

Contest entry: Arctic oil controversies

The entry comprises a selection of stories written over the course of the year about the scientific, political, economic and legal aspects of oil drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge and oil development in general. Some of the stories show how scientific facts belie the longstanding claims that Arctic oil development has been environmentally safe – important information for evaluating similar claims that Arctic refuge development would be safe.

These stories are products of regular beat coverage for the news site Arctic Today.

The stories are arranged in chronological order:

1. Even after decades, caribou still aren't fully used to oil development, scientists say. Published on Jan. 23. The story examines – and refutes – longstanding claims that oil development in Arctic Alaska can be done without harming caribou. The potential for impacts to caribou is a key issue in the debate over Arctic National Wildlife Refuge drilling.
2. Denning polar bears need better protection from Alaska oil development, scientists say. Published on Feb. 28. The story examines failings in current industry methods for avoiding polar bear dens.
3. Suddenly, the odds of investment in Arctic Alaska oil look very remote. Published on March 20. The story is about economic challenges to development in the refuge and elsewhere on the North Slope. Along with the coronavirus pandemic and falling prices, challenges include a shunning of Arctic development by major financial institutions.
4. Seismic surveys on refuge coastal plain would cause long-lasting damage, study says. Published on June 15. The story presents peer-reviewed scientific information that contradicts claims by politicians and development-supporting officials that seismic surveys on the tundra are benign.
5. With Arctic Refuge drilling approved, focus shifts to legal battles and market forces. Published on Aug. 18. The story examines what is next for leasing plans, summarizing legal and economic obstacles.
6. A new lawsuit over Arctic Refuge oil cites transboundary environmental effects. Published on Sept. 11. The story explains the arguments of non-Alaska plaintiffs claiming that oil leasing will cause harm to areas thousands of miles south of the refuge. This is the fourth lawsuit filed that seeks to block the lease sale.
7. With Biden win, the window for oil drilling in Alaska's Arctic refuge is closing. Published on Nov. 20. The story lays out the tight timeline left for the Trump administration to conduct an ANWR lease sale. It also ties in the push for expanded

oil development elsewhere on the North Slope, in the National Petroleum Reserve in Alaska.

8. Alaska agency devotes \$20 million to bid in controversial Artic refuge lease sale. Published on Dec. 24. The story shows how the Alaska Industrial Development and Export Authority, with board members worried that no companies would show up for the lease sale and that the auction would be a flop, decided to jump in as backstop bidders. It turned out that AIDEA, a state agency, was the entity submitting almost all the bids received. Major oil companies, as AIDEA had feared, sat out the lease sale.

That outcome is described in a pair of stories published in January of 2021:

<https://www.arctictoday.com/arctic-refuge-lease-sale-draws-few-bids-most-from-an-alaska-state-agency/>

<https://www.arctictoday.com/after-winning-most-arctic-refuge-bids-an-alaska-agency-prepares-to-assume-oil-leases/>