



**Environmental Assessment**  
**National Petroleum Reserve-Alaska/Utility Corridor**  
**Film Permit/Special Recreation Permit**  
**2010**  
**DOI-BLM-LLAK01000-2010-0017-EA**  
**Pontecorvo Productions**  
**Preparing Office: Arctic Field Office**

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Project Title/Type of Action: **National Petroleum Reserve-Alaska (NPR-A)/Utility Corridor Film Permit/Special Recreation Permit**

Case File Number: **FF095696**

Land Use Plans: **Western Arctic Resource Management Plan (RMP) Management Situation Analysis evaluated 2/5/1990**  
**Final Environmental Impact Statement on Oil and Gas Leasing in The National Petroleum Reserve in Alaska and Record of Decision approved 5/1983**  
**The National Petroleum Reserves Production Act of 1976**

Applicant: Pontecorvo Productions LLC

Address: 8008 29<sup>th</sup> Ave NW  
Seattle, WA 98117

Date: June 2, 2010

Lands Involved:

**Land Description (BLM Managed Lands)**

Legal Description (All Umiat Meridian)

<b>Meridian</b>	<b>Township</b>	<b>Range</b>	<b>Section</b>	
Umiat	1 South	33 West	14,23,25,26,35,36	Excluding Private Land
Umiat	1 South	34 West	1,2,12	
Umiat	2 South	33 West	1,2,10,11,14-19,21,22	
Umiat	2 South	34 West	13,14,22,23,27-32	
Umiat	3 South	34 West	5-8	
Umiat	3 South	35 West	1-18	
Umiat	3 South	36 West	3,4,9,10,15,16,20,21,28,29,31-33	
Umiat	3 South	37 West	33-36	
Umiat	4 South	36 West	6	
Umiat	4 South	37 West	1,3-5,8,17,19, 20,29-31	
Umiat	5 South	38 West	3,4,8,9,17-20,30	
Umiat	5 South	39 West	25,26,32-35	
Umiat	6 South	39 West	4,5,8,9,16,21,28,33,34	Excluding Private Land
Umiat	7 South	39 West	3,10-13	
Umiat	7 South	38 West	1-14,24	
Umiat	7 South	37 West	19,29-33	
Umiat	8 South	37 West	4,9,16,21-23,25,26	

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## **Environmental Assessment**

### **for a Special Recreation/Film Permit**

### **DOI-BLM-LLAK010-2010-0017-EA**

This Environmental Assessment (EA) has been prepared to meet requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), and to support U.S. Department of Interior (USDO I) Bureau of Land Management (BLM) decision-making on permits required to construct and implement the proposed project. The scope of this EA includes analysis of the effects of the proposed activity and alternatives.

Impacts of this type of activity have been evaluated in the referenced planning documents.

## **Chapter 1 Introduction**

Pontecorvo Productions of Seattle, Washington has requested authorization for wildlife filming operations on BLM managed lands within the National Petroleum Reserve-Alaska (NPR-A). Access would be provided by Coyote Air, and the proponent would use a Special Recreation/Film Permit. The proposed action would involve filming from fixed-wing aircraft (at  $\geq 2000$  AGL) and camping along the Utukok River for up to 3 days.

### **1.1 Purpose and Need**

The BLM's organic act, the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 (FLMPA) (43 USC 1701), requires that the agency provide for multiple uses of the public lands. Lands in the arctic are difficult and expensive to access by the general public. Allowing the film crew access to arctic resources provides an opportunity to present information about the ecology of the Western Arctic Caribou herd in their natural habitat to a broad public, with minimal environmental impact. A permit issued by the BLM is needed to provide guidelines to ensure that the resources on BLM managed lands are conserved and to minimize environmental impacts from the proposed action. The purpose of the proposed action is to allow Pontecorvo Productions a permit to film wildlife and natural resources and to guide on BLM managed lands in the NPR-A.

### **1.2 Laws, regulations, other EAs that influence this EA**

This EA will be based on the findings, management controls, and protective measures of the Final Environmental Impact Statement on Oil and Gas Leasing in The National Petroleum Reserve in Alaska and Record of Decision and associated ROD (1983); the Western Arctic Resource Management Plan (WARMP) Management Situation Analysis (Evaluated 2/5/1990); the Utility Corridor Resource Management Plan (UTRMP) (1991); the Utility Corridor Final Environmental Impact Statement (UCFEIS) (1989); and the Colville River Special Area Management Plan (CRSAMP) (2008).

