

**VILLAGE OF POINT HOPE; PACIFIC ENVIRONMENT; and
ALASKA WILDERNESS LEAGUE**

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**Alaska Native Press Briefing Calls on Congress to Protect Native Cultures from
Impacts of Oil and Gas Development in Northern Alaska**

WASHINGTON, DC - Alaska Natives from the Native Village of Point Hope and the community of Nuiqsut gathered today to voice their opposition to oil and gas development in key Native subsistence lands and waters in America's Arctic. Close to one year after the first BP oversight hearing in the Senate, this briefing reinforced the need for Congress to address this administration's headlong leasing of key Native subsistence lands for oil drilling, as well as new concerns regarding the compounding effects of climate change on the future of the Native subsistence cultures in Alaska.

"This briefing is to provide Alaska Native people with the opportunity to voice their concerns about the threats that oil and gas development pose to the future of their cultural traditions," said Cindy Shogan, moderator and Executive Director of Alaska Wilderness League. "Again, this presents Congress with a real opportunity to preserve what remains of the Alaskan Native cultures in northern Alaska. It is our hope that Congress will protect these cultures rather than let them remain at the mercy of this 'drill-it-all' administration."

"We are concerned in Point Hope that as offshore seismic surveys continue, the animals we hunt and follow through the seasons are frightened and slowly disappearing from our shores, hurting my people's ability to survive and continue our subsistence traditions and our way of life," said Earl Kingik, subsistence user and representative for the Tribal Council of the Native Village of Point Hope. "We have passed a resolution that opposes all oil and gas activities on and offshore."

"Human health effects from oil and gas development continue to rise with higher numbers of asthma-related illnesses in my village of Nuiqsut, where the Alpine oil fields are just 4 miles away," said Rosemary Ahtuanguaruak, former Mayor of the City of Nuiqsut, community healthcare practitioner and board member of the Inupiat Community of Arctic Slope (ICAS). "We are worried about these continuing health issues and the lack of help to address the long-term impacts they pose to our people. As we said last year, we say again, we oppose opening the Teshekpuk Lake area to oil and gas development. ICAS passed a resolution two weeks ago which states we oppose development in Teshekpuk Lake."

“As a member of the next generation of subsistence whalers and hunters, I’m seeing the effects of climate change in all I do,” said Elijah Lane, a member of the Native Village of Point Hope and Director of its Parks and Wildlife Department. “I have seen the erosion and the disappearing ice in the Chukchi Sea. I have seen the changes in the migrations of animals on the land and in the water as a result of climate change in Alaska.”

“Minerals Management Service has demonstrated to the public that they are an agency with a steamrolling agenda, egged on by an overly-aggressive industry,” stated Rachel James from Pacific Environment’s Alaska Office. “In the process of pushing the expansion of oil and gas industry at ground zero for global warming, they are threatening polar bears, whales, indigenous peoples, and ignoring the realities of climate change. They need to move beyond oil.”

“As a subsistence hunter of the Native Village Point Hope, I continue to hear my community’s concerns about oil and gas development,” said Daisy Sage, council member of the City of Point Hope. “I want my children and grandchildren to have the same traditions now and for thousands of years more but oil and gas development threatens to take that away. I worry for this and all of the future generations.”

In 2005, the Department of Interior (DOI) issued a plan to dramatically increase oil and gas development in the 4.6 million-acre management area of the National Petroleum Reserve Alaska (NPR-A) that includes the Teshekpuk Lake Special Area, opening over 95 percent of the area to development. The following year, conservationists sued against the plan and an Alaska district court judge ruled that the DOI failed to properly consider the cumulative effects of other North Slope oil and gas activities as part of their original Environment Impact Statement (EIS) and ordered a new EIS. The DOI released their court-mandated supplemental EIS in August, which considered new information, but provided no new alternatives and cited no preferred alternative. Despite continued opposition from Native communities, scientists and conservationists to the plan, DOI appears to be moving down the same industry-first path when dealing with the ecologically significant wetlands of Teshekpuk Lake. There is currently a public comment period open for the EIS, closing on November 6. Over 3.8 million acres have already been leased to oil companies in the NPR-A.

Simultaneously, the DOI is moving forward with massive oil and gas leasing plans throughout the entire 72 million acre Arctic Ocean. This summer, the agency opened over 33 million acres in the Beaufort Sea, over 39 million acres in the Chukchi Sea, and 5.4 million acres in the Bering Sea as part of its new 2007-2012 five year oil and gas leasing program. At the same time, the DOI allowed Shell Oil to move forward with exploration plans in lease areas from the previous 5 year program, starting with exploration activities on lease tracts located offshore of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. Conservationists, the North Slope Borough, the Alaska Eskimo Whaling Commission, and the Inupiat Community of the Arctic Slope are challenging the DOI’s approval of this exploration plan in the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals. In August, the 9th Circuit granted an injunction of Shell’s exploration activities and established an expedited briefing schedule for its consideration of the merits of the case.

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