

On March 18, 2011, a polar bear sow and COY emerged from their den on the Spy Island Drillsite, an artificial island constructed a few miles off the Beaufort Sea coast in northern Alaska. The den was located in a snow drift that formed over the erosion protection bags on the east side of the island. When the sow entered the den, probably in October or early November of 2010, there had been little or no human activity for several weeks on island. In February, Eni Petroleum completed an ice road from the coast to the island, and built an ice pad adjacent to the island. Equipment, material and workers were moved over the ice road and construction was underway when the bears emerged in March. Following a response plan previously approved by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, ENI immediately ceased operations, evacuated personnel, established a one mile no disturbance zone around the bears and contacted the Service. Service biologist Christopher Putnam was sent to the site to monitor the den. A 24-hour per day observation post was established using a Tucker snow cat approximately ½ mile east of the den, and a den monitoring camera was set up at approximately ¼ mile east of the den. The den was monitored by at least two observers with binoculars, cameras, and a handheld FLIR infrared camera. Over the next few days, the bears moved in and out of the den multiple times and investigated the construction site. On March 21, 2011, the bears left the den site, moved off the island onto the sea ice, and travelled north. On March 22, 2011, the bears' tracks were followed using snow machines and an empty temporary shelter excavation was located with more tracks leading away to the north. Photo and video records are available from the Service's MMM for this den.