The action, as proposed, is consistent with the objectives outlined in these documents and not in conflict with other resources in the area. The proposed use is in conformance with current policy of the BLM Arctic Field Office. The proposed action is in conformance with the National Petroleum Reserve Product Act (NPRPA), FLPMA, Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA), Endangered Species Act, Executive Orders (EO) 11988, and EO 11990.

### 1.3 The Decision to be Made

The BLM must conduct a project-specific NEPA analysis and determine whether the proposed project should be approved, rejected, or approved with modifications, and if additional mitigation is needed. This EA will be based on the findings, management controls, and protective measures of the Final Environmental Impact Statement on Oil and Gas Leasing in The National Petroleum Reserve in Alaska and ROD, as well as other laws and regulations. The scope of this EA includes analysis that enables the BLM to select among alternatives that meet the purpose and need, and are within the BLM's jurisdiction (40 Code of Federal Regulations 1506.1(a) (2)).

### 1.4 Scoping and Issues

The proposed action was announced on the BLM Arctic Field Office website NEPA register May 10, 2010. To date no comments have been received.

BLM guidelines define environmental issues as points of disagreement, debate, or dispute resulting from the proposed action (BLM NEPA Handbook, H-1790-1, 2008). Issues are identified through internal and external scoping through a process of considering environmental effects of the proposed action. Some elements are not present in the project area and are, therefore, not discussed further. A summary listing of related issues considered by AFO Field Staff is provided in **Table 1.1**.

**Table 1.1 Issues Considered in Evaluating Impacts**

<b>Resources/Environmental Considerations for Issues and Analysis</b>	<b>Determination</b>	<b>Basis of Determination (See Note )</b>
ACEC's	Not Present	
Air Quality	Minimally Impacted	Protection provided by: State of Alaska Air Non-Point and Mobile Program and regulations (18 AAC 50)
Cultural and Paleontological Resources	Not Present	Protection provided by: Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act
Environmental Justice	Nor Present	Protection provided by: EO 12898

**Table 1.1 Issues Considered in Evaluating Impacts**

<b>Resources/Environmental Considerations for Issues and Analysis</b>	<b>Determination</b>	<b>Basis of Determination (See Note )</b>
Fish	Minimally impacted	Protection provided by: Non Oil & Gas Permit Stipulations IIA, IIB, VIIIA, and XIA3. EFH finding “not likely to adversely affect”.
Flood Plains/Wetlands and Riparian Zones		Protections provided by: EO 11988 and EO 11990
Invasive, Non-native species	Not Present	Protections provided by: not applicable to this action
Native American Religious Concerns	Not Present	
Recreation	Not Present	
Socialcultural Systems	Not Present	
Subsistence	Not Present	Protection provided by: ANILCA
Threatened & Endangered Species Spectacled and Steller’s eider	Minimally Impacted	Protection provided by Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act. (J),
Threatened & Endangered Species Polar Bear	Minimally Impacted	In accordance with section 7 of the Endangered Species Act of 1973, as amended (ESA)
non-T&E birds	Minimally Impacted	Protection provided Non Oil and Gas Permit Stipulations III.A, III.B, XII.C, and XII.D also Raptor Code of Conduct
non-T&E mammals	Minimally Impacted	Protection provided by Non Oil and Gas Permit Stipulations III. A, III.C, IX.A.1, XII.A, XII.B, XII.G
Vegetation	Minimally Impacted	Protections provided by: Non Oil and Gas Permit Stipulation X.A.
Visual Resource Management	Minimally Impacted	Protection provided by: VIIA, XIA,B, IV, VII.A
Water Resources	Minimally Impacted	Protections provided by: Non Oil and Gas Permit Stipulation II.
Waste (Hazardous/Solid)	Minimally Impacted	Protections provided by State of Alaska 18 AAC 30, 60, 62, 63, 72, and 75
Wild & Scenic Rivers	Not Present	
Wilderness	Not Present	
<p><b>Key to Table 1.1:</b>            BLM – Bureau of Land Management            EFH – Essential Fish Habitat  <b>Potentially Affected:</b> The proposed action or alternative could result in potential impacts to resource or issues to the level that additional mitigation may be required, or there is a need to evaluate potentially significant issues.   <b>Minimally Impacted:</b> Resources or issues would not be affected to a degree requiring further analysis because either the expected impacts from the proposed action and alternative would be minimal, or standard protections (e.g., ROPs and Stipulations from overriding BLM plans or other legal protections) would reduce impacts. Minimally impacted resources or issues will not be analyzed further in this EA.   <b>Not Present:</b> Resources or issues are not expected to be affected by the proposed action or alternatives because activities would occur at a different time or place. Resource or issues not present will not be analyzed further in the EA.</p>		

