

**ALASKA WILDERNESS LEAGUE \* DEFENDERS OF WILDLIFE \*  
EARTHJUSTICE \* NATURAL RESOURCES DEFENSE COUNCIL \* PACIFIC  
ENVIRONMENT \* THE WILDERNESS SOCIETY**

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**REPORTER'S MEMO:**

**The Oil Industry's Myth of Environmentally Safe Drilling in Alaska**

WASHINGTON - As top executives with the world's oil industry testify before the House Committee on Natural Resources today in their continued effort to greatly expand offshore drilling across the U.S. and in America's Arctic, we are providing you with a litany of facts that illustrate Big Oil's dismal track record in Alaska and on Saklahin Island in Russia.

Interior Secretary Ken Salazar has taken the positive step of extending the review process for the draft five-year plan for 2010-2015, released in the waning days of the Bush tenure, that expands the Arctic Ocean's leasing area by 76 percent - to 127.6 million acres. As a result, the committee is wisely taking this time to closely examine the impacts of offshore drilling, and help move the nation to a comprehensive clean energy policy.

**As evident on Alaska's North Slope, promises of environmentally sound practices have never been delivered.**

- Alaska's North Slope saw 545 spills, just in 2008. And 2009 isn't starting off much better; crews are still working to clean up another oil spill at Prudhoe Bay that was reported last week.
- In 2006, British Petroleum's corrosion problems at Prudhoe Bay caused the largest oil spill in North Slope history - 200,000 gallons of crude oil - as well as a shutdown of the nation's largest oil field. Worse yet, BP couldn't guarantee that corrosion in their negligently managed oil field would not cause further environmental devastation. BP was subsequently fined for criminal negligence.
- The Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation lists more than 55 existing contaminated sites associated with oil industry operations on the North Slope that contain a variety of toxic materials.
- Each year, oil operations on Alaska's North Slope emit more than 56,000 tons of nitrogen oxides, more than twice the amount spewed by Washington, D.C.

**Currently there are 13.5 million acres of land and waters under lease to oil and gas companies in America's Arctic, and another 84.1 million acres available for lease.**

**Right now, 73.4 million acres in the Arctic Ocean are in the process of being offered for lease – the largest blocks of Arctic waters yet to be offered.**

- Home to America's entire polar bear population, endangered bowhead whales, walrus and three species of ice seals being considered for endangered status, the Arctic Ocean is one of the least-studied and most poorly understood regions on earth. Scientists have estimated a 40 percent likelihood of one or more large oil spills in the Chukchi Sea alone, yet no technology exists to recover oil spilled in the Arctic's icy conditions.
- In November 2008, the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals ruled that the federal government's Minerals Management Service had failed to adequately consider the potential impacts of Shell's proposed drilling in the Beaufort Sea on bowhead whales and Inupiat subsistence activities.
- In September 2007 in the proposed drilling area, a Shell contractor conducting aerial surveys estimated more than 4,800 endangered bowhead whales were present. That's 40-50 percent of the entire endangered bowhead whale population.

**The Alaska Native people of the North Slope are suffering real human consequences of oil and gas development.**

- The North Slope native village of Nuiqsut is surrounded by oil pipelines and the Alpine oil field is located just four miles away.
- When the Alpine oil field was first proposed to be built next to the village, the residents of Nuiqsut were promised at least 50 jobs, a 14-acre footprint and 20 flights into the airfield in June and July. Now the footprint has grown to 200 acres, the 1,900 flights have completely driven away the caribou they depend on, only a handful of villagers work in the oil fields, and the yellow haze can be seen for miles and miles.
- Since the Alpine oil field came online, there has been a 600 percent increase in respiratory illnesses in Nuiqsut.

**Shell's behavior in Sakhalin Island, Russia, home to the world's largest integrated oil and gas project, also raises some serious questions about promises made.**

- Shell committed to follow all the recommendations of a panel of international whale scientists to shield the critically endangered western Pacific gray whale (population = 130) from the pressures of oil development. Instead, Shell built an offshore platform adjacent to the critically endangered western gray whales' only feeding habitat and has consistently failed to provide complete and timely research data and information on their proposed activities.
- The project has brought with it all the elements of offshore oil development: construction of platforms and pipelines, seismic testing, increased vessel traffic, and drilling. In addition to the threats to the vulnerable whale population, it has brought air and water pollution, fish kills, unprecedented inflation, and increased violence. And, as Alaskans who remember the Exxon Valdez spill on March 24, 1989 know too well, the specter of an oil spill is always present.

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