



U.S. Department of the Interior  
Bureau of Land Management

# **Decision Record**

**Environmental Assessment: DOI-BLM-AK-R000-2024-0001-EA**

**ConocoPhillips Alaska, Inc.**

**FF098191**

**Prepared by  
U.S. Department of the Interior  
Bureau of Land Management  
Arctic District Office  
Fairbanks, Alaska**

# Decision Record

## INTRODUCTION

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) has completed the ConocoPhillips Ptarmigan Seismic Survey Environmental Assessment (DOI-BLM-AK-R000-2024-0001-EA) to evaluate the impacts of the Proposed Action on the environment and North Slope communities.

ConocoPhillips Alaska, Inc. (CPAI) has requested authorization from the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) to conduct a three-dimensional geophysical winter seismic survey and associated activities on the eastside of the National Petroleum Reserve in Alaska (NPR-A) for the 2023-2024 winter season. Air-supported cleanup and inspections would take place the following summer. Access to the seismic survey area would be located on lands managed by the BLM Arctic District and the Kuukpik Native Corporation. The overall seismic operational area would be entirely on BLM managed lands (approximately 229,000 acres).

The project would occur from December 2023 – March 2023 and July - August 2024.

Under the Proposed Action, CPAI would:

- Use a 5.5-acre ice pad which was authorized under the 2023 Willow Master Development Plan EIS ROD, starting in December 2023 for staging equipment and fuel.
- Construct a 5.8-mile snow road (3.8 miles on BLM managed lands and 2 miles on Kuukpik Native Corporation lands) from the ice pad to the boundary of the seismic survey acquisition area (December 2023). The snow road would be used from January through May 2024 (depending on environmental conditions).
- Have a mobile, temporary camp to support up to 200 personnel and seismic operations.
- Have resupply trips from the ice pad to the camp, occurring every one to two days for a total of 80-100 round trips.
- Have temporary airstrips on up to four lakes.
- Withdraw water from up to 6 source lakes located on BLM managed lands to construct the ice pad and to potentially supplement water for the camp. Up to 300,000 gallons of water could be withdrawn from up to 6 lakes to provided supplemental water for the camp.
- Store up to 28,000 gallons of fuel in mobile tanks to support daily operations of the camp and seismic operations and store up to 18,000 gallons of fuel at the ice pad.
- Conduct seismic imaging using up to 14 standard-sized vibroseis vehicles and 3 smaller univibe vibroseis vehicles across approximately 160,300 acres.
- Conduct summer inspections and cleanup using a helicopter during the summer of 2024.
- Follow all design features described in Section 2.1 – Proposed Action – of the EA.
- Request a deviation from the NPR-A Integrated activity Plan (IAP) Record of Decision.

## **MAJOR LAWS PERTINENT TO DECISION**

The proposed activities are consistent with all Federal, State, and local laws, and requirements imposed for the protection of the environment including major laws such as the Federal Land Policy and Management Act, the Endangered Species Act, the National Historic Preservation Act, the Sustainable Fisheries Act, the Marine Mammals Protection Act, the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act, and the Naval Petroleum Reserves Production Act, along with Executive Orders 11988 and 11990.

The 2020 NPR-A IAP EIS and associated 2022 ROD were completed to fulfill the BLM's responsibility to manage lands in the NPR-A under the authority of the Naval Petroleum Reserves Production Act, Federal Land Policy and Management Act, the National Environmental Policy Act, and the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act.

## **SELECTED ALTERNATIVE**

The proposed action, as presented to the BLM, is the selected alternative. The proposed action meets the purpose and need of the EA. The No Action Alternative was not selected because it would not meet the purpose and need. The No Action Alternative would preclude the applicant from conducting seismic activities on BLM managed lands.

## **FINDING OF NO NEW SIGNIFICANT IMPACT (FONNSI)**

Based upon a review of the EA and the supporting documents to which the EA is tiered, a Finding of no new significant impacts (FONNSI) was determined for the proposed action. The FONNSI determined that the proposed action would not have any new significant effects on the quality of the human environment, individually or cumulatively with other actions in the general area and that an environmental impact statement is not required. See FONNSI for more information.

## **PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT**

Public notification of the proposed project and EA development was announced on October 3, 2023, on the BLM NEPA Register website (<https://eplanning.blm.gov/eplanning-ui/home>) (DOI-BLM-AK-R000-2024-0001-EA). The project was discussed with tribes, municipal governments, ANCSA corporations, and other regional North Slope entities during the NPR-A Working Group meetings, held on October 17, 2023 and December 1, 2023.