In summary, BLM resource specialists have reviewed the proposed action and found no issues for further evaluation in this EA. Existing protective measures would ensure that any resources would be at most minimally impacted from the proposed action. The effects of activities by Pontecorvo on the Utukok River was also analyzed in a previous EA, *National Petroleum Reserve-Alaska/Utility Corridor Film Permit/Special Recreation Permit 2009*( DOI-BLM-LLAK01000-2009-0017-EA). The activities proposed for the current proposed action on this river are sufficiently similar to those analyzed in the 2009 EA ( DOI-BLM-LLAK01000-2009-0017-EA). This EA will be tiered to the 2009 EA. Therefore, this EA will only introduce the alternatives, but no additional analysis will be carried forth.

### **1.5 Public Involvement**

Public notification of the Environmental analysis was announced in the NEPA register on file at the Arctic Field Office Environmental Assessment web site beginning May 10, 2010. No public comments or inquiries were received through June 1, 2010.

## **Chapter 2 Alternatives Including the Proposed Action**

### **2.1 Introduction**

This section describes the alternatives considered, including the no action and proposed action.

### **2.2 Description of Alternatives**

#### **2.2.1 Alternative A: No Action**

Under no action, the BLM would not grant a special recreation/film permit to Pontecorvo Productions in western NPR-A. Current land management situation and activities would continue but access and activities related to those requested by the proponents would not occur. Such activities include research and monitoring, recreation, subsistence, and travel.

#### **2.2.2 Alternative B: Proposed Action**

The objective of the proposed project is to film wildlife with an emphasis on caribou and caribou herds in the Western Arctic during June 1 to July 15 2010. Access and filming would be from fixed-wing aircraft. The proponent also plans to camp along the Utukok River for three days to film migrating caribou.

Pontecorvo Productions is proposing to use the film for a PBS Nature documentary on the Arctic, and the film is expected during 2011. The proposed film will be used for public television viewing and for educational outreach at universities and schools throughout the country.

The equipment would consist of long-range lenses so filming would show wildlife exhibiting natural (undisturbed by human) behavior. Pontecorvo Productions has held a BLM Special Recreation/Film Permit with the BLM in previous years. The precise location and timing of the proposed filming would depend on the location of the wildlife that Pontecorvo Productions proposes to film. Pontecorvo Productions has authorization to film in the Arctic Refuge to include aerial photography.

When camping on the Utukok, the crew would camp in portable tents each night and the camp. The crew (2 people) would eat pre-prepared food, which would be stored in bear proof containers. There would be no cooking or use of fuel or campfires, unless necessary. The crew would practice "Leave No Trace" guidelines

### **Chapter 3 Affected Environment**

The affected environment for the area of the Proposed Action is discussed in the following documents: (1) The Western Arctic Resource Management Plan Situation Analysis Chapter 3, evaluated 1/19/1990, and (2) Chapter 2 of the Final Environmental Impact Statement on Oil and Gas Leasing in the NPR-A. The Northwest National Petroleum Reserve-Alaska Integrated Activity Plan/Environmental Impact Statement (November 2003), while outside the proposed area, analyzed an area similar in nature. In addition, the CRSAMP developed protections for avian species which also inhabit the proposed area of use.

### **Chapter 4 Environmental Impacts**

The following analysis will focus on impacts due to the proposed action and no action alternatives. Additional details on related impacts are discussed in the respective plans for NPR-A (Final Environmental Impact Statement on Oil and Gas Leasing in the NPR-A, CSRAMP). This EA will focus on project specific and site specific impacts of the proposed action and no action alternatives.

#### **4.1 Direct and Indirect Effects**

Analysis of impacts from the proposed action and no action alternative is based on observations and scientific information gained from decades of similar operations on the North Slope and other Arctic regions. The proposed activities are not substantially different from those previously evaluated in the Final Environmental Impact Statement on Oil and Gas Leasing in The National Petroleum Reserve in Alaska (Section IV), the CRSAMP (Chapter 4) and analyses from these documents are incorporated by reference.

#### **4.2 Cumulative Effects**

Cumulative impacts result from the incremental addition of past, present, and reasonably foreseeable actions. Each action may be individually minor by itself, but when added to others could become significant over a period of time.

The time frame for the proposed action for the NPR-A portion of the project area is 1977 (designation of NPR-A) to 10 years into the future, assuming that the relatively low level of activity and management would remain at about the same level as present. Due to the limited scope and intensity of the proposed action the geographic area would be limited within 10 miles of the proposed river travel corridor, camps, and staging areas.

