you added in land transfers that the Department is talking about with private corporations, aren't you talking about 10 percent or better?

Secretary: The area that would be leased would exceed that one percent, but what I was talking about in that article and what I pointed out is that out of a million and a half acres, we would only visualize perhaps 12,600 acres that would actually be physically occupied. Now, what you have to recognize and I do certainly is the caribou we expect would stay anywhere from a kilometer to three kilometers away from each drill pad, but relatively small intrusion in fact to an area that size.

Pauley: So you get to spend a good deal of August in Alaska.

Secretary: Well it will be a lot cooler than Washington.

Pauley: Alright, thank you, Mr. Secretary.