



THE WILDLIFE SOCIETY

Leaders in Wildlife Science, Management and Conservation

Final Position Statement

Petroleum Development in Arctic, Subarctic, and Coastal Regions

Untapped petroleum resources of arctic regions could contribute to the world's diminishing energy supplies. However, an inadequate understanding of or disregard for polar and boreal ecosystems could lead activities associated with development of a northern petroleum industry to cause severe environmental damage. Polar and boreal ecosystems are particularly susceptible to disturbance because their biological diversity and net biological productivity are low. Climate change is placing additional stress on these systems. Natural recovery following disturbance is extremely slow in most northern soil-plant systems. Furthermore, animals that reside in colonies or congregate seasonally in small areas in ecosystems of the far north could be stressed not only from degradation of their habitats but also from accelerated human disturbance. Thus, development of a petroleum industry in arctic and subarctic regions must be implemented carefully to avoid or minimize rapid and perhaps irreparable damage to unique and easily disrupted ecosystems.

Coastal and continental shelf regions at all latitudes are also subject to substantial disruption by oil and gas exploration, development, storage, transport, and refining activities. Although environmental recovery may be more rapid in marine than in terrestrial habitats, potential for damage to ocean and shoreline flora and fauna is great.

The policy of The Wildlife Society in regard to development of arctic, subarctic, and coastal petroleum resources is to:

1. Support those petroleum developments deemed to be in the public interest, only if alternatives to such developments have been thoroughly studied and have been determined not to be environmentally and socio-economically feasible.
2. Urge that practical measures be taken to reduce or mitigate all environmental and biotic damage resulting from petroleum development. Such measures should include: (a) establishment of strict environmental standards and surveillance for exploration and development of petroleum resources; (b) initiation of international planning for utilization of common petroleum resources and transportation corridors; (c) the use, where possible, of existing road and utility rights-of-way for pipelines; (d) the use of transport vehicles or structures that offer the maximum environmental protection against accidental oil spills; (e) avoidance of encroachments upon important wilderness and wildlife areas by development structures and associated access roads and support facilities; (f) consideration of wildlife movement corridors and critical foraging, breeding and wintering areas; and (g) proactive planning and implementation of post-development restoration and recovery of affected lands.
3. Encourage research designed to support sustainable comprehensive resource management in arctic, subarctic, and coastal regions.

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