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Acting ASFE, Christopher Smith, and Alaska Department of Natural Resources Commissioner, Dan Sullivan, sign an MOU at the LNG 17 Global Conference in Houston, Texas, pledging to work together in the effort to get more of Alaska's fossil fuels into the energy stream. Photo courtesy of LNG 17.

## MEDIA CONTACT

[Jenny Hakun](#)

FE Office of Communications

202-586-5616

**Washington, DC** - Development of potentially vast and important unconventional energy resources in Alaska – including viscous oil and methane hydrates – could be accelerated under a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) signed today by the state's Department of Natural Resources (DNR) and the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE).

The purpose of the MOU is to "improve cooperation and collaboration" between Alaska's DNR and DOE's Office of Fossil Energy (FE) related to research and development (R&D) as well as "information sharing" connected to the development of unconventional energy resources in the state.

The Alaska North Slope has two of the largest conventional oil fields in North America (Prudhoe Bay and Kuparuk) as well as several other smaller but still significant fields. The state also has significant unconventional petroleum and natural gas resources, including both viscous oil and methane hydrate deposits.

Viscous oil is a type of "heavy" or thicker oil similar in consistency to syrup that presents some special technical and economic challenges for recovery. On the North Slope, it has been estimated that as much as 20 billion to 25 billion barrels of viscous oil are contained within shallow, regionally extensive sands.

Essentially molecules of natural gas trapped in ice crystals, methane hydrates represent a potentially enormous energy resource, possibly exceeding the combined energy content of all other fossil fuels. The U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) has estimated a potentially recoverable resource of 85 trillion cubic feet of gas in favorable hydrate accumulations on the Alaska North Slope alone.

Under the agreement, DOE's Office of Fossil Energy will be responsible for developing R&D opportunities in Alaska and providing scientific expertise and resources in support of projects. This will be achieved by FE's National Energy Technology Laboratory (NETL) through collaborations with various federal, industry, international and academic partners.

Alaska will "use its best efforts to resolve land access issues, arrange for the leasing of state land, and coordinate infrastructure, logistics, permitting and regulation where appropriate. These efforts

will support “the assessment of unconventional energy resources” and “the field evaluation of potential production technologies” through scientific tests, and may involve “facilitating access to land within existing units, un-leased acreage and leased acreage on state lands.”

Alaska will also support DOE by providing “scientific review and interpretations of data through the divisions of Oil and Gas and Geologic and Geophysical Surveys.” Alaska will also participate in periodic reviews of all scientific data and reports collected or created during the course of the MOU, signed by Alaska DNR Commissioner Daniel S. Sullivan and Christopher A. Smith, DOE’s acting Assistant Secretary of Fossil Energy, at the 17th International Conference and Exhibition on Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG-17) in Houston, Texas.

DOE is one of the world’s leading unconventional oil and natural gas R&D institutions. Among other areas, FE scientists have worked actively with researchers in other nations (mainly Japan, Korea, India, China, Canada), as well as with USGS, the Bureau of Land Management the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management and other federal agencies, to advance methane hydrate technology. The Methane Hydrate Research and Development Act of 2000 established DOE (through the efforts of FE and NETL) as the lead U.S. agency for methane hydrate research and development.

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