

# Effects of Oil and Gas Activities in the Arctic Ocean

## Environmental Impact Statement



January 2012

Newsletter #3

*This is the third in a series of newsletters concerning the Effects of Oil and Gas Activities in the Arctic Ocean Environmental Impact Statement. It is being mailed to federal, state, and local agencies; elected and appointed officials; Alaska Native groups; other interested organizations; and individual citizens to inform people about the project and to solicit comments. This and subsequent newsletters can be found on the project website at <http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/pr/permits/eis/arctic.htm>.*

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) and the U.S. Department of the Interior's Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM) have prepared and released a Draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) that analyzes the effects of offshore geophysical seismic surveys and exploratory drilling in the federal and state waters of the U.S. Beaufort and Chukchi seas.

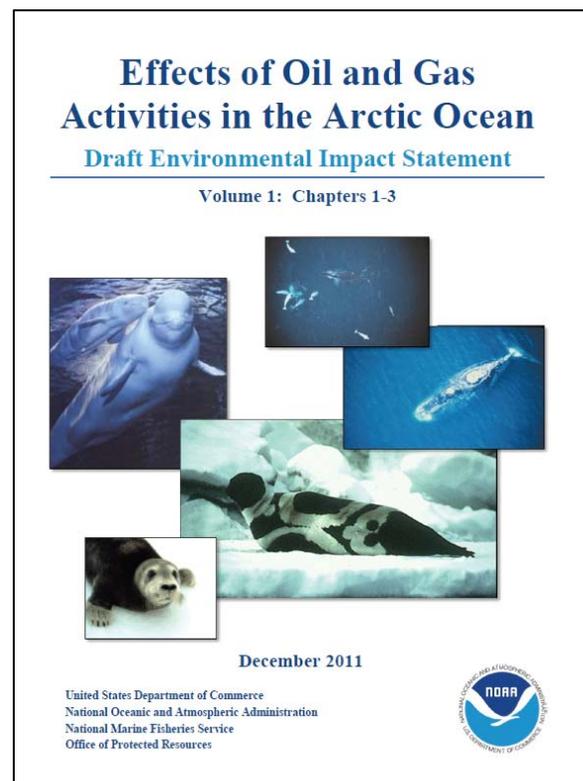
***The public comment period on the Draft EIS ends February 28, 2012.***

Information on how you can obtain a copy of the document or submit comments is included in this newsletter.

### **ABOUT THE ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT**

NMFS is serving as the lead agency for this EIS. BOEM (formerly called the U.S. Minerals Management Service) and the North Slope Borough are cooperating agencies on this EIS. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency is serving as a consulting agency. NMFS is also coordinating with the Alaska Eskimo Whaling Commission pursuant to our co-management agreement under the Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA).

The proposed actions considered in the Draft EIS are:



- NMFS' issuance of incidental take authorizations (ITAs) under Section 101(a)(5) of the MMPA, for the taking of marine mammals incidental to conducting seismic surveys, ancillary activities, and exploratory drilling; and
- BOEM's issuance of permits and authorizations under the Outer Continental Shelf Lands Act for seismic surveys and ancillary activities.

The Draft EIS considers a range of reasonable alternatives consistent with the MMPA, analyzes a range of mitigation and monitoring measures for protecting marine mammals and the availability of marine mammals for subsistence uses, and addresses cumulative effects in the Beaufort and Chukchi seas.

NMFS intends to use this EIS to: 1) evaluate the potential effects of different levels of offshore seismic surveys and exploratory drilling activities occurring in the Beaufort and Chukchi seas; 2) take a comprehensive look at potential cumulative impacts in the EIS project area; and 3) evaluate the effectiveness of various mitigation measures. NMFS will use the findings of the EIS when reviewing individual applications for ITAs associated with seismic surveys and exploratory drilling in the Beaufort and Chukchi seas.

## **PROJECT ALTERNATIVES**

Because this Draft EIS is not addressing individual ITA applications for a specific project, the structure of the alternatives for this EIS are different than those for a specific project. Based on issues identified during the scoping period for this EIS, five alternatives were developed and carried forward for analysis. Each alternative includes an analysis of a suite of standard and additional mitigation measures that have been identified to reduce impacts to marine mammals and to ensure no unmitigable adverse impact on the availability of marine mammals for subsistence uses.

