In 1953, the U.S. Department of the Interior’s Bureau of Land Management began exploring the idea of setting aside a portion of the Arctic coastline to conserve the natural habitat of the Eskimos. This area, later known as the National Petroleum Reserve-Alaska (NPR-A), was established in part to assess the potential for oil and gas reserves. Over the years, the reserve has been the site of numerous exploration efforts and has yielded significant discoveries.

One of the most notable events in the history of the NPR-A was the drilling of Umiat #9, an exploratory oil well that was completed in the Barrow area between 1953 and 1955. This well, along with other oil seeps that prompted President Lyndon B. Johnson to order the CIA to conduct an energy survey of Alaska in 1964, revealed the potential for substantial petroleum reserves in the region.

In 1976, in accordance with the Naval Services Land Management Act of 1975, the National Petroleum Reserve No. 4, the National Petroleum Reserve-Alaska, and the National Petroleum Reserve in Alaska were combined and renamed to the National Petroleum Reserve-Alaska (NPR-A). This action was intended to better reflect the geographic boundaries of the reserve and to facilitate the management of its resources.

The NPR-A is a crucial part of the Nation’s energy security, providing a source of oil and gas that is essential to meet domestic energy needs. The reserve is managed to ensure that its natural resources are protected and that the local communities benefit from its existence. The Bureau of Land Management, working under contract for the Department of Energy, is responsible for overseeing the activities within the NPR-A and ensuring that they are conducted in a manner that is consistent with the reserve’s conservation and energy development goals.