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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
December 22, 2011

**NOAA seeks comment on draft environmental impact statement on  
Arctic oil and gas exploration**

NOAA is seeking public comment on a draft environmental impact statement describing how offshore oil and gas activities in the U.S. Beaufort and Chukchi seas could affect marine mammals and the Alaska Native communities that depend on them for subsistence. The document also examines measures to lessen potential effects.

The draft EIS, released today, looks at measures NOAA could adopt over the next five years as it issues incidental take authorizations under the Marine Mammal Protection Act in the area. The EIS will also contribute to decisions made by the Department of the Interior's Bureau of Ocean Energy Management on issuing permits for seismic surveys.

The Marine Mammal Protection Act directs the Secretary of Commerce to allow the incidental and unintentional take of small numbers of marine mammals by U.S. citizens if their actions will have only a negligible effect on the species and will not reduce the availability of the mammals to the Alaska Natives who rely on them.

As part of its analysis, NOAA examines various measures to minimize any potential harmful effects from sound, discharge of pollutants and presence of vessels that can be part of these operations.

"We know how important marine mammals are to healthy Arctic ecosystems and the people who depend on them for food and cultural traditions," said Eric Schwaab, assistant NOAA administrator for NOAA's Fisheries Service. "We want to hear comments on these proposed alternatives to lessen any effects of oil and gas exploration in the Arctic."

The draft EIS lays out a number of mitigation measures, such as closing areas to exploration during whale migration and feeding and during traditional whale and seal hunts. If adopted, these measures could reduce the effects on marine mammals and ensure they remain available to the communities that depend on them for their diets and cultural traditions.

NOAA and the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management will travel to eight North Slope communities to hold public hearings in late January and February on the draft environmental impact statement. The times and building locations of the public hearings in Barrow, Kaktovik, Kivalina, Kotzebue, Nuiqsut, Point Hope, Point Lay and Wainwright will be announced early in 2012 in the Federal Register and through a public notice.

After receiving public comments during the 45-day comment period and from the public hearings, NOAA will finalize the environmental impact statement in 2012. It will then be used to guide decisions by BOEM about permitting of oil and gas exploration and by NOAA about incidental take authorizations that allow unintentional take of small numbers of marine mammals.

To read the draft EIS go to <http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/pr/permits/eis/arctic.htm>.

To comment on the draft EIS, the public can submit written comments via mail, fax, or email by Mon., Feb. 13.

Comments may be mailed to:  
James H. Lecky  
Director, Office of Protected Resources  
NOAA / NMFS  
1315 East West Highway, Room 13704  
Silver Spring, MD 20910

Comments may also be faxed 301-713-0376, or emailed to [arcticeis.comments@noaa.gov](mailto:arcticeis.comments@noaa.gov)

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