The BLM released the EA on the project ePlanning page (<https://eplanning.blm.gov/eplanning-ui/project/2026861/570>) on November 9, 2023 for a 30-day public comment period.

During the public comment period, the BLM received a total of 311 public comment submissions from environmental organizations and members of the general public via the project ePlanning page and email. Several of the environmental organizations provided submissions with comments and/or signatures from their members. These totaled an additional 60,024 signatures and comments.

Of the submissions received, 57 were unique (i.e., original submissions that did not have identical or almost identical wording as another submission). The remaining submissions were form letters (i.e., submissions containing identical content, form letters with slight

modifications (e.g., one or two unique sentences added, but otherwise identical to a form letter), duplicate submissions (i.e., the sender submitted the same submission multiple times), or signatures only.

Appendix J of the EA provides a summary of the substantive issues raised in the public comments on the EA and the BLM responses to these issues.

## **DECISION**

I have determined that the Proposed Action, with design features and required operating procedures, will not have any new significant impacts on the human environment (see FONNSI) and that the proposed project is in conformance with the approved 2022 NPR-A IAP ROD and the Naval Petroleum Reserves Production Act of 1976.

The selected action includes:

- Use a 5.5-acre ice pad which was authorized under the 2023 Willow Master Development Plan EIS ROD, starting in December 2023 for staging equipment and fuel.
- Construction of a 5.8-mile snow road (3.8 miles on BLM managed lands and 2 miles on Kuukpik Native Corporation lands) from the ice pad to the boundary of the seismic survey acquisition area (December 2023). The snow road would be used from January through May 2024 (depending on environmental conditions).
- Using a mobile, temporary camp to support up to 200 personnel and seismic operations.
- Conducting resupply trips from the ice pad to the camp, occurring every one to two days for a total of 80-100 round trips.
- Constructing temporary airstrips on up to four lakes.
- Withdraw water from up to 6 source lakes located on BLM managed lands to construct the ice pad and to potentially supplement water for the camp.
- Storage of up to 28,000 gallons of fuel in mobile tanks to support daily operations of the camp and seismic operations and storage of up to 18,000 gallons of fuel at the ice pad.
- Conducting seismic imaging using up to 14 standard-sized vibroseis vehicles and 3 smaller univibe vibroseis vehicles across approximately 160,300 acres.
- Conduct summer inspections and cleanup using a helicopter during the summer of 2024.
- Following all design features described in Section 2.1 – Proposed Action – of the EA.
- Requesting a deviation from the NPR-A Integrated activity Plan (IAP) Record of Decision (ROD) Required Operating Procedure B-2(g) that prohibits compaction of snow or snow removal from fish-bearing waterbodies, with exceptions for approved ice road crossings, water pumping stations on lakes, or areas of grounded ice.

The Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA) Section 810 analysis found that there would be no reasonably foreseeable or significant decrease in the *abundance* of harvestable resources (caribou and furbearers) and no reasonably foreseeable or significant limitations on harvester *access* (for caribou and furbearers) from the Proposed Action.

Although there are relatively stable subsistence harvest rates and the area has historically low winter use for caribou harvest, the direct and indirect impacts of the Proposed Action along with the cumulative effects of other activities (primarily energy development) in the region could alter the *distribution and availability* of harvestable resources (primarily furbearers) but would not significantly restrict subsistence uses beyond what has been described and analyzed in the 2020 NPR-A IAP EIS and associated ANILCA Section 810 analysis, as described below.

Moreover, CPAI committed to following the Subsistence Plan as submitted for the Willow Master Oil and Gas Development Plan SEIS (see Appendix H to the EA) for all activities in the area, regardless of scope. Several aspects of that Plan apply to the seismic activities authorized by this DR, including the employment of a Subsistence Representative, Ice Road Monitors, a POC for issues, issue resolution plans, helicopter use communication plans, and the "Good Neighbor Policy" which allows for the transport of subsistence users to areas where caribou are available should it be determined that activities are impacting the ability for hunters to harvest caribou.

On September 29, 2023, the BLM initiated consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and requested concurrence on the determination that the proposed activities are not likely to adversely affect polar bears, spectacled eiders, Steller's eiders or designated critical habitat for polar bears. On October 26, 2023, the USFWS concurred with BLM's determinations and informal consultation was concluded.

Given the time of year for the majority of the proposed activity (i.e., winter), environmental protection measures provided by the 2022 NPR-A IAP ROD ROPs, project specific ROPs, and requirements by other regulatory agencies, effects on Essential Fish Habitat (EFH) are unlikely. The Proposed Action would have "*no adverse effect*" on essential fish habitats and no further EFH consultation would be required.

