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Subject: Fw: Biden-Harris Administration Takes Major Steps to Protect Arctic Lands and Wildlife in Alaska
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Hi team - Sharing the latest news of the day. As always, if you receive any media inquiries on any of these matters please coordinate through OC and they will coordinate with HQ/Dpt. - sb

From: U.S. Department of the Interior <info@updates.interior.gov>
Sent: Wednesday, September 6, 2023 3:01 PM
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Subject: Biden-Harris Administration Takes Major Steps to Protect Arctic Lands and Wildlife in Alaska

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Date: Wednesday, September 6, 2023
Contact: Interior_Press@ios.doi.gov

Biden-Harris Administration Takes Major Steps to Protect Arctic Lands and Wildlife in Alaska

Department of the Interior cancels oil and gas leases in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge; proposes new protections in National Petroleum Reserve in Alaska

WASHINGTON — The Biden-Harris administration today announced significant steps to protect the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (Arctic Refuge) and more than 13 million acres in the National Petroleum Reserve in Alaska (NPR-A). These bold actions to protect the Arctic region build on President Biden's [historic conservation and climate agenda](#), which already includes protecting more than 21 million acres of public lands and waters across the nation, and securing the Inflation Reduction Act, the largest investment in climate action in history.

In the Arctic Refuge, Secretary of the Interior Deb Haaland has authorized the cancellation of the remaining seven oil and gas leases issued by the previous administration in the Coastal Plain. The leases were suspended in June 2021 following the issuance of [Secretary's Order \(S.O.\) 3401](#), which identified "multiple legal deficiencies in the underlying record supporting the leases."

In addition, the Department today [proposed new regulations](#) for the NPR-A that would ensure maximum protection for the more than 13 million acres of Special Areas in the reserve, while supporting subsistence activities for Alaska Native communities. The proposed rule, [previewed in March 2023](#), adds to President Biden's actions to protect millions of acres of lands and waters in the Arctic, including withdrawing approximately 2.8 million acres of the Beaufort Sea, ensuring the entire United States Arctic Ocean is off limits to new oil and gas leasing.

"With climate change warming the Arctic more than twice as fast as the rest of the planet, we must do everything within our control to meet the highest standards of care to protect this fragile ecosystem," said **Secretary Haaland**. "President Biden is delivering on the most ambitious climate and conservation agenda in history. The steps we are taking today further that commitment, based on the best available science and in recognition of the Indigenous Knowledge of the original stewards of this area, to safeguard our public lands for future generations."

Lease Cancellations in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge

Following passage of the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act of 2017 (Tax Act), the previous Administration held an oil and gas lease sale in the Arctic Refuge's Coastal Plain on January 6, 2021, and issued 10-year leases on nine tracts covering more than 430,000 acres. On January 21, 2021, President Biden issued Executive Order 13990, directing the Department to review oil and gas leasing in the Refuge, "[i]n light of the alleged legal deficiencies underlying the program." S.O. 3401 directed a new, comprehensive analysis of the potential environmental impacts of the Coastal Plain Leasing Program. Since that time, two of the issued leases have been canceled and refunded at the request of the lessees. The remaining seven leases held by the sole lessee covered 365,000 acres in the Coastal Plain.

The Secretary of the Interior has the authority to cancel or suspend oil and gas leases issued in violation of a statute or regulation. The draft supplemental environmental impact statement (SEIS) released today by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) developed information supporting the Department's determination that the 2021 lease sale was seriously flawed and based on a number of fundamental legal deficiencies, including: insufficient analysis under the National Environmental Policy Act, including failure to adequately analyze a reasonable range of alternatives and properly quantify downstream greenhouse gas emissions; and failure to properly interpret the Tax Act. Accordingly, Secretary Haaland has determined that the leases issued by the previous administration in the Arctic Refuge shall be cancelled.

Protections in the National Petroleum Reserve in Alaska

Extending from the northwest slope of the Brooks Range to the Arctic Coast, the NPR-A encompasses roughly 23 million acres of public land managed by the BLM. 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.

Under the Naval Petroleum Reserves Production Act (NPRPA) of 1976, Congress directed the BLM to balance oil and gas development with the management and protection of sensitive landscapes – known as Special Areas – and surface resources across the reserve. The proposed rule is designed to assure maximum protection of Special Areas, as authorized under the NPRPA. The proposed rule would require that protections for Special Areas remain in place for as long as the values and characteristics in those areas are present, ensuring the durability of the protections into the future. The proposed rule also

would require the BLM to review and gather public input – at least every five years – on whether existing special areas should be expanded, whether new special areas should be designated, and whether additional resources within special areas should be identified for protection. Upon finalization of the proposed rule, the Administration will follow this proposed process to inform the creation or expansion of additional special areas in the NPR-A.

The proposed rule would protect 13 million acres encompassed by the existing Special Areas 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 collectively known for their globally significant intact habitat for wildlife, including grizzly and polar bears, caribou and hundreds of thousands of migratory birds. The rule would establish an outright prohibition on any new leasing in 10.6 million acres, more than 40 percent of the NPR-A.

The proposed rule would raise the bar for development throughout the NPR-A by establishing clear guidelines that are consistent with provisions of the current management plan for the reserve, the [NPR-A Integrated Activity Plan](#) (IAP). This current management plan for the reserve was put in place in 2022, and effectively reversed the previous administration’s IAP that sought to expand oil and gas leasing and development in the NPR-A and reduce protections for the Special Areas.

The proposed rulemaking would help protect subsistence uses throughout the NPR-A, responding to Alaska Native communities who have relied on the land, water and wildlife to support their way of life for thousands of years. It also advances the Biden-Harris administration’s commitment to strengthening the role of Tribal governments in the management of public lands by encouraging the BLM to explore co-stewardship opportunities with Tribes for the Special Areas.

Seeking Public Comment

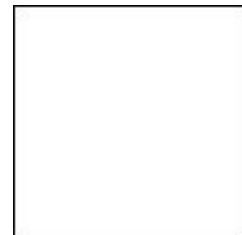
There will be a 45-day public review and comment period on the draft SEIS for the Coastal Plain. In developing the draft, the BLM and FWS engaged with a wide variety of stakeholders and used the best available data and science, including Indigenous Knowledge. For additional information, go to [BLM’s eplanning page](#).

The proposed [NPR-A rule](#) and [map of the five NPR-A Special Areas](#) as delineated in the 2022 IAP, are available for preview. A forthcoming publication of the proposed rule in the Federal Register will open a 60-day public comment period. During that time, the BLM will host in-person meetings in communities on the North Slope, as well as virtual public meetings to discuss the proposed rule. Details of those opportunities will be made available soon.

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