

Pre-decision draft for deliberation

## **Peer Review Plan**

Seismic survey design and potential impacts to maternal polar bear dens

### **About the Document**

**Title:** Seismic survey design and potential impacts to maternal polar bear dens

**Estimated Peer Review Timeframe:** October 31, 2019

**Type of Review:** Influential

### **About the Peer Review Process**

In accordance with the requirements of the Office of Management and Budget's Final Information Quality Bulletin for Peer Review, we are requesting that the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) initiate peer review of a manuscript co-authored by Dr. Ryan Wilson, USFWS and Dr. George Durner, USGS examining seismic survey design and potential impacts to maternal polar bear dens.

USGS will manage the review process following the Bureau's Fundamental Science Policy. USGS will select peer reviewers pursuant to the requirements in Survey Manual Chapter 502.3 – Fundamental Science Practices: Peer Review (<https://www.usgs.gov/about/organization/science-support/survey-manual/5023-fundamental-science-practices-peer-review>). Comments will be solicited from at least three reviewers with expertise in bear ecology, seismic survey design, development and wildlife interactions.

**Will the public and/or scientific or professional societies be asked to nominate peer reviewers?:** No

**Are waivers or deferrals being invoked?:** No

**Estimated Start Date of Peer Review:** July 22, 2019

### **About Public Participation**

This peer review plan is made available on the website to allow the public to monitor our compliance with the Office of Management and Budget's Final Information Quality Bulletin for Peer Review. If this manuscript is used to inform proposed incidental take regulations or incidental harassment authorizations under the Marine Mammal Protection Act, the public will have the opportunity to comment on that proposed regulation when published in the *Federal Register*.

### **Background**

The 1002 Area of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge is an important maternal denning area for polar bears and was recently opened to potential oil and gas exploration and development. The first step in this process is to conduct winter seismic surveys to evaluate oil and gas potential; important information needed by potential bidders for lease sales in the area. In order to conduct

## Pre-decision draft for deliberation

these surveys, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Bureau of Land Management must issue permits with stipulations as required by Marine Mammal Protection Act, Endangered Species Act, and other relevant legislation. Issuing these permits and determining stipulations requires information about the distribution of polar bear denning habitats and potential interactions with permitted activities. This paper presents an analysis of polar bear maternal denning habitat in the 1002 Area and five different scenarios of seismic surveys conducted during winter months in a portion of the 1002 Area. The five scenarios of seismic survey range from no spatial or temporal restrictions on activities to four ranges of explicit stipulations of when and where operations could occur. Information from these analyses will provide critical peer reviewed information for FWS and BLM to facilitate permitting of activities in the 1002 Area.

## Contact

For more information, contact Mary Colligan, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Alaska Region, at (907)786-3505.