



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

National Petroleum Reserve in Alaska Rule

Fact Sheet

The Bureau of Land Management has updated its regulations for the management and protection of the National Petroleum Reserve in Alaska (NPR-A) for the first time in more than 40 years to balance development of oil and gas with protection of the other natural resources in the Reserve. 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.

Under the Naval Petroleum Reserves Production Act (NPRPA) of 1976, as amended, Congress directed the BLM to balance oil and gas development with the protection of fish and wildlife, subsistence, recreational, and other values in the NPR-A, with added protection for Special Areas. The NPRPA requires management of Special Areas to "assure the maximum protection of such surface values to the extent consistent with the requirements of this Act for the exploration of the reserve." (42 U.S.C. 6504(a)). The updated rule allows the BLM to better meet this mandate by establishing strong protections for Special Areas, allowing for the designation of additional Special Areas, and providing clear guidelines for development that safeguard subsistence resources throughout the Reserve, consistent with key provisions of the current [NPR-A Integrated Activity Plan](#), while respecting valid existing rights.

The update to this framework, which has been largely unchanged since it was first promulgated in 1977, improves the BLM's ability to respond to changing conditions in the Arctic while providing transparency in conservation and development decisions.

Managing and Protecting Special Areas

The rule establishes a new regulatory framework for establishing, managing, and protecting the NPR-A's Special Areas, which are home to sensitive fish and wildlife, subsistence, recreational, and other resources. This framework follows the direction of the NPRPA by "assuring maximum protection of significant resource values is the management priority for Special Areas." The rule honors valid existing rights within the Special Areas.

Enhancing Protections for Subsistence Uses and Additional Resources

Tribal Nations have occupied lands within the NPR-A since time immemorial, and more than 40 Indigenous communities continue to rely on subsistence resources that utilize the Reserve, including caribou, migratory birds and their eggs, and many other fish and wildlife species, with five North Slope communities subsisting primarily from food harvested from the NPR-A.

In addition to providing a framework for designation and management of Special Areas, the rule requires the adoption of measures to mitigate the adverse effects of proposed oil and gas activities across the Reserve, as required by the NPRPA. In protecting surface resources, the rule ensures that key wildlife habitat remains healthy, thereby safeguarding subsistence resources throughout the NPR-A and supporting the Alaska Native communities who rely on the land, water, and wildlife to continue their way of life.

Adopting Key Aspects of the Current IAP

Integrated Activity Plans (IAPs) guide the BLM's decision-making for federal lands and resources in the NPR-A. The rule incorporates several key components of the current IAP, including incorporating existing Special Areas, identifying where oil and gas leasing and the construction of new infrastructure is allowed, and

authorizing limited exceptions to development restrictions, including to support the needs of communities in and around the NPR-A.

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

Effect on Existing Oil and Gas Leases or Operations

The rule recognizes valid existing rights and will be implemented in a manner that is consistent with the terms of current oil and gas leases in the NPR-A. Areas closed to leasing and new infrastructure under the current IAP remain closed.

The rule also clarifies guidelines for future development throughout the NPR-A. Under the rule, oil and gas leasing and development could still proceed, consistent with the 2022 IAP Record of Decision.

Summary of Refinements since the Proposed Rule

After a robust 90-day comment period, with 6 public meetings and more than 100,000 comments received, the BLM made several refinements to the proposed rule, including:

- Clarification that the requirements of this rule only apply to oil and gas activities.
- Reorganization and clarification of the requirements for designating, de-designating, or otherwise changing the boundaries or management of Special Areas.
- Change of the time period to regularly evaluate the need for new or modified Special Areas from 5 to 10 years, while specifying that the BLM may conduct the evaluation sooner if the authorized officer determines that changing conditions warrant earlier review.
- Clarification to assure maximum protection of significant resource values in Special Areas, “consistent with the requirements of the NPRPA for exploration [and production] of the Reserve.”
- Clarification of the process for preparing an environmental analysis and reaching a final decision on proposed leasing, exploration, development, or new infrastructure in Special Areas. If the BLM determines that the proposal cannot avoid adverse effects on significant resource values in a Special Area, then the BLM must prepare a Statement of Adverse Effect. The Statement of Adverse Effect will be incorporated into the environmental analysis and provided to the public for review and comment.
- Clarification that the BLM will seek co-stewardship opportunities not just in managing Special Areas, but also in managing subsistence resources more broadly throughout the Reserve.
- Clarification that economic interests in a Special Area provide a basis for Tribal consultation.

For a more detailed accounting of all the refinements, review the Summary of Changes in the Final Rule section in the Federal Register Notice

Next steps

The final NPR-A Rule will go into effect 60 days after publication in the Federal Register.

The BLM will publish a Request for Information to solicit public comment on whether to consider adding resource values to existing Special Areas in the Western Arctic; amending the boundaries or changing the management of existing Special Areas; or identifying public lands that may qualify for the designation of new Special Areas.