

**BUREAU:** U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS)  
**MEMBER:** Sullivan, Multiple Senator Interest  
**ISSUE:** Oil and Gas Development in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge

#### **I. ISSUE BACKGROUND**

- In 1980, the 19 million acre Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (Arctic Refuge) was established by the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA). This was a re-designation of the 8 million acre Arctic National Wildlife Range created in 1960.
- In 1988, the Arctic Refuge's initial Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP) recognized the coastal plain (1002 area) as critical habitat for numerous subsistence and internationally significant species including polar bear, Porcupine caribou and over 100 bird and waterfowl species.
- In 2009, the USGS estimated 10.4 billion barrels of recoverable oil in the 1002 area.
- In 2015, a revised CCP recommended an additional 12 million acres as Wilderness, including the entire 1002 area, and four rivers as National Wild and Scenic Rivers.

#### **II. POSITION of INTERESTED PARTIES**

- The Alaska delegation, the State of Alaska and other development interests support leasing the 1002 area for oil and gas development.
- The Native Gwich'in people and others oppose oil and gas development in the 1002 area.

#### **III. RECENT CONGRESSIONAL ACTIVITY**

- The final tax package, H.R. 1, signed into law on December 22, 2017, directs the Secretary through the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) to establish and administer a competitive oil and gas program in the 1002 area.
- The oil and gas program shall be managed similar to BLM's program in the National Petroleum Reserve - Alaska. A maximum of 2,000 surface acres may be authorized.
- The Tax Act requires two oil and gas lease sales within 10 years of enactment. All revenue receipts shall be split evenly between the State of Alaska and the U.S. Treasury.

#### **IV. NEXT STEPS/ OUTLOOK**

- The BLM is developing an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for leasing. The Service is a cooperating agency. The public comment period on the draft EIS is anticipated in November 2018, followed by a final EIS and Record of Decision in June 2019. The first issuance of leases is planned by December 2019.
- In April 2018, SAExploration, Inc. (SAE) requested authorization to conduct seismic exploration in the 1002 area. BLM is the lead agency for the Environmental Assessment associated with authorization and the Service is a cooperating agency.
  - In addition to the EA, SAE submitted an application to the Service to authorize the incidental take of polar bears in association with their proposed seismic operations. The operations proposed have the potential to result in a number of lethal and injurious takes of polar bears. Given the threatened status of the polar bear population and the current level of subsistence take, additional takes may exceed what is allowed under the Marine Mammal Protection Act in order to issue Incidental Take Regulations. The Service is working closely with SAE to explore plans to minimize the impact of seismic operations on denning polar bears.

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