



U.S. Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management

Proposed NPR-A Rule

Fact Sheet

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) is proposing to update its regulations for the management and protection of the National Petroleum Reserve in Alaska (NPR-A). Extending from the northwestern slope of the Brooks Range to the Arctic Coast, the NPR-A encompasses roughly 23 million acres of public land managed by the BLM.

The BLM manages the NPR-A in accordance with the Naval Petroleum Reserves Production Act of 1976 (NPRPA), which requires the BLM to balance oil and gas development with the protection of fish and wildlife, subsistence, recreational, and other values. The proposed rule would fulfill this duty by establishing a new framework for balancing development with the protection of Special Areas – lands that harbor significant subsistence, recreational, fish and wildlife, historical, and scenic values – and the management of surface resources throughout the NPR-A. This framework, which has not been updated substantially since the early 1980s, would improve the BLM's ability to respond to changing conditions in the Arctic while providing transparency in conservation and development decisions. The proposed regulations would also enhance protections for subsistence uses and resources throughout the NPR-A, particularly within the Teshekpuk Lake, Utukok River Uplands, and other Special Areas.

Additionally, the proposed regulations would incorporate several key aspects of the [current Integrated Activity Plan](#) (IAP) for the NPR-A. The IAP is a management plan for the NPR-A that designates areas for certain uses, including oil and gas leasing, infrastructure, and special protections. In areas open to leasing, the IAP also identifies stipulations and required operating procedures to mitigate the impacts of oil and gas and other permitted activities. The BLM issued the IAP in April 2022 following a multi-year stakeholder and public outreach process.

The proposed rule would protect 13 million acres by limiting future oil and gas leasing and industrial development in the Teshekpuk Lake, Utukok Uplands, Colville River, Kasegaluk Lagoon, and Peard Bay Special Areas – places known for their globally significant habitat for wildlife, including grizzly and polar bears, caribou, and hundreds of thousands of migratory birds. Building off the IAP, the rule would establish an outright prohibition on any new leasing in 10.6 million acres, more than 40 percent of the NPR-A.

Managing and Protecting Special Areas

The proposed regulations would establish a new framework for managing and protecting the NPR-A's sensitive fish and wildlife, subsistence, recreational, and other resources, many of which are concentrated in Special Areas. This framework would:

- Require the BLM to conduct an evaluation at least once every five years to determine whether to identify new Special Areas and enhance protections for existing Special Areas;
- Establish that “assuring maximum protection of significant resource values is the management priority for Special Areas” as required by 42 U.S.C. 6504(a);
- Require the BLM to prepare a Statement of Adverse Effect if oil and gas activities would cause unavoidable adverse effects on a Special Area, and to minimize or mitigate those effects to the “maximum extent possible,” as authorized in 42 U.S.C. 6506a(b); and
- Require the adoption of conditions, restrictions, and prohibitions to mitigate the adverse effects of proposed oil and gas activities outside of Special Areas.

Adopting Key Aspects of the Current IAP

The Integrated Activity Plan guides the BLM's decision-making in the NPR-A. The proposed rule would incorporate several key components of the current IAP, including by:

- Incorporating the existing Colville River, Kasegaluk Lagoon, Peard Bay, Teshekpuk Lake, and Utukok River Uplands Special Area designations and specifying the "significant resource values" associated with each of those areas;
- Identifying where oil and gas leasing and the construction of new infrastructure is permitted, consistent with the 2022 IAP; and
- Authorizing limited exceptions to development restrictions, including to support the needs of communities in and around the NPR-A.

The proposed rule would also require the BLM to maintain an IAP on an ongoing basis and ensure that its actions conform to the applicable IAP.

Enhancing Protections for Subsistence Uses and Resources

Tribal Nations have occupied lands now within the NPR-A since time immemorial, and over 40 Indigenous communities continue to rely on subsistence activities in the reserve, harvesting caribou, shore and waterbirds, and many other fish and wildlife species, with many communities subsisting primarily from food harvested from the NPR-A.

The proposed rule would help protect subsistence uses throughout the NPR-A, responding to Alaska Native communities who rely on the land, water, and wildlife to support their way of life.

No Effect on Existing Oil and Gas Leases or Operations

The proposed rule would not affect existing oil and gas leases or operations in the NPR-A. Areas closed to leasing and new infrastructure under the current IAP would remain closed in the proposed rule. The BLM would continue to honor any valid existing rights within (and outside) of those areas.

The proposed rule would, however, raise the bar for future development throughout the NPR-A by establishing clear guidelines that are consistent with the current management plan for the reserve, the NPR-A IAP. Under the proposed rule, oil and gas leasing and development could still proceed, consistent with the NPR-A IAP record of decision of April 2022.

What's Next

The publication of the proposed rule in the Federal Register opened a 60-day public comment period, which has been extended an additional 10-days to now close on November 17, 2023. During this time, the BLM will host in-person meetings in communities on the North Slope, and Anchorage, as well as virtual public meetings, to discuss the proposed rule.

This proposal reflects the beginning of an important conversation with BLM's partners and stakeholders. Public involvement through this rulemaking process is crucial to ensure the BLM is making appropriate land management decisions on the ground.

We want to hear from you. To learn more about this proposed rule, or to provide comment, please visit <https://www.regulations.gov>.