Due to the remoteness of the areas, the activity levels are limited by available transportation. There is minimal recreation, research and subsistence use in the area. The proposed action is anticipated to have very little if any impact as all the applicants will be using leave no trace principles.

The proposed action is not anticipated to result in cumulative impacts due to the remoteness of the portion of the NPR-A where the activity would occur, the low impact levels associated with the activity, and the short-term time frame of the proposed action.

#### **4.4 MITIGATION AND MONITORING**

The stipulations for the proposed action are a subset of The Colville River Special Area Management Plan, and the Final Environmental Impact Statement on Oil and Gas Leasing in The National Petroleum Reserve in Alaska and Record of Decision, approved 5/1983. Special Recreation/Film Permit holders meet most requirements by following the guidelines in Leave No Trace, Alaskan Tundra.

#### **4.5 SUMMARY OF ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES**

No issues were identified in the evaluation of the proposed action for this EA.

### **Chapter 5 Consultation and Coordination**

#### **5.1 Agencies, Organization, Persons Consulted**

Public notification of the Environmental analysis will be on file at the Arctic Field Office and available on the Arctic Field Office Environmental Assessment web site.

### **5.3 List of Preparers**

#### **BLM**

##### **Arctic Field Office:**

Dave Yokel, Wildlife Biologist

Michael Kunz, Archaeologist

Susan Flora, Environmental Scientist

Richard Kemnitz, Hydrologist

Donna Wixon, Natural Resource Specialist

Debbie Nigro, Wildlife Biologist

Matthew Whitman, Fisheries Biologist

Stacie McIntosh, Anthropologist/Subsistence Specialist

Roger Sayre, NEPA Specialist

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2930.00

### ***Finding of No Significant Impact***

Type of Action: Special Recreation Permit

Serial Number: FF095696

Environmental Assessment Number: DOI-BLM-LLAKF010-2010-0017-EA

Applicant: Pontecorvo Productions LLC

Address:  
8008 29<sup>th</sup> Ave NW  
Seattle, WA 98117

District: Arctic Field Office

Planning Unit: Western Arctic Resource Management Plan (RMP) Management Situation  
Analysis evaluated 2/5/1990  
Final Environmental Impact Statement on Oil and Gas Leasing in The  
National Petroleum Reserve in Alaska and Record of Decision approved  
5/1983  
The National Petroleum Reserves Production Act of 1976

Lands Involved: See Case File for Specific Description, lands are in the vicinity of the  
Utukok River.

### ***Context and Intensity of Environmental Impacts***

Based upon a review of the EA prepared by the Arctic Field Office and the supporting documents, I have determined that the proposed action will not have a significant effect on the quality of the human environment, individually or cumulatively with other actions in the general area. The effects of activities from Pontecorvo Productions LLC on the Utukok River was also analyzed in a previous EA, *National Petroleum Reserve-Alaska/Utility Corridor*

*Film Permit/Special Recreation Permit 2009( DOI-BLM-LLAK01000-2009-0017-EA)*. The activities proposed for the current proposed action on this river are sufficiently similar to those analyzed in the 2009 EA ( *DOI-BLM-LLAK01000-2009-0017-EA*). This EA is tiered to the 2009 EA. No environmental effects meet the definition of significance as defined at 40 CFR 1508.27. Therefore, an environmental impact statement is not required. We reviewed the context of the proposed action and found that it would not result in any significant effects to resources and values. The mitigation measures and environmental protections would ensure that the Proposed Action would not add significantly to incremental impacts.

The need for this project is to allow the film crew access to arctic resources providing an opportunity to present information about the ecology of the Western Arctic Caribou herd in their natural habitat to a broad public, with minimal environmental impact.

The following factors were considered in the EA to evaluate the significance of this proposal (40 CFR 1508.27): Beneficial and adverse impacts; effects on public health and safety; unique cultural or ecological areas within or near the project area: potentially controversial or uncertain effects; whether the action may establish a precedent for future actions with significant effect; cumulative effects; adverse impacts to important scientific, cultural or historical resources; effects to endangered or threatened species or habitat; or whether the action threatens a violation of federal, state, local or tribal law, regulation or policy imposed for the protection of the environment, where non-federal requirements are consistent with federal requirements:

### ***Monitoring and Mitigation***

BLM will monitor on the ground activities periodically. Mitigation measures will be implemented as described in the attached authorization stipulations.

#### **APPROVED:**

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/s/Lon Kelly  
Arctic Field Office Manager

June 2, 2010

Date