

Should the United States Drill for Oil in Alaska's Wilderness?

The conservation of our natural resources and their proper use underlies almost every other problem in our national life.

Theodore Roosevelt, June 10, 1907

During the first 200 years of its settlement, America seemed a vast country with almost no limits. When President Jefferson added the Louisiana Purchase to the nation, he believed it would provide untouched land and resources for centuries to come. In the next 64 years America would add Florida, California and the Mexican Cession, Oregon Country, and then Alaska. With all this land and the riches under its soil, America's natural resources would surely last forever.

But forever is a long time, especially when so many settlers saw the wilderness as a big candy store. Fortunately for the land and its resources, there were some farsighted people who realized that the candy store should not be open all the time. In fact, there were some aisles in the store that should be completely closed down. In 1872 Congress set aside a piece of land in Wyoming, establishing Yellowstone as the country's first national park. This was followed by the first forest reserve in 1891, and the first wildlife reserve in 1903. By the time Congress and President Woodrow Wilson established the National Park Service in 1916 there were 40 national parks and monuments to place under its care.

Now, flash forward to 1980. At this time, America found itself in an oil crisis. Events in the Middle East were making America aware of how fragile the oil supply lines were. In 1980, the United States was importing more than a third of its oil. If oil from the Middle East were cut off, how would America keep its economy running?

One answer to the oil and gas crisis was to use less oil. Some Americans did switch to smaller cars. Another answer was to drill for more oil here at home. Indeed, the largest oil field in North America had recently been discovered in Prudhoe Bay on the north coast of Alaska. Prudhoe Bay would soon account for 20% of all **domestic** US oil production.

Given the concerns about oil in 1980, it is surprising that in that same year, Congress

created a wildlife reserve just east of Prudhoe Bay. The Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (ANWR) was established to protect native plants and animals from human interference. The Refuge would cover 19 millions acres, an area about the size of South Carolina. To protect the **ecosystem**, most of the Refuge was declared

closed to oil exploration. However, the act did give Congress future power to allow drilling in a 1.5 million acre stretch along the shore where oil reserves are believed to be.

Ever since ANWR was established, pro and anti **lobbyists** have battled in Washington about opening up the Refuge to drilling. With oil prices rising and Middle East troubles continuing, in May 2006 the House of Representatives voted 225 – 201 to allow drilling in ANWR. However, the bill died in the Senate and drilling was not permitted. But the issue is not dead.

The question in this Mini-Q is similar to ones Americans are will face for years to come. Examine the documents that follow and decide: *Should the United States drill for oil in an Alaska's Wilderness?*



Congressman Morris K. Udall celebrates the passage of the Alaska Lands Act Bill in 1980.

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Background Essay Questions

1. Why weren't many colonial Americans concerned about protecting natural resources?
2. In what year was the National Park Service established?
3. In what two basic ways did Americans deal with the gas shortage of 1980?
4. Did the oil from Prudhoe Bay, Alaska, help ease the crisis?
5. Did the ANWR legislation of 1980 permit any oil drilling?
6. What was the result of the Congressional ANWR vote in 2006?
7. Define or describe each of the following:

domestic

ANWR

ecosystem

lobbyist

1968 – Largest oil deposits in North America discovered in Alaska

1969 – April 22: United States celebrates first Earth Day

1973 – US government calls for 90% reduction of auto pollution

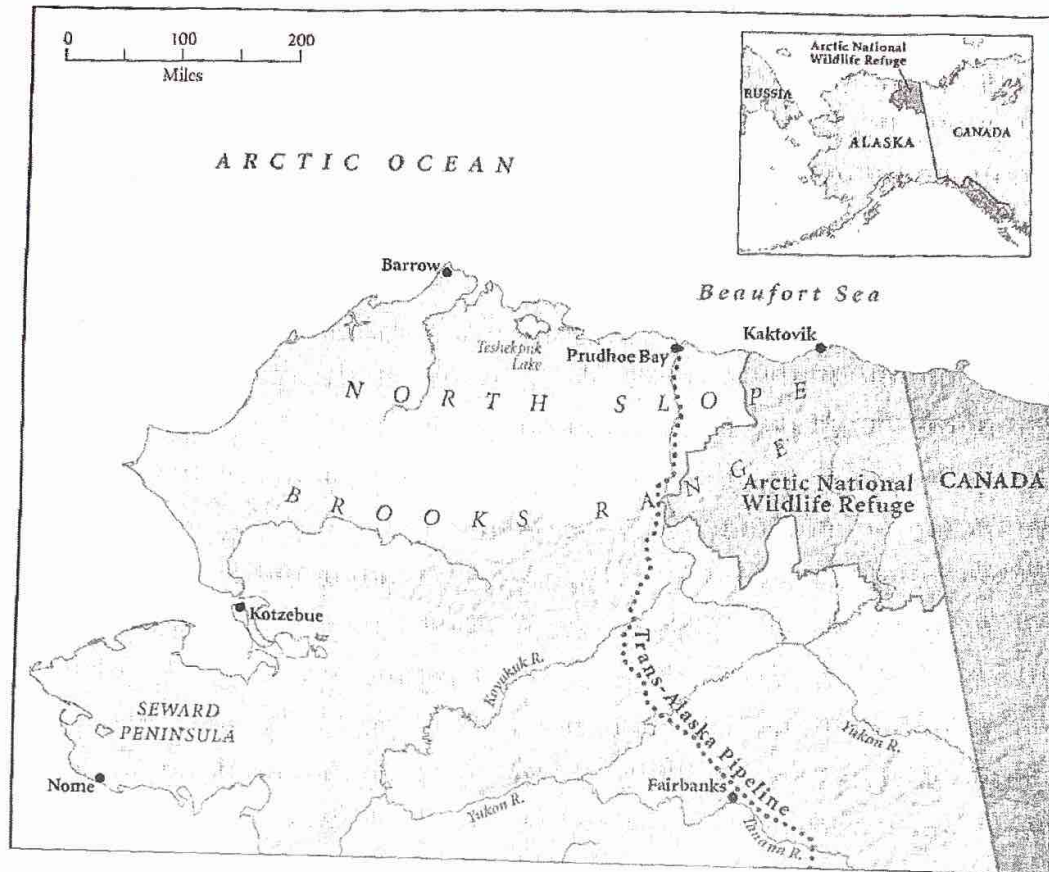
1974 – OPEC oil embargo, gas prices quadruple

