



THE WILDERNESS SOCIETY

The “2,000 Acres” Scam

“The proponents of drilling add insult to injury with their spurious arguments in favor of drilling. It is only a few thousand acres, they say. That is like saying, do not worry, the tumor is only in your lungs. The drilling will have impacts that will affect wildlife throughout the area.”

--Rep. Sherwood Boehlert (R-NY) April 10, 2003, CR H3251

Energy bills that have narrowly passed the House of Representatives (H.R. 4 August 2, 2001; H.R. 6 April 11, 2003, H.R. 6, April, 21 2005) contain language designed to make oil development in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge sound more palatable to the public. One such scam was an amendment claiming development would be confined to a 2,000 acre area. In reality, opening the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge to drilling would cause environmental devastation across the entire 1.5 million-acre Coastal Plain, the biological heart of the Refuge.

The entire 1.5 million-acre Coastal Plain would be opened to leasing and exploration.

Drilling proponents claim the House energy bill would open only 2,000 acres to the oil corporations, but in reality the *entire* 1.5 million acre “1002 area” would be opened to leasing and exploration.

In fact, the 2005 House energy bill (with the so-called “2,000” acre restriction) mandates that the first lease sale be no less than 200,000 acres¹.

There is no requirement that the 2,000 acres be contiguous.

Oil corporations want you to think they are talking about one compact area of 2,000 acres. But, as with the North Slope oil fields west of the Arctic Refuge, development would sprawl over a very large area.

Supporting infrastructure would have to stretch across the Coastal Plain.

The U.S. Geological Survey said that whatever oil and gas is under the Coastal Plain is in small deposits spread throughout the plain.² This is why the bill includes the entire 1.5 million acre Coastal Plain and not a smaller portion of it. To produce oil from this vast area, networks of pipelines and roads would be built, fragmenting wildlife habitat.

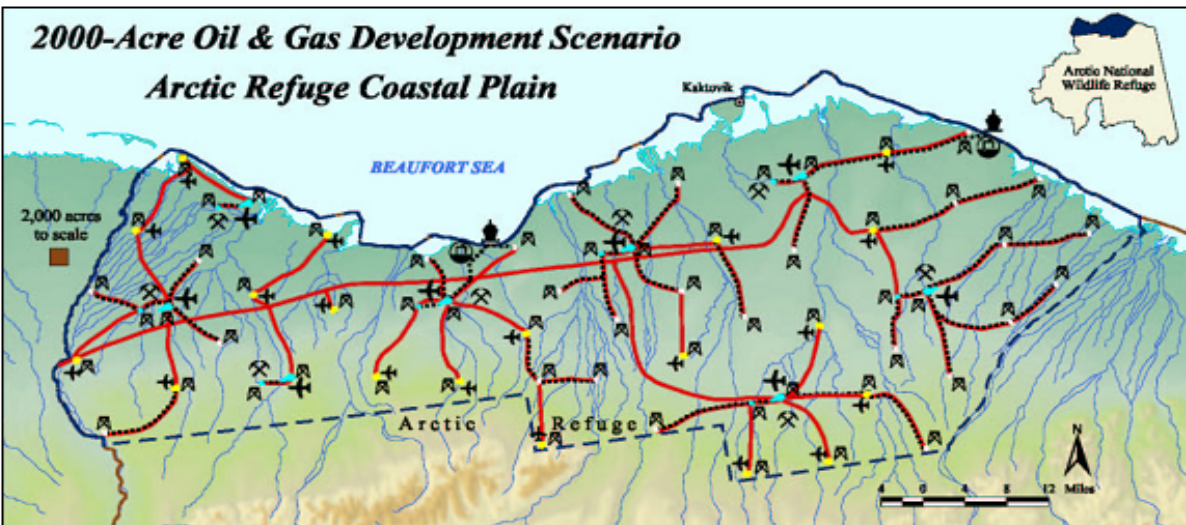
Even if the 2,000 acres were contiguous, it would have a huge impact on the wilderness.

For example, the 12-lane wide New Jersey turnpike stretches more than 100 miles across the state but covers only 1,773 acres.

The 2,000 acres does not include all oil industry infrastructure, facilities, or operations.

“My amendment did not address roads.”³ -- Rep. John E. Sununu

The bill’s “2,000 acres” only included the area where oil production facilities actually touch the ground, and excluded gravel mines, roads, and pipelines (except their posts).⁴ It did not cover seismic or other exploration operations across the 1.5 million acre area. It also did not account for air and noise pollution, which are carried far from development.



Map illustrates what “2,000-acres” of development, by drilling proponent’s math, might look like. Arctic Refuge drilling would require a spider web of industrial development, spreading across the entire 1.5 million-acre Coastal Plain.

The National Academy of Sciences said impacts extend well beyond the immediate “footprint.”

“The effects of industrial activities are not limited to the footprint of a structure or to its immediate vicinity, a variety of influences can extend some distance from the actual footprint...”

The common practice of describing the effects of particular projects in terms of the area directly disturbed by roads, pads, pipelines, and other facilities ignores the spreading character of oil development on the North Slope and the consequences of this to wildland values. All of these effects result in the erosion of wildland values over an area far exceeding the area directly affected...

Nearly all the roads, pads, pipelines and other infrastructure ever built are still in place. The environmental effects of such structures on the landscape, water systems, vegetation, and animals are manifest not only at the “footprint” itself (physical area covered by the structure) but also at distances that vary depending on the environmental component being affected.”⁵

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¹ H.R. 6, Energy Policy Act of 2005, Sec. 2206, <http://thomas.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/z?c109:H.R.6>:

² U.S. Geological Survey. April 2001. *Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, 1002 Area, Petroleum Assessment, 1998, including economic analysis.* USGS Fact Sheet FS-028-01.

Bird, K.J. 1998. Chapter AO. Assessment Overview. In: *The oil and gas resource potential of the 1002 area, Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, Alaska*, by ANWR Assessment Team, U.S. Geological Survey Open File Report 98-34. Figs. AO6-15.

³ Rep. John E. Sununu. August 15, 2001. “Environmental extremists just say no to any new energy production.” *Union Leader*.

⁴ Identical amendment in H.R.4 and H.R.6: “Ensure that the maximum amount of surface acreage covered by production and support facilities, including airstrips and any areas covered by gravel beams or piers for support of pipelines, does not exceed 2,000 acres on the Coastal Plain.”

⁵ National Research Council. 2003. *Cumulative environmental effects of oil and gas activities on Alaska’s North Slope.* National Academies Press. P. 4, 9,148; and Report Brief at http://books.nap.edu/html/north_slope/reportbrief.pdf