

[AK-930-1110-00]

Notice of Intent To Prepare an Integrated Activity Plan (IAP)/ Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) on Management of the Northeastern Portion of the National Petroleum Reserve-Alaska (NPR-A), Request for Information, and Call for Nominations and Comments

AGENCY: Bureau of Land Management, Interior.

ACTION: Notice of Intent to Prepare and Integrated Activity Plan/Environmental Impact Statement on Management of the northeastern portion of the National Petroleum Reserve-Alaska, Request for Information, and Call for Nominations and Comments.

SUMMARY: In accordance with the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 (43 U.S.C. 1701 *et seq.*), as amended; the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (42 U.S.C. 4321 *et seq.*), as amended; Title I of the Naval Petroleum Reserves Production Act of 1976 (42 U.S.C. 6501 *et seq.*), as amended by the Department of the Interior and Related Agencies Appropriations Act for Fiscal Year 1981, Pub. L. 96-514, 94 Stat. 2957, 2964 (codified in 42 U.S.C. 6508); the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act, Pub. L. 96-487, 94 Stat. 2371, section 810, 16 U.S.C. 3120; and the regulations at 43 CFR Parts 2360 and 3130; the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), Alaska State Office, is preparing an Integrated Activity Plan (IAP)/ Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the northeast portion of the National Petroleum Reserve-Alaska (NPR-A). This Notice also serves as a Request for Information (Request) and Call for Nominations (Call) and Comments per 43 CFR 3130.1 and 3131.2.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: The purpose of this Notice is to invite suggestions and the submittal of relevant information for the proposed IAP/EIS. Potential issues include, but are not limited to, wildlife resources (terrestrial and aquatic) protection, mineral resource development (including oil and gas leasing, pursuant to 43 CFR Part 3130), subsistence resources and activities and possible impacts on subsistence from various management alternatives, access recreation and visual resources, threatened and endangered species, and historic, cultural, soil, water, and vegetation resources. Potential management actions and activities which may have environmental and subsistence impacts for the area include mineral material extraction, leasable

mineral exploration and development, recreation, commercial development, modification of the existing Special Areas and identification of any new areas for additional resource protection.

Information, comments, and nominations on specific issues to be addressed in the plan are sought from all interested parties. This early planning and consultation step is important for ensuring that all interests and concerns are communicated to the Department of the Interior for future decisions in land use, planning, and management.

Description of the Area:

The area subject to this Notice is composed of those BLM-administered lands, subject to valid existing rights, in the northeastern portion of NPR-A. The northeastern portion of NPR-A is described as beginning on the NPR-A boundary on the township line between T. 3 S., R. 5 W. and T. 3 S., R. 6 W., Umiat Meridian (U.M.), and thence northerly along the township lines to the northeast corner of T. 2 N., R. 6 W., U.M., thence westerly along the township line to the right bank of the Ikpikpuk River, thence northerly along the right bank of the Ikpikpuk River to the northern boundary of NPR-A, thence in a generally easterly and southerly direction following the boundary of NPR-A to the point of beginning. This area consists of approximately 4.6 million acres. A large scale map of the plan area (which also serves as the Call map) showing boundaries of the area on a township-by-township basis is available from the Alaska State Office, BLM, 222 West 7th Avenue, Anchorage, AK 99501, telephone (907) 271-3369.

Responses

BLM seeks information and comments on issues relating to the future land use, planning, and management of the northeast corder of NPR-A. The bureau requests information and comments on resources, such as wildlife and subsistence resources, as well as current and potential future activities on these lands, including possible development of the area's oil and gas potential. For example, the agency is interested in learning what areas of particular value for various species and uses, and what measures should be considered to protect resources and uses from potentially impacting activities.

Comments are also sought on any potential conflicts with approved coastal management plans (CMPs) and other land use plans that may result from possible future activities in the area. These comments should identify

specific policies of concern as listed in CMPs or other plans, the nature of the conflicts foreseen, and steps that BLM could take to avoid or mitigate the potential conflicts. Comments may be in terms of broad areas or restricted to particular townships of concern.

Comments are sought on activities and measures to protect surface resources within the plan area, including fish and wildlife, historical and scenic values. Comments are sought on subsistence uses and needs within the plan area and possible impacts on subsistence from other uses of the area. Comments should include recommendations for particular sections of the plan area that are of value for surface and subsurface resources, as well as conditions, restrictions and prohibitions that would protect surface resources.

Pursuant to 43 CFR 3131.1 and 3131.2, relevant information related to possible oil and gas leasing is requested for the plan area. Oil and gas companies are specifically requested to nominate within the plan area, areas that they would like to have considered for oil and gas leasing. Nominations must be depicted on the Call map by outlining the area(s) of interest along township lines. Nominators are asked to submit a list of townships nominated to facilitate correct interpretation of their nominations on the Call map. Although the identifies of those submitting nominations for oil and gas leasing become a matter of public record, the individual nominations will be held confidential consistent with applicable law.

Nominators also are requested to rank townships nominated for oil and gas leasing according to priority of interest (e.g., priority 1 (high), 2 (medium), or 3 (low)). Townships nonominated that do not indicate priorities will be considered priority 3. Nominators are encouraged to be specific in indicating townships by priority. Blanket priorities on large areas are not useful in the analysis of industry interest. The telephone number and name of a person to contact in the nominator's organization for additional information should be included in the response.

The regulations at 43 CFR part 3130 limit the size of an oil and gas lease tract within the NPR-A boundaries to no more than 60,000 acres (43 CFR 3130.4-1). Although nominations are to be submitted along township lines, comments are also being sought on the preferred size of tracts for leasing in this area, not to exceed 60,000 acres.

Responses to this request for information and comments, and call for

nominations must be received no later than 45 days following publication of this document in the Federal Register. Nominations must be submitted in envelopes labeled "Nominations Related to the NPA-A IAP/EIS" to protect the confidentiality of the nonominations. The original Call map with nonominations must be submitted to the NRP-A Planning Team Leader, Bureau of Land Management, 222 West 7th Avenue #K13, Anchorage, Alaska 99513-7599.

Information, comments, and nominations submitted in responses to this publication will assist in early scoping and later development of alternative for the IAP/EIS and will help

identify areas for potential activities, including oil and gas development and resource protection.

Tentative Schedule

Approximate dates for actions and decisions in the planning process for this proposal are:

Comments Due on Notice, Request, and Call.	March 31, 1997.
Scoping meetings (precise dates announced later).	March-April 1997.
Draft IAP/EIS available for comment.	October 31, 1997.
Public meetings/hearings ..	Nov.-Dec. 1997.
Comments due on Draft IAP/EIS.	December 31, 1997.

Final IAP/EIS available for public review.	May 15, 1998.
Record of Decision	August 15, 1998.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION, CONTACT: Jim Ducker, (907) 271-3369 or jducker ak.blm.gov, or Curt Wilson, (907) 271-5546 or c1wilson@ak.blm.gov. Both can be reached by mail at 222 W. 7th Avenue, #13, Anchorage, AK 99513-7599.

Tom Allen,
State Director, Alaska.

Attachment—Map of Plan Area

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