1977 – Alaskan pipeline is opened

1989 – Exxon Valdez oil spill off Alaska, largest oil spill in US history

Document A

Source: Map courtesy of US Fish & Wildlife Service – Alaska, February 14, 2006.



Document Analysis

1. What is the name of the human settlement on the north coast of the Refuge?
2. What kind of natural geographical features does ANWR have within its boundaries?
3. At the coast, how far is the western edge of the Refuge from the Alaskan pipeline?
4. Why do you think there are no highways through the park?
5. From the map, guess at least five animals that you think live in the park.
Hint: What animals live in cold water, mountains and northern forests?

Document B

Source: Selected from "Top Ten Reasons to Support ANWR Development." Courtesy of Arctic Power, Anchorage, Alaska, 2005.

Note: Arctic Power is a non-profit lobbying group endorsed by the Alaska state legislature.

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1. **Only 8% of ANWR Would be Considered for Exploration** Only 1.5 million acres (8%) of ANWR is being considered for development. The remaining 17.5 million acres (92%) will remain permanently closed. If oil is discovered, less than 2000 acres of the 1.5 million acres of the Coastal Plain would be affected.
2. **Revenues to the State and Federal Treasury** Federal revenues would be enhanced by billions of dollars. Estimates for ANWR by the Office of Management and Budget and the Department of Interior for the first five years after Congressional approval are 4.2 billion dollars.
3. **Jobs to Be Created** Between 250,000 and 750,000 ANWR jobs are estimated to be created by development of the Coastal Plain.
4. **Imported Oil Too Costly** In 2004 the US imported an average of 58% of its oil and during certain months up to 64%. That (is equal to) over \$150 billion in oil imports....

Document Analysis

1. Why do you think the Alaska state legislature supports Arctic Power?
2. According to Arctic Power, what are three benefits to Americans from drilling in ANWR?
3. Is oil guaranteed to be found in ANWR? Cite the text that supports your answer.
4. How much money would ANWR oil bring in to the US Treasury after five years of drilling?
5. The entire population of Alaska in 2008 was about 700,000. How could oil from ANWR possibly create up to 735,000 jobs?
6. What do you think is the strongest pro-drilling argument in this document? Why?

Document C

Source: Courtesy of the Arctic Wildlife Organization, Washington, DC, 2004.

1. **Will drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge solve gasoline and oil supply problems and reduce prices?** No. A study by the US Energy Information Agency (March 2004) shows it would only reduce US oil imports 4%, having no real effect on prices or supply....
2. **Are estimated oil supplies in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge expected to significantly change our energy prospects?** No. It is estimated that the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge contains no more than a six month supply of oil at our current consumption rates.
3. **Given the war against terrorism, shouldn't the US (try) to be self sufficient?**
No, it's not possible to be self-sufficient given the amount of oil consumed as a nation. The US uses more oil than it could find domestically, even if it were to drill on all public lands. The US uses 25% to 30% of the oil produced in the world, yet has less than 3% of known oil reserves. The amount from the Arctic Refuge is a drop in the bucket.... The only way to enhance national security is to develop alternatives that reduce oil consumption.

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Document Analysis

1. According to the document, will new oil from ANWR significantly increase the supply or lower the price of domestic oil? Explain why or why not.
2. If the US economy were to run only on ANWR oil, how long would that oil supply last?
3. What percent of the world's oil does the US consume?
4. What percent of the world's oil does the United States have in its known oil reserves?
5. How does the document suggest America solve its energy problem?

Document D

Source: Jacob Adams, an Inupiat Eskimo, in an open letter to Congress, Barrow, Alaska, June, 1995.

Note: Adams served as Chairman and President of the Arctic Slope Regional Corporation, a corporation with 9,000 Inupiat shareholders that would benefit financially from drilling.

The Inupiat people believe that this ... area represents our nation's best hope for significant new deposits of a critical strategic resource. We believe that delays in development deprive us of the benefits from our lands....

Much has been said about the need to keep ANWR a total wilderness, and to prevent development in even the smallest corner.... In our experience, we can only afford to keep most of our land as wilderness if we are allowed to extract maximum value from smaller areas, such as Prudhoe Bay, or the Coastal Plain (ANWR).

The Inupiat Eskimo people are the indigenous people of the Arctic coastal environment. We rely on the land and resources of the North Slope for our physical, our cultural and our economic well-being. We have watched the oil and gas development at Prudhoe Bay... and have seen first-hand how development can co-exist with our natural resources and our way of life.

It is our experience that carefully regulated oil exploration and development can take place on the private and public lands inside the Coastal Plain study area. We believe the oil industry has made good on its promise to preserve our environment.

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Document Analysis

1. Who wrote this letter, to whom, and when?
2. The writer says that the Inupiat are the indigenous people of the Arctic Coastal Plain. What does that mean?
3. According to the letter, why do some Inupiat support oil drilling in ANWR?
4. What do you think is the best argument against the letter writer's position?
5. Should the Inupiat's point of view be given special consideration by Congress? Explain.