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The Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM) is requesting comments on the oil and gas potential of the Beaufort Sea Planning Area (BSPA) off the northern coast of Alaska. Under the Interior Department's 2012-2017 Outer Continental Shelf Oil & Gas Leasing Program, BOEM plans to lease more offshore areas of Alaska for oil and gas production.

Walter Cruickshank, Acting Director of BOEM, noted that although BSPA, a part of the Arctic Ocean, has significant energy production potential it is also ecologically and culturally significant to Alaskan Native communities. Senator Mark Begich (D-AK) praised the move as a step toward taking advantage of Arctic resources in Alaska. Critics, including the Alaska Wilderness League, have called for President Obama to forbid drilling in the Arctic, citing the severity of the weather and lack of scientific knowledge of the region.

BOEM's request for input also extends to environmental risk factors, archaeological sites that could be affected, and multiple uses of the BSPA, including navigation and fisheries.

The comment period runs until September 12, 2014.

Sources: Bureau of Ocean Energy Management, E&E News, Federal Register

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