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Secretary Salazar Finalizes Plan for Additional Development, Wildlife Protections in 23 Million Acre National Petroleum Reserve-Alaska

WASHINGTON – As part of President Obama’s all-of-the-above energy strategy to continue to expand domestic energy production, Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar today signed the Record of Decision (ROD) for the National Petroleum Reserve in Alaska (NPR-A). The final action allows for the development of 72 percent of the estimated economically recoverable oil in the nearly 23-million-acre Reserve, while protecting the vital subsistence resources of Alaska Natives and the habitat of world-class wildlife populations.

“The balanced approach under this plan is the result of extensive local input and will help guide the responsible production and transport of the substantial oil and gas resources in and around the Reserve,” said Salazar. “This comprehensive plan will allow us to continue to expand our leasing in the NPR-A, as has happened over the last three years, while protecting the outstanding and unique resources that are critically important to the culture and subsistence lifestyle of Alaska Natives and our nation’s conservation heritage.”

As part of the Obama Administration’s all-of-the-above energy strategy, domestic oil and gas production has grown each year the President has been in office, with domestic oil production currently higher than any time in nearly a decade and natural gas production at its highest level ever. Foreign oil imports now account for less than 50 percent of the oil consumed in America – the lowest level since 1995. In fiscal year 2012, Interior paid out \$12.15 billion in revenue generated from energy production on public lands and offshore areas – a \$1 billion increase over the previous year.

The Record of Decision addresses two key issues that [Secretary Salazar identified for special attention](#) when he released the final Environmental Impact Statement for the NPR-A Integrated Activity Plan. First, the ROD provides explicit confirmation that potential pipelines carrying oil or gas from operations in the Chukchi and Beaufort Seas can be constructed through the NPR-A. Second, following additional consultations with

North Slope communities, the Record of Decision requires that BLM establish an “NPR-A Working Group” that will include representatives of North Slope tribal entities, Native corporations and local governments.

The NPR-A Working Group will provide input on the full range of management issues and possible future development in the NPR-A, including pipelines and related oil and gas infrastructure development. The Working Group also will be a forum to gather additional scientific information and traditional knowledge about wildlife populations and needs, and it can inform potential adjustments to the boundaries of special areas including, for example, potential future adjustments to the southernmost boundary of the Teshekpuk Lake special area. The Plan itself is consistent with the Congressional intent that oil and gas leases be offered in the NPR-A while providing significant protections for the subsistence resources of Alaska Native residents of the area and the Reserve’s extensive wildlife and recreational values.

After receiving more than 400,000 public comments and following two days of meetings and visits with North Slope leaders in August 2012, Salazar announced the Preferred Alternative, which was adopted by the ROD that he signed today. The ROD includes the creation of the Peard Bay Special Area and enlarges the Teshekpuk Lake and Utukok River Uplands Special Areas, expanding Special Areas in the NPR-A from 8.3 million acres to 13.35 million acres.

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) has estimated that the NPR-A lands made available for development under this plan contain nearly three-fourths of NPR-A’s estimated economically recoverable oil and over half of the estimated economically recoverable gas. The plan will allow for access to oil and gas resources on 11.8 million acres, which are estimated to hold 549 million barrels of economically recoverable oil and 8.7 trillion cubic feet of economically recoverable natural gas.

Following President Obama’s [directive](#) in May 2011 that annual oil and gas lease sales be conducted in the NPR-A, BLM offered three million acres in December 2011. That sale generated 17 winning bids covering more than 120,000 acres. Another lease sale on November 7, 2012, offered 4.5 million acres and received 14 winning bids on 160,088 total acres. There are now 191 authorized oil and gas leases in the NPR-A, encompassing 1.5 million acres. To date, only exploratory drilling has occurred, but in 2011, with the assistance of the President’s Interagency Working Group on Coordination of Domestic Energy Development and Permitting in Alaska, the Corps of Engineers issued permits to ConocoPhillips that will allow for the first commercial oil and gas production in the Reserve.

The Record of Decision makes all lands along the Chukchi Sea coast, most of the lands along the Beaufort Sea coast, and other lands available for application for a wide range of route options for pipelines and other infrastructure that would support offshore development. The decision concurrently protects a wide range of resources, including critical areas for sensitive bird populations from all seven continents and for the roughly 400,000 caribou found in the Teshekpuk Lake and Western Arctic Caribou Herds.

Subsistence users in more than 40 villages in northwest Alaska rely on these caribou herds.

The plan, which is detailed in the Final Integrated Activity Plan and Final Environmental Impact Statement (Final IAP/EIS) for the NPR-A, is the first management plan that covers the entire Reserve, including 9.2 million acres in the southwest area. Previous plans covered the northeast and northwest planning areas only.

The Final IAP/EIS for the NPR-A, released in December 2012, was developed through extensive consultations that considered the viewpoints of Alaskans who live in the region, tribal governments, the State of Alaska, industry, environmental organizations and other stakeholders and federal partners. The BLM hosted seven public meetings and Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act subsistence hearings in North Slope villages. The BLM also held meetings in Fairbanks and Anchorage. Also, following release of the Final IAP/EIS, the BLM conducted meetings in communities on the North Slope to receive recommendations on future ongoing outreach efforts with communities located within or near the NPR-A.

By law, the BLM administers the NPR-A for the purposes of oil and gas leasing along with protection of areas containing significant subsistence, recreational, fish and wildlife or historical or scenic value. The Naval Petroleum Reserves Production Act of 1976 as amended (which transferred the Reserve from the Navy to the Department of the Interior) mandates maximum protection of such areas while conducting an expeditious program of oil and gas leasing.

The NPR-A ROD and related documents are available online at www.blm.gov/ak and at the BLM-Alaska Public Room at 222 W. 7th Avenue #13, Anchorage, AK 99513-7599. A Notice of Availability of the ROD will also be published in the *Federal Register*.

For further information about the NPR-A IAP/EIS, contact the BLM at (907) 271-5960 or (800) 877-8339.

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