

Panelists to argue drilling in wildlife refuge

By Kelvin Wee
Emerald Reporter

Should oil drilling be allowed on a coastal wildlife refuge in Alaska?

That question will be addressed at a panel discussion hosted by the Survival Center in the EMU Forum Room at 7 p.m. tonight.

According to Steve Albert, Survival Center wildlife issues coordinator, the 1.5 million acres in limbo was dedicated as a national wildlife refuge in 1980 during the Carter administration.

In recent years, proposals have been made to revert the coastal plain to allow prospecting and drilling for oil. Albert cited a government report stating there is only a 19 percent chance that oil will be found there.

Albert added if oil is found there, the amount will only satisfy four percent of what Americans use each year. The report states the wells, if found, will also produce about 3.2 billion barrels of oil, or 180 days worth of drilling, Albert added.

If the status of the coastal area is reverted, survival of the wildlife in the northern United States and Canada that depend on the area may be threatened, Albert said. He said that the cost of drilling for oil in that region will not be worth the results it could have on the wildlife there.

The area supports over 162,000 snow geese, half of the entire snow geese population in the U.S. and over 72,000 porcupine caribou. The survival of the caribou herds will drop by 40 percent if the coastal plain is changed from the present wildlife refuge to a drilling site, Albert said.

According to Albert, the caribou spend their winters in the Yukon in Canada, and migrate to the Alaskan coast every spring to bear their young. If this area is taken from them, their calving patterns will be disrupted and their survival threatened.

The area also is home to polar bears, wolves, grizzly bears, musk oxen and many other animals whose numbers will drop if the status of the area is changed, Albert claimed.

from 4th Congressional district Rep. Peter DeFazio's office; Michael McDermitt, a representative from ARCO oil company; and Steve Griffith, a representative from the Wilderness

the effects reverting the wildlife refuge will have on the animal population in the United States and Canada.

Survival Center Director Michael Carlson suggested that Oregonians concerned about wildlife call Sen. Mark Hatfield. Hatfield is the chairman of the Senate Energy Committee.

Carlson added that the Survival Center will pay for postage of cards that can be completed and sent to Hatfield.

The Survival Center also sponsors other events dealing with environmental issues. There will be two symposia during Winter Term; one focusing on toxics in Oregon and the other on forest issues.

The center also sponsors Earth Week every spring, a whale watching exposition and education on recycling materials on campus.

For more information, call the Survival Center at 686-4356

'People think that the forest service owns the national forest, but it's our land.'

— Steve Albert

There are bills in the Congress now aimed at protecting these animals and their land, he added. One such bill is HR 39 submitted by Rep. Morris Udall, D-Ariz. The bill seeks to dedicate the coastal plain as a wildlife refuge, Albert explained.

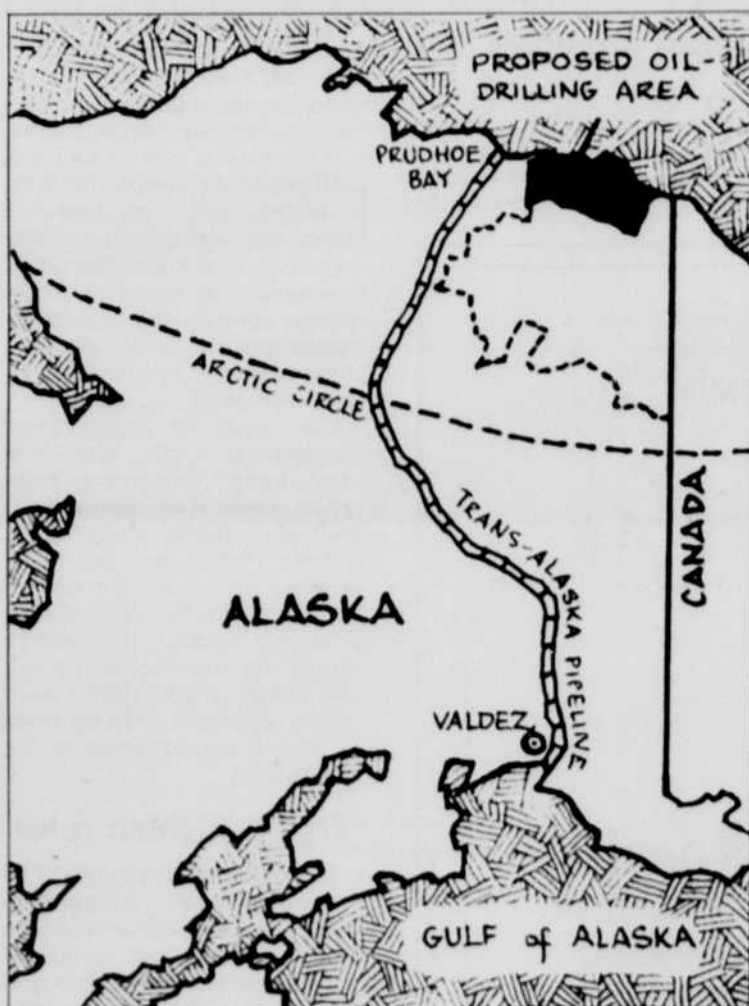
"People think that the forest service owns the national forest, but it's our land," Albert said.

Members on tonight's panel include Bob Warren, an aid

Society in Portland.

Warren, former director of the National Alaska Environmental Center, will be representing DeFazio's views on the issue at the panel. DeFazio is one of the leading supporters of wildlife conservation in the country, Albert said.

The panelists will discuss the ecological importance of the Alaskan coastal plain, if there is any oil there and if so, how much. They will also discuss



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