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DOI Starts Clock on Arctic Drilling

Statement from Cindy Shogan, Executive Director, Alaska Wilderness League:

“The federal government announced today that one agency within the Department of the Interior (DOI) – the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management and Regulatory Enforcement (BOEMRE) - is starting the clock on drilling in the Arctic’s Beaufort Sea, despite the fact that a comprehensive report from another DOI agency – the scientifically expert United States Geological Survey (USGS)- recently said that ‘it is difficult, if not impossible’ to make informed decisions about oil and gas development in one of our nation’s most fragile, unique marine environments. What’s more, this report also states, unequivocally, that there is currently no effective way to clean up a spill in the Arctic’s icy conditions.

For example, the USGS report states that despite technological advances in mechanical recovery for oil spill response, ‘many of these may face severe limitations during deployment due to ice-processing challenges, extreme weather (freezing) conditions, and changing conditions in the ice itself.’ In broken ice conditions, the amount of oil that could be cleaned up using mechanical recovery techniques is estimated at a mere 1 to 20 percent, according to the USGS report.

The facts are undeniable. With a decision on the most aggressive course of drilling ever proposed in the Beaufort Sea expected by early next month, BOEMRE must follow through on Interior Secretary Ken Salazar’s promise to make decisions based on ‘sound science’ instead of politics. Moving forward with drilling in the Beaufort Sea would be reckless when sound science shows clearly that there is no way to clean up an oil spill in the Arctic and there is a serious lack of information about ‘the least understood area in the world.’ BOEMRE cannot approve Shell’s plans without violating a fundamental promise that Secretary Salazar made to the American people.”

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