

## SUMMARY

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Northeast National Petroleum Reserve-Alaska (NPR-A) Integrated Activity Plan/Environmental Impact Statement (IAP/EIS) is designed to determine the appropriate multiple-use management of 4.6 million acres of the NPR-A, consistent with existing statutory direction for its management. To carry out its management responsibilities, BLM is addressing two major questions: (1) What protections and enhanced management will be implemented for surface resources such as wildlife; wildlife habitat; fisheries; and paleontological, subsistence, and recreation resources within the planning area? (2) Will the BLM conduct oil and gas lease sales in the planning area and, if so, what lands will be made available for leasing?

In addressing these questions BLM, in partnership with the public and many Federal, State, and North Slope Borough government agencies who have assisted in this planning effort, has focused on the relationships of the current and potential uses of the planning area and the impact of those uses on the natural and human resources of the area. In this analysis, specific uses, resources, and portions of the planning area have stood out as especially significant.

Subsistence activities, particularly hunting and fishing, in the planning area are exceedingly important to local residents, including the Inupiat, the Native people of Alaska's North Slope. Subsistence hunting and fishing are central to the Inupiat's ages-old cultural system. Moreover, subsistence activities provide critical sustenance for people who live off Alaska's road network at an extreme distance from the Nation's food-distribution system.

The potential use of the area for oil development is one focus of much of the analysis in the IAP/EIS. The Naval Petroleum Reserves Production Act of 1976 (NPRPA), as amended, encourages oil and gas leasing in NPR-A, while requiring protection of important surface resources and uses. North Slope oil production, centered at the massive Prudhoe Bay field, is key to the Nation's domestic oil supply. The North Slope contributes about 20 percent of America's current domestic production. The oil industry has discovered and developed other fields both to the east and west of Prudhoe. However, production is in decline from these older fields, and there are indications that the planning area contains fields that can help to stem the decline.

Two portions of the planning area and their associated surface resources stand out as especially important. The northern third of the area near Teshekpuk Lake has extraordinary wildlife. It also is the area with the highest potential for oil and gas resources. It is the home of the Teshekpuk Lake Caribou Herd. The herd calves in the

lands around the lake and provides much of the meat harvested by nearby North Slope villagers. In addition, large numbers of waterfowl, including in some years more than 20 percent of the world's black brant population, spend the critical flightless molting period along the shores of the numerous lakes north and east of Teshekpuk. This part of the planning area also is the summer breeding and nesting ground for waterfowl that annually migrate north from throughout the Americas. Spectacled and Steller's eiders, both recently added to the list of threatened and endangered species, are among the birds using the area. The area also provides fish for local residents.

The Colville River valley is the other particularly important portion of the planning area. It provides important habitat for raptors, including the Arctic peregrine falcon that, until 1996, was listed as an endangered species; neotropical migratory birds; moose; and fish. In addition, it contains world-class paleontological deposits and is an important all-season access corridor.

The IAP/EIS analyzes six alternative future management plans for public comment, including the Preferred Alternative. No Preferred Alternative was identified in the Draft IAP/EIS. The BLM wanted the public's thoughts on all the options offered in the draft document before it selected a specific plan. Comments received during the public comment period were considered in development of the Preferred Alternative.

Some elements are common to several alternatives. Stipulations would be imposed on authorized activities under all of the alternatives. These stipulations are designed to protect surface resources and subsistence uses. The scope of the stipulations increases with each alternative from Alternative A to Alternative E. Alternative A is the no-action alternative, which continues pre-existing management direction with no new lease sales. The stipulations that apply to Alternative A are ones that historically have been applied to permits for seismic or other activities not related to oil and gas. These stipulations also apply to alternatives B through E. Alternatives B through E make progressively more lands available for oil and gas leasing. Consequently, stipulations are added to the alternatives to mitigate impacts from the increasingly larger area and numbers and kinds of resources potentially impacted by development. For example, relatively few stipulations specifically protect caribou from oil and gas exploration and development under Alternatives A through C, because the most important caribou habitat is not made available under those alternatives. Specific stipulations, such as restrictions on where and how oil facilities can be sited, are provided for caribou protection under Alternatives D and E, which make

important caribou habitat available for leasing. A slightly modified set of these stipulations was developed specific to the Preferred Alternative, incorporating comments received from the public during the comment period on the Draft IAP/EIS.

Several alternatives recommend creation of specially designated areas. The Secretary of the Interior is authorized to identify specific lands in the NPR-A as "Special Areas." Areas around Teshekpuk Lake and the Colville River were designated as Special Areas in 1977. Under some of the alternatives, BLM would recommend that the Secretary designate lands along the Ikpikpuk River important for their paleontological values as a Special Area and that the Secretary add the Pik Dunes, an unusual feature in the planning area of importance for caribou, to the Teshekpuk Lake Special Area. Under various alternatives, BLM would have recommended that Congress designate the Colville River as a wild, scenic, or recreation river under the Wild and Scenic Rivers (WSR) Act. A review of the physical characteristics of the Colville River and associated resource values determined that the Colville River was "eligible" for designation under the WSR Act. Based on comments received on the Draft IAP/EIS, the other landowners within the potential WSR corridor do not support designation and would be unwilling to cooperate in management of a wild and scenic river. Therefore, a determination that the Colville River is "unsuitable" for designation under the WSR Act has been included in the Preferred Alternative. In several alternatives, BLM proposes to work with nearby landowners, including the State and the Arctic Slope Regional Corporation, to create a Bird Conservation Area under the Partners in Flight Program. This designation would highlight consideration of this habitat for land managers. Should a new Special Area, a Wild and Scenic River, or a Bird Conservation Area, result from the plan, BLM would draft specific plans or studies for these areas. Finally, under some alternatives, BLM proposes to undertake a plan to guide future studies of caribou and waterfowl populations in the Teshekpuk Lake area.

