



City of Wainwright

Mr. Steven Cohn, State Director, Bureau of Land Management-Alaska

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Ms. Bonnie Million, Congressional Liaison, Bureau of Land Management - Alaska

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December 7, 2023

SUBJECT: Proposed Rule for the Management and Protection of the National Petroleum Reserve in Alaska

To the BLM,

Below are the City of Wainwright's comments on the Proposed Rule for the National Petroleum Reserve in Alaska (NPR-A). I am Cheryl Panik, Mayor for the City of Wainwright, located inside the NPR-A. I am also tribal administrator for the Village of Wainwright, a resident of the North Slope, and a member of the NPR-A Working Group.

The NPR-A Working Group (WG) was established under Secretary Salazar as part of the 2013 Integrated Activity Plan (IAP) to work collaboratively with the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) on federal management issues that are important to our communities that are located within the boundaries of the NPR-A. Secretary Salazar established the WG to provide balance and a safe environment for our communities to be heard on issues and decisions that can have an impact on our community and to advise the BLM on these issues from our perspective.

The introduction of the Proposed Rule for the Management and Protection of the National Petroleum Reserve in Alaska (Proposed Rule) does just the opposite and does not meet the goals of Secretary Salazar. In fact, we find it ironic that this BLM has reversed the 2020 IAP in its 2022 IAP Record of Decision (ROD) because the 2022 IAP ROD reverts to the 2013 IAP ROD which established us and a critical voice in future decisions like this Proposed Rulemaking. It appears to us that the BLM has decided to pick and choose what out of the 2023 IAP ROD they want to emulate and overlooked entirely the role of the WG.

The City of Wainwright feels you have failed to center collaboration with local communities and people in the creation of the Proposed Rule and you have not provided our communities with adequate time or resources to fully understand the changes you are proposing and their impacts.

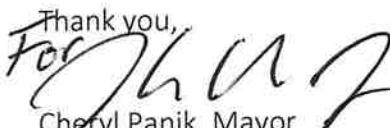
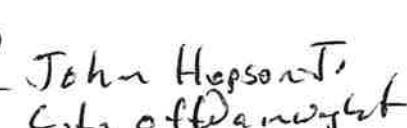
We have attended two WG meetings where the BLM has presented the Proposed Rule yet there are some significant gaps in your presentations that we feel it necessary to comment on. In the presentations BLM has implied that through its research of comments of past IAP's, North Slope communities have provided evidence that the Proposed Rule is necessary to provide additional mitigations of the significant adverse effects of oil and gas activities on surface resources. We would like to receive copies of your summary and findings that support the implications that you are doing this because of us. We have used the public process under the IAP to ensure adequate protections exist at the time of the IAP – that is a best management practice from our perspective. The City acknowledges that we are living in a changing arctic and we are the people on the ground who best understand these changes.

As a small municipal government with limited resources, adding the burden of a new public process for evaluating Special Areas is an unreasonable suggestion – we simply do not have the resources to be in a continual public process between reviewing Special Areas and the IAP's. We are familiar with the IAP process adopted by the BLM and feel that is the most meaningful path forward.

Our city government operations are in part funded by the NPR-A Impact Mitigation Grant Fund administered by the State of Alaska and our local taxes. We feel that the Economic Analysis presented in the Proposed Rule is deeply flawed. It appears in your analysis that you have failed to include critical factors, such as the NPR-A Impact Mitigation Grant Fund which provides funding to NPR-A municipalities for a broad range of projects in our communities. You have also failed to acknowledge the North Slope Borough operations, which are funded through taxes on industrial activity in the NPR-A, and provides funding for schools, health clinics, water, sewer, among many other amenities and services to North Slope communities. For example, in 2022, the Borough received \$376.9 million in oil and gas property taxes, accounting for 95% of the Borough's total property tax receipts. A portion of this amount is distributed to the smaller municipalities, like ours, throughout the NSB region. We need to be part see the underlying data that leads to your conclusion that there will be minimal economic impact on our region and are requesting a new NEPA-like Economic Impact Analysis to include consultation and inclusion of the NPR-A Working Group as anticipated by Secretary Salazar in the 2013 Integrated Activity Plan Record of Decision.

While I am submitting these comments as the Mayor of Wainwright, I have to say that as the Tribal Administrator for the Village of Wainwright our tribe has been frustrated by the lack of effective consultation and the accelerated timeline this rulemaking is being done under. This is a very complex document that even BLM representatives struggled to present in a way that clearly demonstrated what is being updated.

The above comments must be addressed before you finalize any sort of rule updating the management processes currently in place for the NPR-A. We only had our community presentation on December 4 while many of our community members were traveling back from the Bureau of Indian Affairs Providers Conference or out of Wainwright for the Alaska Municipal League Conference. We have tried to demonstrate on many occasions that your timeframe did not meet the timeframe of our community but that has fallen on deaf ears. We don't understand why this process is being rushed even in the face of clear feedback from North Slope entities, the NPR-A Working Group, and even our Alaska Delegation. Updating the management regime currently in place in the NPR-A is a big deal to our communities and it must be done in a thoughtful way that improves the current system; what you have presented does not.

Thank you,

For 
Cheryl Panik, Mayor
City of Wainwright
John Hespont,
City of Wainwright
City Manager