The alternatives are summarized as follows:

### **Alternative 1 - No Action Alternative:**

Under the No Action Alternative, NMFS would not issue any ITAs under the MMPA for seismic surveys, ancillary activities, or exploratory drilling in the Beaufort and Chukchi Seas, and BOEM would not issue geological and geophysical permits or

authorize ancillary activities in the Beaufort and Chukchi seas.

### **Alternative 2 - Authorization for Level 1 Exploration Activity:**

Alternative 2 analyzes a certain amount of 2D/3D seismic, site clearance and high resolution shallow hazards, and on-ice seismic surveys and exploratory drilling programs to occur each year in both the Beaufort and Chukchi seas. Alternative 2 also evaluates a range of standard and additional mitigation measures that would be considered and incorporated into any issued authorization (on a case-by-case basis). Examples of standard and additional mitigation measures include measures to: reduce acoustic exposures (e.g., exclusion zones, flight altitude restrictions, time/area closures); reduce non-acoustic exposures (e.g., vessel speed restrictions, oil spill prevention plans, limited or zero discharge requirements); and ensure no unmitigable adverse impact to subsistence uses (e.g., time/area closures, use of communication centers).

### **Alternative 3 - Authorization for Level 2 Exploration Activity:**

Alternative 3 analyzes a level of 2D/3D seismic, site clearance and high resolution shallow hazards, and on-ice seismic surveys and exploratory drilling programs to occur each year in both the Beaufort and Chukchi seas that is higher than the level contemplated under Alternative 2. The same suite of standard and additional mitigation measures that would be considered and incorporated into any issued authorization (on a case-by-case basis) under Alternative 2 is considered under Alternative 3.

### **Alternative 4 - Authorization for Level 2 Exploration Activity with Additional Required Time/Area Closures:**

Alternative 4 considers the same level of activity contemplated under Alternative 3 and also evaluates the same suite of standard and additional mitigation measures.

However, certain time/area closures that would be considered on a case-by-case basis under the other alternatives would be required under Alternative 4. The time/area closures would be for specific areas important to biological productivity, life history functions for specific species of concern, and subsistence activities. Activities would not be permitted to occur in any of the time/area closures during the specific identified periods. Additionally, buffer zones around these time/area closures could potentially be included.

**Alternative 5 - Authorization for Level 2 Exploration Activity with Use of Alternative Technologies:** Alternative 5 considers the same level of activity contemplated under Alternative 3 and also evaluates the same suite of standard and additional mitigation measures. However, Alternative 5 also includes specific additional mitigation measures that focus on the use of alternative technologies that have the potential to augment or replace traditional airgun-based seismic exploration activities in the future.

## **HOW CAN YOU PARTICIPATE IN THE EIS?**

The Draft EIS is now available to the public for a review period of **60 days** (December 30, 2011 – February 28, 2012).

***Your comments are very important to us.*** As stakeholders in oil and gas development, subsistence, marine mammals, or general interest in the Beaufort and Chukchi seas, we need to hear your ideas and suggestions on this EIS.

All interested parties are invited to review the Draft EIS and attend the public meetings, including members of the general public, Alaska Native organizations, local and regional interest groups, the oil and gas industry, and state and federal agencies. Comments provided on the Draft EIS will be used to develop the Final EIS.

There are several ways to participate in the review of the Draft EIS. Public testimony, written comments, and electronic comments will be accepted during the review period. Oral and written comments can be provided in-person at the public meetings or submitted via email, mail and fax.

NMFS and the cooperating agencies will review all comments, determine how the comments should be addressed, and make appropriate revisions in preparing the Final EIS. The Final EIS will contain the comments submitted and a summary of responses to those comments.

Electronic copies of the Draft EIS are available on the project website at: <http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/pr/permits/eis/arctic.htm>.

To request a hard copy version of the Draft EIS or a CD please contact Candace Nachman at (301) 427-8401 or via email at [arcticeis.comments@noaa.gov](mailto:arcticeis.comments@noaa.gov)

## **ATTEND A PUBLIC MEETING!**

The schedule for public meetings is listed below. The format for these meetings will consist of a short open house to view a summary of the Draft EIS, followed by an opportunity for the public to provide comments. During the open house, representatives from NMFS, the cooperating agencies, and the third-party EIS team will be available to discuss the project and answer questions. The public meetings will also be documented by a court reporter.

