

Statement of
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Status Update: Legacy Wells in the NPR-A
Presented to
Senate Resources Committee (DRAFT)
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I appreciate this opportunity to provide you with an update on the BLM's Legacy Wells clean-up program since my comments to the House Resources Committee last month.

The BLM recognizes the importance of cleaning up these well sites. As you know, since 2002, the Federal government has spent almost \$86 million in plugging legacy wells and cleaning up the surface at priority legacy well sites. We have plugged 18 wells and remediated contaminated soils where necessary with that funding.

In the last several weeks, we have been working to finalize the Legacy Wells Summary Report 2013 update. This update has been prepared following a comprehensive site by site inventory. A draft of the report was provided to the Alaska Oil and Gas Conservation Commission (AOGCC), the Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation, the Arctic Slope Regional Corporation (ASRC) and the North Slope Borough and the U.S. Geologic Survey. I understand the AOGCC has prepared comments that will come our way shortly. We welcome their review and input.

The summary report, once finalized, will be used to complete a strategic plan for addressing well clean up. The strategic plan will document our goals for the program and identify actions necessary for “closure” of all legacy wells in the NPR-A.

As you are all too well aware, the cost of plugging these wells is compounded by their remoteness and inaccessibility for most of the year. Ice roads must be developed to move equipment and gear to set up on-site camps adequate to shelter workers in temperatures as cold as minus forty. Provisions and fuel must be constantly resupplied and daylight is limited. Specialized equipment must be winterized and transported on sleds for what can be hundreds of miles from Deadhorse, the principal road accessible supply depot.

Regarding the SHPO Issue:

Much has been said in the last few weeks about the BLM’s process of consulting with the State Historic Preservation Office regarding legacy well sites that are more than 50 years old. I want to assure you that this is part of our normal environmental review process, and is not expected to result in any delays in accomplishing clean-up work. In addition, historical significance in and of itself does not preclude plugging or cleanup and is considered well in advance of on the ground activities.

Regarding Simpson #26:

Regarding the Simpson #26 well, a picture of which has been widely circulated at meetings on this issue, I would like to make a few clarifying points. What you see in this picture is a well that was drilled in a natural oil seep. That well was plugged by the BLM in 2006. The oil you see is from the natural seep and not leaks. Surface solid waste clean-up still must occur, but is logistically difficult. During plugging operations back in 2006, the tundra was snow covered and

workers at the site were unable to see and retrieve the barrels. Other surface debris has been removed from the site. The BLM's Arctic Field Office is planning to focus on surface remediation projects during the 2013/2014 field seasons, and this site is identified as a high priority.

We appreciate and share your concern about the need to address the legacy wells issue. The BLM remains committed to seek funding to properly address those sites that pose a threat to public health and safety and the environment and to conduct our work in a fiscally responsible manner. We will continue to work collaboratively with the AOGCC, Native Corporations, Tribal governments, and other partners including the ASRC as we prioritize well clean-up projects in the strategic plan and during the clean-up efforts.

Thank you again for the opportunity to address you today. I will glad to answer any questions.