There will be no anticipated impacts to cultural or paleontological resources by the Proposed Action and the Proposed Action will not be expected to result in any adverse effects to Historic Properties. Required ROPs provide direction to avoid known sites as well as for the unanticipated discovery of cultural or paleontological resources.

Environmental protections provided by project specific ROPs described in the EA (Section 2.3) and the appropriate ROPs from the 2022 NPR-A IAP Record of Decision found in Appendix A of the EA will be included in all authorizations for this project. The Seismic Conditions of Approval described in Appendix I will be included in all authorizations for this project.

The decision to allow the Proposed Action is not expected to result in any undue or unnecessary environmental degradation of public lands. All practicable alternatives and measures to reduce or eliminate impacts to wetlands and floodplains in the project area have been taken and the Proposed Action is in compliance with Executive Orders 11990 and 11988. The action, as proposed, is not in conflict with other resources in the area and is in conformance with current policy of the BLM Arctic District Office.

I have reviewed the Environmental Assessment including the explanation and resolution of any environmental impacts. I have determined that the proposed action with mitigation

measures described therein will not have any new (see FONNSI) significant direct, indirect, or cumulative impacts on the human environment and that an EIS is not required. I have determined that the proposed project is in conformance with the approved IAP. It is my decision to authorize the proposed action of issuing a seismic permit.

The environmental protection measures afforded by the NPR-A IAP/EIS (2020) and ROD (2022) and the additional mitigations provided in the EA and FONNSI are to be included in all authorizations. All operational plans included in Appendices B-H of the EA are required.

The applicant submitted a Waste Management Plan as required by the EIS/ROD Best Management Practice A-2. The plan is hereby accepted.

The applicant submitted an Orientation Program Plan for Oil and Gas Related Activities as required by the EIS/ROD Best Management Practice I-1. The plan is hereby accepted.

The applicant submitted a Weed Plan as required by the EIS/ROD and Best Management Practice M-2. The plan is hereby accepted.

The applicant submitted a Subsistence plan as required by the EIS/ROD Best Management Practice H-1. The plan is hereby accepted.

The applicant requested a deviation to ROP B-2(g). Without this deviation, that ROP would prohibit construction of airstrips on ungrounded lake ice as well as removal of snow from lakes for camp water.

As explained in more detail in the EA and FONNSI, removal or compaction of ice and snow on fish-bearing waterbodies has the potential to increase ice growth that could impinge on fish overwintering habitat space. Here, however, the proposed airstrips would account for less than 3 percent of the total area of ungrounded ice, and therefore would not eliminate or substantially reduce the quantity of overwintering habitat space on the four lakes at issue. Moreover, the removal of snow for camp water would be for very limited amounts of time (two to six days), and continued snow drifting and snowfall would be expected to cover that area relatively quickly and minimize any additional ice growth. Given the limited nature of these impacts, the deviation is hereby approved.

## **APPEAL PROVISIONS**

This decision shall take effect immediately upon the date it is signed by the authorized officer(s) and shall remain in effect while any appeal is pending unless the Interior Board of Land Appeals issues a stay (43 CFR 3150.2(b)).

This decision may be appealed to the Interior Board of Land Appeals, Office of Hearings and Appeals in accordance with 43 CFR Part 4 and DOI Form 1842-1. The notice of appeal must be filed in the Bureau of Land Management Arctic District Office, 222 University Avenue, Fairbanks, Alaska 99709 or by e-mail to [blm\\_ak\\_appeals@blm.gov](mailto:blm_ak_appeals@blm.gov) within 30 days from receipt of this decision. Include the following in the subject line: "Notice of Appeal: Arctic District Office."

If you wish to file a petition for stay pursuant to 43 CFR Part 4.21(b), the petition for stay should accompany your notice of appeal and shall show sufficient justification based on the following standards: (1) The relative harm to the parties if the stay is granted or denied, (2) The likelihood of the appellant's success on the merits, (3) The likelihood of irreparable harm to the appellant or resources if the stay is not granted, and (4) Whether the public interest favors granting the stay. If a petition for stay is submitted with the notice of appeal, a copy of the notice of appeal and petition for stay must be served on each party named in the decision from which the appeal is taken, and with the IBLA at the same time it is filed with the authorized officer. A copy of the notice of appeal, any statement of reasons and all pertinent documents must be served on each adverse party named in the decision from which the appeal is taken and on the Office of the Solicitor, U.S. Department of the Interior, 4230 University Drive Suite 300, Anchorage, AK 99508, not later than 15 days after filing the document with the authorized officer and/or IBLA.

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Acting for Nichelle Jones  
Arctic District Manager