To request accommodation of a disability or special need at a public meeting (e.g. sign language interpreter), please contact Erin Green, 10 days prior to the meeting, via fax (907) 562-1297, telephone (907) 562-3366 or email: [Erin.Green@urs.com](mailto:Erin.Green@urs.com).

NMFS will make a reasonable effort to provide effective accommodations for all participants.

## PUBLIC MEETING SCHEDULE

Date	Time	Location
Monday Jan. 30	7:00 pm	<b>Wainwright</b> Community Center
Tuesday Jan. 31	7:00 pm	Inupiat Heritage Center, <b>Barrow</b>
Wednesday Feb. 1	7:00 pm	<b>Kaktovik</b> Community Center
Thursday Feb. 2	7:00 pm	<b>Nuiqsut</b> Community Center
Monday Feb. 6	7:00 pm	McQueen School, <b>Kivalina</b>
Tuesday Feb. 7	9:30 am	Northwest Arctic Borough Assembly Chambers, <b>Kotzebue</b>
Tuesday Feb. 7	7:00 pm	<b>Point Hope</b> Community Center
Wednesday Feb. 8	7:00 pm	<b>Point Lay</b> Community Center
Monday Feb. 13	12:00pm	Loussac Library - Wilda Marston Theatre, <b>Anchorage</b>



**Bowhead Whales** (*Balaena mysticetus*)  
Photo: Dave Rugh, NOAA

### HOW TO SUBMIT COMMENTS

In addition to attending the public meetings and providing verbal comments, there are several ways to submit written comments:

- Bring them to a public meeting.
- Use the link at the project website:  
<http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/pr/permits/eis/arctic.htm>
- Email us at:  
[arcticeis.comments@noaa.gov](mailto:arcticeis.comments@noaa.gov)
- Fax comments to: (301) 713-0376
- Mail comments to:

Mr. James H. Lecky  
Director  
Office of Protected Resources  
National Marine Fisheries Service  
1315 East-West Hwy, Room 13705  
Silver Spring, MD 20910-6233

***Written comments and statements must be postmarked no later than Tuesday February 28, 2012.***

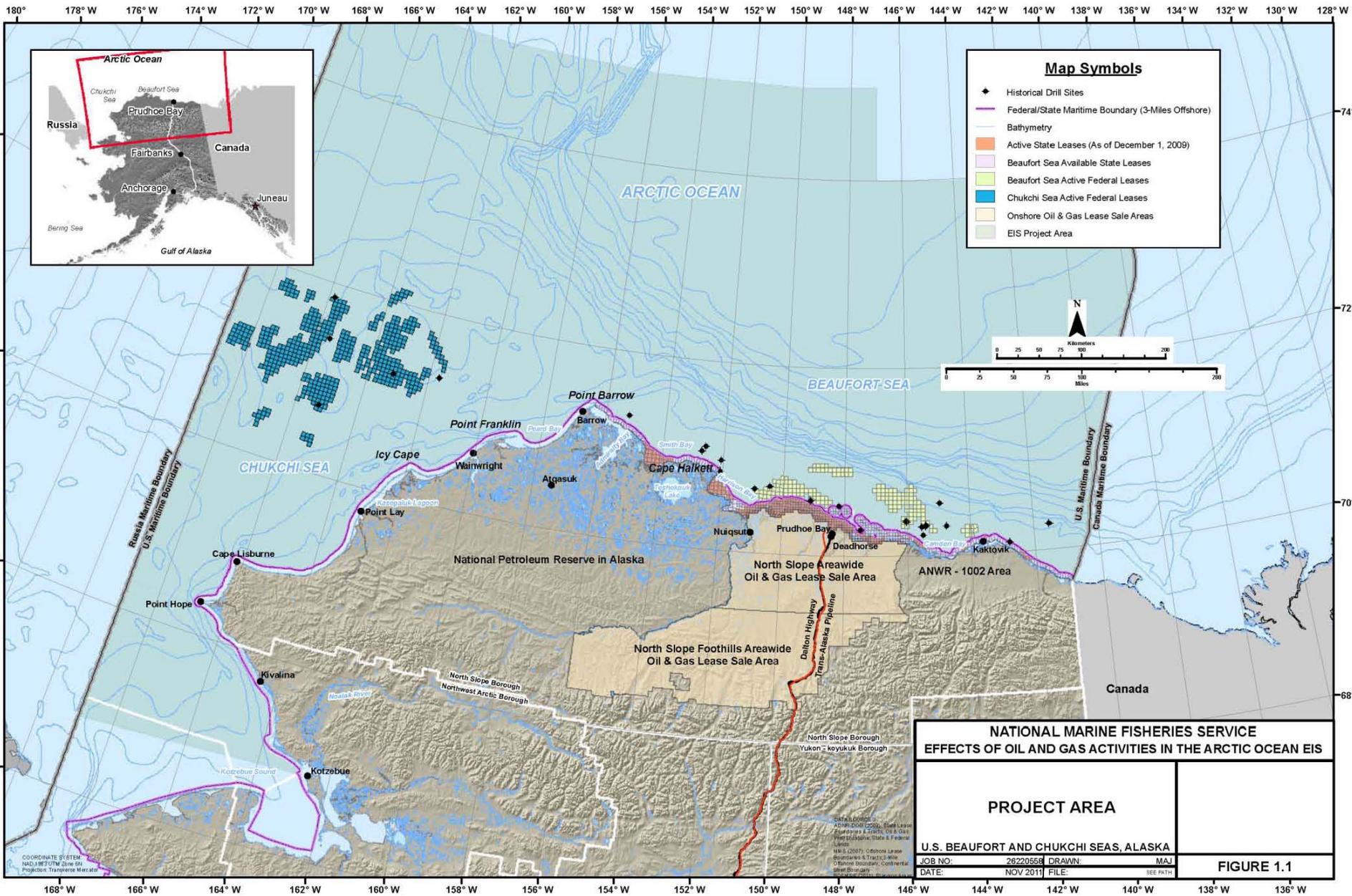
Comments sent via email, including all attachments, must not exceed a 25-megabyte file size. Comments will be reviewed and incorporated into the Final EIS. We request that you include in your comments: (1) your name, address, and affiliation (if any); and (2) background documents to support your comments as appropriate.

