

related activity within the area covered by these regulations may request an LOA. Each applicant for an LOA must submit a plan to monitor the effects of authorized activities on polar bears and walrus. Each LOA applicant must also include a Plan of Cooperation on the availability of these species for subsistence use by Alaska Native communities that may be affected by Industry operations. The purpose of the Plan is to minimize the impact of oil and gas activity on the availability of the species or the stock to ensure that subsistence needs can be met. The Plan must provide the procedures on how Industry will work with the affected Native communities, including a description of the necessary actions that will be taken to: (1) avoid interference with subsistence hunting of polar bears and Pacific walrus; and (2) ensure continued availability of these species for subsistence use.

We will evaluate each request for an LOA for a specific activity and specific location, and may condition each LOA for that activity and location. For example, an LOA issued in response to a request to conduct activities on barrier islands with known active bear dens, or a history of polar bear denning, may be conditioned to require avoidance of a specific den site by 1 mile, intensified monitoring in a 1-mile buffer around the den, or avoiding the area until a specific date. More information on applying for and receiving an LOA can be found at 50 CFR 18.27(f).

Description of Geographic Region

These regulations would allow Industry to incidentally take small numbers of polar bear and Pacific walrus within the same area, referred to as the Beaufort Sea Region, as covered by our previous regulations. This region is defined by a north-south line at Barrow, Alaska, and includes all Alaska coastal areas, State waters, and Outer Continental Shelf waters east of that line to the Canadian border. The onshore region is the same north-south line at Barrow, 25 miles inland and east to the Canning River. The Arctic National Wildlife Refuge is not included in the area covered by these regulations.

Description of Activities

In accordance with 50 CFR 18.27, Industry submitted a request for the promulgation of incidental take regulations pursuant to section 101(a)(5)(A) of the MMPA. Activities covered in this regulation include Industry exploration, development, and production of oil and gas, as well as environmental monitoring associated with these activities. These regulations

do not authorize incidental take for offshore production sites other than the Northstar Production area.

Exploration activities may occur onshore or offshore and include: Geological surveys; geotechnical site investigations; reflective seismic exploration; vibrator seismic data collection; airgun and water gun seismic data collection; explosive seismic data collection; vertical seismic profiles; subsea sediment sampling; construction and use of drilling structures such as caisson-retained islands, ice islands, bottom-founded structures (steel drilling caisson, or SDC), ice pads and ice roads; oil spill prevention, response, and cleanup; and site restoration and remediation.

Exploratory drilling for oil is an aspect of exploration activities. Exploratory drilling and associated support activities and features include: transportation to site; setup of 90–100 person camps and support camps (requiring lights, generators, snow removal, water plants, wastewater plants, dining halls, sleeping quarters, mechanical shops, fuel storage, camp moves, landing strips, aircraft support, health and safety facilities, data recording facility, and communication equipment); building gravel pads; building gravel islands with sandbag and concrete block protection, ice islands, and ice roads; gravel hauling; gravel mine sites; road building; pipelines; electrical lines; water lines; road maintenance; buildings; facilities; operating heavy equipment; digging trenches; burying pipelines and covering pipelines; sea lift; water flood; security operations; dredging; moving floating drill units; helicopter support; and drill ships such as the SDC, CANMAR Explorer III, and the Kulluk.

Development activities associated with oil and gas industry operations include: Road construction; pipeline construction; waterline construction; gravel pad construction; camp construction (personnel, dining, lodging, maintenance shops, water plants, wastewater plants); transportation (automobile, airplane, and helicopter traffic; runway construction; installation of electronic equipment); well drilling; drill rig transport; personnel support; and demobilization, restoration, and remediation.

Production activities include: personnel transportation (automobiles, airplanes, helicopters, boats, rolligons, cat trains, and snowmobiles) and unit operations (building operations, oil production, oil spills, cleanup, restoration, and remediation).

Alaska's North Slope encompasses an area of 88,280 square miles and contains 8 major oil and gas fields in production: Endicott-Duck Island, Prudhoe Bay, Kuparuk River, Point McIntyre, Milne Point, Badami, Northstar, and Colville River. These 8 fields include 21 current satellite oilfields: Sag Delta North, Eider, North Prudhoe Bay, Lisburne, Niakuk, Niakuk-Ivashak, Aurora, Midnight Sun, Borealis, West Beach, Polaris, Orion, Tarn, Tabasco, Palm, West Sak, Meltwater, Cascade, Schrader Bluff, Sag River, and Alpine. Exploration and delineation of known satellite fields identified within existing production fields would also be appropriate for coverage under the provisions of this rule.

During the period covered by the regulations, we anticipate a level of activity per year at existing production facilities similar to that during the timeframe of the previous regulations. In addition, during the period of the rule, we anticipate that the levels of new annual exploration and development activities will be similar to those of the previous 3 years. At this time no additional production sites are planned within the next 16 months, except possibly satellite fields, associated with existing major oil and gas fields and addressed through existing Environmental Assessments or existing Environmental Impact Statements.

Biological Information

Pacific Walrus

The Pacific walrus (*Odobenus rosmarus*) typically inhabits the waters of the Chukchi and Bering seas. Most of the population congregates near the ice edge of the Chukchi Sea pack ice west of Point Barrow during the summer. Walrus migrate north and south following the annual advance and retreat of the pack ice. In the winter, walrus inhabit the pack ice of the Bering Sea, with concentrations occurring in the Gulf of Anadyr, south of St. Lawrence Island, and south of Nunivak Island. The current, conservative minimum population estimate is approximately 200,000 walrus. This estimate is based on surveys conducted in 1990 and is associated with wide confidence intervals. However, no surveys have been conducted since then and the actual size and trend of the population is unknown, although believed to be near the 1990 level. Pacific walrus use five major haulout sites on the west coast of Alaska. There are no known haulout sites from Point Barrow to Demarcation Point on the Beaufort Sea coast.