



H.R. 2150: The National Petroleum Reserve-Alaska Access Act Another Drilling Bill, Still No Relief to Americans' Pain at the Pump

The National Petroleum Reserve - Alaska

The National Petroleum Reserve - Alaska (Reserve) is the largest single unit of public lands in the nation. Encompassing 23.5 million acres, the Reserve harbors rich, vital wild lands and wildlife. These lands belong to you and me – and we deserve to play a role in how they are managed. In 1923, President Harding set aside the lands in the Reserve as an emergency oil supply for the U.S. Navy. In 1976, the administration of the Reserve was transferred to the Department of the Interior. As far back as 1976, Congress told the U.S. Department of Interior to **“take every precaution to avoid unnecessary surface damage and to minimize ecological disturbance throughout the [R]eserve.”**



*Explosion of wildflowers along the banks of the Utukok River.
Photo credit: © Dave Shreffler.*

National Petroleum Reserve-Alaska Access Act

Rep. Doc Hastings' (R-WA) legislation, H.R. 2150 - The National Petroleum Reserve-Alaska Access Act, is yet another Republican policy on how to deal with high gas prices, but provides no real world solutions – the bill does nothing to address American's current pain at the pump. Instead of solely focusing on drilling the Reserve – one of America's greatest unknown treasures – we should also be ensuring that the special places within the Reserve are granted the strongest possible protections.

The proposed legislation redefines the Reserve as explicitly designated for the purpose of providing oil and natural gas resources to the United States, undercutting the protection of surface values which, along with responsible oil and gas development, has been a fundamental congressional mandate in the Reserve. The legislation echoes the same call for annual leases that President Obama already has committed to hold, and seeks to expedite drilling through risky shortcuts. The Obama Administration is already doing what is needed to allow reasonable access to oil and gas resources within the Reserve, and Hastings' approach is both unnecessary and short-sighted.

Despite the rhetoric, and the legislation's requirement for more study of the Reserve's oil and gas potential, the United States Geological Survey in May 2011 found that the Reserve's oil potential is far less than originally thought. The analysis seems to ring true – especially to the oil industry. Over the last several years, a large portion of previously leased tracts have been dropped or allowed to expire by the oil industry. In fact, the most recent Reserve lease sale offered 1.8 million acres but received bids on only a few individual tracts in near already leased areas.

Rather than focusing on drilling the Reserve, Congress should be focused on ensuring that the special places within the Reserve are granted the strongest possible protections. Oppose Rep. Hastings' bill – a bill full of rhetoric with no real solutions.

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