Visit the project website for information updates:

<http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/pr/permits/eis/arctic.htm>.

This table summarizes estimated dates for the next steps in the EIS process; the EIS is now in *Steps 4 and 5* of the process.

Step	Steps in the EIS Process
1	<b>Federal Notice of Intent (NOI) to Prepare an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS)</b>
2	<b>Scoping</b>
3	<b>Analysis of Alternatives</b>
4	<b>Issue Draft EIS and Public Comment Period</b> December 30, 2011 – February 28, 2012
5	<b>Public Meetings on Draft EIS</b> January/February 2012
6	<b>Public Comment Review &amp; Synthesis</b> Spring 2012
7	<b>Respond to Comments/Prepare Final EIS</b> Estimated Spring/Summer 2012
8	<b>Issue Final EIS</b> Estimated: August 2012 Available for minimum 30-day public review
9	<b>Record of Decision</b> Public statements of agency decisions Estimated: September 2012



**NATIONAL MARINE FISHERIES SERVICE  
 EFFECTS OF OIL AND GAS ACTIVITIES IN THE ARCTIC OCEAN EIS**

<b>PROJECT AREA</b>	
<b>U.S. BEAUFORT AND CHUKCHI SEAS, ALASKA</b>	
JOB NO: 26220558	DRAWN: MAJ
DATE: NOV 2011	FILE: SEE PATH

**FIGURE 1.1**

Mr. James H. Lecky  
Director  
Office of Protected Resources, National Marine Fisheries Service  
1315 East-West Hwy, Room 13705  
Silver Spring, MD 20910-6233

Prsrt STD  
US Postage  
**PAID**  
Permit 845  
Anchorage, AK

### REMINDER: HOW TO SUBMIT COMMENTS

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- Email us at: [arcticeis.comments@noaa.gov](mailto:arcticeis.comments@noaa.gov)
- Fax comments to: (301) 713-0376
- Mail comments to:  
Mr. James H. Lecky, Director  
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NMFS 1315 East-West Hwy, Room 13705  
Silver Spring, MD 20910-6233

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Activities in the Arctic Ocean**  
**Draft Environmental Impact Statement**

Volume 1: Chapters 1-3

December 2011

United States Department of Commerce  
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration  
National Marine Fisheries Service  
Office of Protected Resources

**Bearded Seal pup (*Erignathus barbatus*)**  
Photo: NOAA