The alternatives presented in the IAP/EIS are consistent with the purposes of the NPR-A's governing statutes. Each alternative addresses a different balance between serving the "total energy needs of the nation" and protecting the surface resources, including providing "maximum protection" for resources in Special Areas, as required by the NPRPA. The alternatives are:

**Preferred Alternative:** The Preferred Alternative protects habitats important to molting geese and the Teshekpuk Lake caribou herd by making them unavailable for leasing or by strict restrictions on oil and gas surface occupancy. In addition, surface use restrictions and other stipulations are applied to other habitats identified as having high

surface resource values, including areas identified by North Slope residents as important subsistence use areas, such as Fish and Judy creeks and the Ikpikpuk and Miguakiak rivers. Similar restrictions and stipulations are applied to the Colville, Kikiakrorak, and Kogosukruk rivers to protect raptor nesting and subsistence. Areas along the later two rivers are added to the Colville Special Area and the Pik Dunes is added to the Teshekpuk Lake Special Area under the Preferred Alternative. While protecting these resources, the alternative makes 87 percent of the planning area available for leasing. Through the use of stipulations, leasing would be conducted in a manner that is consistent with the protection of the surface resources, including requiring a thorough consultation with affected communities, establishment of a subsistence advisory panel, and creation of an Interagency Research and Monitoring Team. This team would coordinate research and monitoring efforts related to the effectiveness of stipulations and surface resource impacts. No roads connecting outside the planning area (other than temporary ice roads) will be allowed.

**Alternative A (No Action Alternative):** Alternative A, the "no action" alternative, describes the current management situation as required by NEPA. The BLM would continue to authorize such activities as winter overland supply moves to North Slope villages, other scientific studies, and Special Recreation Permits for commercial guides. (All alternatives would allow such activities to continue.) The alternative represents an assessment that the Nation's long-term energy needs might be better met and the resources of the Reserve are better protected by deferring leasing until such time in the future when petroleum is in greater demand and petroleum exploration and production technology creates fewer impacts to surface resources. Alternative A has two options, one allowing seismic (as is currently the case) and one prohibiting seismic.

**Alternative B:** Alternative B makes 53 percent of the planning area available for oil and gas leasing. Lands identified as important for paleontological resources, recreational use, and habitat for caribou, waterfowl, and fish would not be made available for oil and gas leasing. Lands from which the village of Nuiqsut's Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act corporation are entitled to select would not be leased for oil and gas until the corporation's entitlement has been satisfied. An area along the Ikpikpuk River would be recommended as a new Special Area and the alternative would recommend that the Pik Dunes be added to the Teshekpuk Lake Special Area. A corridor along the Colville River would be recommended as a "wild" river under the WSR Act, and BLM would work with adjacent landowners to establish a Bird Conservation Area along the Colville and some of its tributaries.

**Alternative C:** Alternative C makes 72 percent of the planning area available for leasing. It protects the habitats important to the Teshekpuk Lake caribou herd (an important subsistence resource for area residents) and molting geese, which visit the planning area every summer, by making these habitats unavailable for oil and gas leasing. An area along the Ikpikpuk River would be recommended as a new Special Area and the alternative would recommend that the Pik Dunes be added to the Teshekpuk Lake Special Area. A corridor along the Colville River would be recommended as a “scenic” river under the WSR Act, and BLM would work with adjacent landowners to establish a Bird Conservation Area along the Colville and some of its tributaries. In addition, the alternative applies surface use restrictions and other stipulations to other habitats identified as having high surface resource values.

**Alternative D:** Alternative D makes 90 percent of the planning area available for leasing. The important goose-molting area north and east of the Teshekpuk Lake, which also encompasses part of the caribou-calving area, would remain unavailable for oil and gas leasing. An area along the Ikpikpuk River would be recommended as a new Special Area and the alternative would recommend that the Pik Dunes be added to the Teshekpuk Lake Special Area. A corridor along the Colville River would be recommended as a “recreation” river under the WSR Act, and BLM would work with adjacent landowners to establish a Bird Conservation Area along the Colville and some of its tributaries. The alternative also applies surface use restrictions and other stipulations, including special requirements to minimize impacts to calving and postcalving caribou, in other areas of high surface resource values.

**Alternative E:** Alternative E makes all BLM administered lands in the planning area available for leasing. It protects surface resources, though, through lease stipulations which restrict oil and gas activities in sensitive areas. Specific restrictions, including siting restrictions on structures and seasonal restrictions on uses, protect caribou and molting geese and their habitats. An area along the Ikpikpuk River would be recommended as a new Special Area and the alternative would recommend that the Pik Dunes be added to the Teshekpuk Lake Special Area. The BLM would work with adjacent landowners to establish a Bird Conservation Area along the Colville and some of its tributaries.