

## ICE ROADS MYTH

Proponents of drilling in the Arctic Refuge often espouse a technological utopia where miraculous roads made of ice melt away, leaving no trace of industrial development. But ice roads are far from impact free, and the conditions on the Arctic Refuge coastal plain would essentially force companies to lay gravel roads and well pads.

### ***Ice road travel season is melting away***

Global warming, a direct result of burning fossil fuels, is diminishing the oil industry's ability to use ice roads. Over the past three decades, ice road use on the North Slope has been shortened from 204 to 124 days.<sup>i</sup>

### ***Ice roads require vast quantities of water***

Construction of ice roads requires enormous quantities of fresh water, mostly in the winter when liquid water is hard to come by. According to Alaska Department of Natural Resources, North Slope oil exploration and development consumed 1.5 billion gallons of water in 2000.<sup>ii</sup>

The Arctic Refuge coastal plain, however, has few lakes, and water is very limited. A 1995 U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service report confirmed earlier conclusions: *"Additional investigations since 1987 substantiate the fact that water in the 1002 area is very limited and the impact upon water resources should be considered major."*<sup>iii</sup>

### ***There is not one oil field on Alaska's North Slope that does not have permanent gravel roads.***

Gravel roads are still standard practice for oil development on land. The Tarn and Meltwater oil fields were developed between 1998 and 2001 with 20 miles of new road as well as a new 25-acre gravel mine.<sup>iv</sup> Exxon recently proposed 15 miles of new roads joining new drill pads, jet airport, dock, gravel mine, and production sites for its Pt. Thomson gas hydrocarbon project.<sup>v</sup>

Even the original Alpine field -- promoted to this day as a "roadless development" -- had three miles of roads when it began pumping crude in 2000. In December 2004, a new road into NPR-A and others connecting to the initial oil field bump the total to 33 miles of Alpine roads and BLM predicted 122 more miles would be needed for the next phase of Alpine expansion.<sup>vi</sup>

Alaska's Governor Frank Murkowski vaulted two major roads on the North Slope to the top of his "industrial roads" program in 2005.<sup>vii</sup> These would be year-round, permanent gravel roads:

- Foothills Road heading for 50 miles west from the Trans-Alaska Pipeline towards the NPR-A.
- Bullen Point Road pushing east from Prudhoe Bay for 48 miles to ExxonMobil's Pt. Thomson oil and gas field--just a few miles from the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge.

### ***Ice Roads don't work in the summer***

Like directional drilling, the chorus of "we'll only drill in the winter" is deliberately misleading propaganda. Once oil is discovered, efforts to recover it continue year-round. Year-long vehicle traffic, production plant noise, helicopter and airplane traffic, air pollution, and other activities create inevitable conflicts with wildlife in every month and season. Oil companies have never ceased production activity in the summer months on the North Slope.<sup>viii</sup>

### ***Winter exploration is anything but harmless to the environment.***

Winter exploration can disturb polar bears in their maternity dens and frighten sensitive muskoxen, year-round residents of the Coastal Plain. Exploration also impacts fish habitats in rivers and lakes by removing massive amounts of water to build ice roads and ice pads, and seismic trails damage plants and permafrost even through snow and ice.<sup>ix</sup>

Ultimately, drilling proponents have no intention of limiting their activity to the winter season – they drill and produce oil through the summer now, and they can be expected to do so in the future.

**Most Americans maintain that there are some places so special that they should be off-limits to oil drilling and industrial development, and they believe the coastal plain of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge is one of them. Policy makers evaluating proposals to open the Arctic Refuge to oil drilling should look carefully at the industry's promises and its track record.**

<sup>i</sup> BLM. 2002. *Environmental Assessment: EA: AK-023-03-008. National Petroleum Reserve-Alaska (NPR-A) Exploration Drilling Program Puviaq #1 and #2 Exploration wells.* ConocoPhillips Alaska, Inc. p.4-22.

<sup>ii</sup> National Research Council. 2003. *Cumulative environmental effects of oil and gas activities on Alaska's North Slope.* National Academies Press, Washington DC. P. 40.

<sup>iii</sup> U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. 1995. *A preliminary review of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, Alaska, coastal plain resource assessment: report and recommendation to the Congress of the United States and Final Legislative Environmental Impact Statement.* Anchorage.

<sup>iv</sup> U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. October 11, 2000. Public notice of application for permit Kuparuk River 128 (4-2000-1037), p. 1 {Meltwater field development}; U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Public notice of application for permit (August 26, 1997), Kuparuk River 124 (4—970705) p.1 {Tarn field}.

<sup>v</sup> ExxonMobil. July 30, 2001. *Point Thomson Gas Cycling Project, Environmental Report*, Fig. 2-1.

<sup>vi</sup> BLM. September 2004. *Alpine Satellite Development Plan. Final Environmental Impact Statement*. Vol. 1, Sec. 2, p. 28.

<sup>vii</sup> Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities. December 2004. *Industrial Ports and Roads Program. Status Report*. Mike McKinnon. <http://www.dot.state.ak.us/stwdplng/industrialroads/assets/IRP12-04.pdf>

<sup>viii</sup> BLM. 2004. *Alpine satellite development plan: Final Environmental Impact Statement, Vol.1*. Table 2.3.10-1. Sec. 2, p.53.

<sup>ix</sup> National Research Council. 2003. *Cumulative environmental effects of oil and gas activities on Alaska's North Slope*. Pp. 48; 86-88; 117; 126-127; 155-158.