

## **REPORT RAISES TOUGH QUESTIONS ABOUT DRILLING IN ANWR**

(EDITOR'S NOTE: Charles Levendosky, editorial page editor of the Casper Star-Tribune, has written about public lands issues for over a decade and is respected for his insight into these issues. His e-mail address is levendos@trib.com.)

By CHARLES LEVENDOSKY  
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The Bush administration as well as those U.S. senators who receive large campaign contributions from the oil and gas industry now claim that drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (ANWR) is a matter of national security. They imply it's the patriotic thing to do. Nonsense. It's about profit. Drilling in the refuge has always been about profit.

Apologists for the oil and gas industry claim we need to drill everywhere in order to become more oil independent. We never will be. Not even close.

Even the most optimistic estimates of the oil available in ANWR do not project it to provide more than 1 percent of the nation's daily use over the average field's lifespan of 40 years. That's a pittance. The across-the-board conservation measures the American people took recently when electricity prices gouged holes in their wallets saved as much energy on a daily basis as ANWR can be expected to supply.

These apologists never tell us what will happen when this country finally pumps out all of its oil. It's a limited non-renewable resource. Obviously, this nation needs to develop alternative sources of energy, or we will be forced to beg more nations for oil. Yet this administration tells us to spend more, consume more -- during a war when conservation would be the wisest approach.

According to the U.S. Energy Information Administration, oil supplies were only minimally affected by the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11. The Oct. 17 issue of the Oil & Gas Journal pointed out that due to decreased world demand for oil, the United States has no shortages of oil supplies-- even with the ongoing military operations.

On Aug. 2, the U.S. House passed its version of an energy bill (H.R. 4) which authorizes drilling in the ecologically sensitive 1002 Area of ANWR.

Sen. Frank Murkowski, R-Alaska, introduced an energy bill in the Senate in February (S. 388). It also authorizes drilling in the Coastal Plain of ANWR. The bill has been stalled in the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources since May.

Senate Majority Leader Tom Daschle, D-S.D., has problems with drilling in the very heart of the refuge and has used parliamentary maneuvers to stop the passage of Murkowski's bill.

Undoubtedly, he read the report prepared for Congress by the Congressional Research Service (CRS) regarding the problems related to drilling for oil and gas in ANWR. The report was released on Sept. 6.

The report notes that opening 1002 Area (the Coastal Plain) of ANWR to oil and gas development also opens Alaska Native lands within ANWR to such development -- all 100,000 acres. That fact alone ensures there will be no "small footprint," as it was described by President Bush, in developing oil and gas in the refuge.

ANWR is managed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, as all refuges are -- for the protection and preservation of wildlife. Under the two energy bills, the Bureau of Land Management would manage the leasing program, while the USFWS would only provide expertise on biological and wildlife issues. In effect, the bills divorce oil and gas development from the biological and wildlife purposes of the refuge.

Both energy bills begin with the assumption and legal stance that "the oil and gas leasing program and activities in the 1002 Area are compatible with the purposes for which the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge was established, and that no further findings or decisions are required to implement this determination." According to the CRS report, that statement could limit the USFWS's authority to impose conditions on leases and other activities such as building and operating port facilities, staging areas and personnel centers.

In direct contradiction to the "small footprint" argument, both bills use the phrase, "no significant adverse effect," a very low environmental standard in terms of a guide to leasing. The standard is only triggered by significant damage to the ecology or fish and wildlife of the Coastal Plain.

The authority to close an area to protect its wildlife is granted solely to the secretary of the Interior. The bills, thereby, preempt the Endangered Species Act which would normally be triggered if a species is jeopardized.

The authority to close areas on a seasonal basis to allow wildlife migration or to isolate caribou calving grounds only applies to exploratory drilling activities. The Senate bill grants no authority to Interior for seasonal closures during the production phase of oil and gas development.

Once the refuge is open to development, individual Native allotments within the Coastal Plain and other environmentally sensitive areas of ANWR could be used for surface development like staging areas and refuse storage. Native allotments within ANWR total more than 10,000 acres.

The Senate energy bill states that Congress finds an Environmental Impact Statement for the 1002 Area, which was completed in 1987, to be adequate to satisfy the legal and procedural requirement of the National Environmental Policy Act. The bill eliminates any

requirement to do another EIS to ensure that oil exploration and development will not result in a significant adverse effects on fish and wildlife.

In a final insult to the American public, both energy bills would allow the oil from ANWR -- if it is transported via the Trans-Alaska Pipeline System -- to be exported. The president can stop such export only by determining that it is not in the national interest.

Daschle should be commended for using his leverage to derail Murkowski's energy bill. It's bad legislation.

Drilling for oil in the Coastal Plain amounts to shooting a bullet into the wild heart of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge.