



Williams, Dee <dmwilliams@usgs.gov>

keynote address in Anchorage

3 messages

Williams, Dee <dmwilliams@usgs.gov>
To: "Houseknecht, David" <dhouse@usgs.gov>
Cc: "Thurston, Dennis" <dennis.thurston@boem.gov>

Wed, Jul 12, 2017 at 3:23 PM

Hi Dave: We met when you were last in Anchorage. I am sure the Executive Order has created great demands on your time. I am writing to ask whether you might be persuaded to accept an invitation to provide the keynote address at an upcoming science conference in Anchorage on October 11? The venue is the 5th (biennial) United States-Canada Northern Oil and Gas Research Forum, October 11-13, which features current research activities and pressing information needs for management of petroleum activities in the Chukchi and Beaufort Seas, North Slope and Mackenzie Valley.

I participate in the organizing committee of that event (with Dennis Thurston and BOEM as lead). We were hoping you might be willing to address the conference during lunch on day 1 with a geologic presentation about the recent discoveries on the coastal plain and the interpretive implications that are driving the need for updated assessments. Even though the assessment results will not be available, the topic is certainly of keen interest up here, and perhaps timely for a status update in the fall. You could frame the parameters of your talk however you think most appropriate.

Please consider and let me know if this venue can be worked into your busy schedule. I can provide more details about the conference if you have questions.

Dee Williams, PhD
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Houseknecht, David <dhouse@usgs.gov>
To: "Williams, Dee" <dmwilliams@usgs.gov>
Cc: "Thurston, Dennis" <dennis.thurston@boem.gov>

Thu, Jul 13, 2017 at 8:10 AM

Sorry gents, but I will be in London that week to give a keynote talk at another international geological conference. The Anchorage conference sounds like a good one - sorry I must miss it.

[Quoted text hidden]

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Thurston, Dennis <dennis.thurston@boem.gov>
To: "Houseknecht, David" <dhouse@usgs.gov>
Cc: "Williams, Dee" <dmwilliams@usgs.gov>

Thu, Jul 13, 2017 at 8:51 AM

Bummer. Thanks David. We'll miss you. Say, make sure you have June 11-14, 2018 Stockholm for ICAM 8 on your calendar!

Cheers!

[Quoted text hidden]

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Dennis Thurston

8/14/2017

DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR Mail - keynote address in Anchorage

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Williams, Dee <dmwilliams@usgs.gov>

Sec Order

1 message

Williams, Dee <dmwilliams@usgs.gov>
To: David Johnston <david.johnston@boem.gov>

Fri, Jun 2, 2017 at 10:23 AM

Hi Dave:

Here is the EnergyWire story I mentioned:

ARCTIC

New discoveries raise prospect of more ANWR oil

Margaret Kriz Hobson, E&E News reporter

Published: Tuesday, May 30, 2017

Massive new oil discoveries on Alaska's North Slope are raising state and industry hopes that the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge could also hold bountiful petroleum reservoirs.

Federal scientists say that the coastal plain of the Arctic refuge contains rock formations that are nearly identical to geological structures that are prevalent at three promising new oil finds in northern Alaska.

According to preliminary estimates, production at those new discoveries could peak at more than 400,000 barrels of oil per day. The projects, located in or near the National Petroleum Reserve-Alaska, are being developed separately by ConocoPhillips, Caelus Energy LLC and Spanish oil company Repsol SA, which is working with its American independent partner Armstrong Energy (Energywire, March 3).

Based on the new oil finds, the U.S. Geological Survey is gearing up to revise its assessment of the oil potential in the NPR-A and on state-controlled property just east of the reserve. USGS research geologist Dave Houseknecht said the government recently licensed two 3-D surveys in the Alaska petroleum reserve.

But Houseknecht said there are no plans to reassess the oil potential of the Arctic refuge because no new well data or seismic studies have been produced since USGS issued its last report on the region in 1998. That assessment estimated that ANWR's northern plain, known as the 1002 area, is likely to contain a mean volume of 10.4 billion barrels of oil.

"I've been asked annually since the 1998 report why we haven't done an update on the Arctic refuge," he said. "And I say, there's nothing new. There's no new information that would compel us to think that we would do an assessment differently than the way we did it 20 years ago."

Houseknecht noted that federal scientists have not been given "marching orders" or the funding needed to conduct modern seismic studies in the Arctic refuge or to reprocess the 2-D studies conducted in the 1980s.

Excitement over potential new oil activity in Alaska comes at a time when the Trump administration is calling on the federal government to sell oil and gas leases on ANWR's 1.5-million-acre coastal plain. The White House's recent budget proposal asserts that leasing in the refuge could raise \$1.8 billion by 2027 but includes no details on how that estimate was reached.

The coastal plain is located at the northern edge of the 19-million-acre Arctic refuge, which is roughly the size of South Carolina. The region is home to polar bears, caribou, musk oxen and hundreds of species of migratory birds.

Leasing cannot begin until Congress opens the coastal plain to new oil development, which has been repeatedly thwarted by national conservation groups and Senate Democrats.

In 2015, then-President Obama asked Congress to designate nearly the entire coastal plain as wilderness. But that plea fell on deaf ears in the Republican-led House and Senate.

Now Alaska's Republican delegation is leading the charge to open oil and gas development on ANWR's coastal plain and in parts of the NPR-A that were protected for subsistence hunting and wildlife habitat under the Interior Department's 2013 management plan.

Interest is growing

With new attention focused on energy development in the far north, Houseknecht was in high demand at last week's Alaska Geological Society conference in Anchorage. "I'm getting a lot of questions revolving around the possibility for changing the land status in areas of the NPR-A that are currently off-limits, and of course in ANWR," he said.

Houseknecht, who has been researching the geology of the American Arctic for 25 years, was also invited to meet with Alaska Gov. Bill Walker (I) and Department of Natural Resources Commissioner Andy Mack.

When asked about the oil potential in ANWR, the USGS geologist said he always comes back to the bottom line. The only firm data that's currently available on the coastal plain consists of a series of 2-D seismic studies conducted in 1984 and 1985.

"It's quite poor quality, to be honest with you," he noted.

Meanwhile, little is known about the single well that Chevron and BP drilled into the coastal plain bedrock in the 1980s. Just what the two oil companies discovered at the site, known as the KIC well, remains a closely held secret. "It's reputed to be the tightest hole in North America," Houseknecht observed.

In recent years, federal geologists have made research trips to the refuge to examine source rocks and structural geology on the northeastern Alaska lands. Now with interest in ANWR's oil potential growing, Houseknecht said scientists are hoping to go back to the refuge this summer, though they haven't secured the necessary permits.

"This time it appears we may be doing more focused work," Houseknecht said. He quickly added that USGS hasn't gotten specific orders on the type of research it should conduct.

If Congress approves oil development in the Arctic refuge, the focus will be on whether new seismic studies would be permitted before the government holds a lease sale and who would pay for that research.

"I expect everyone will have a look at ANWR, especially if there's a 3-D survey done for a lease sale," Houseknecht said. Today's seismic technology is "light years ahead of the 3-D that was collected a decade or 15 years ago. It's much higher resolution. Much finer detail can be inferred from the data."

Interest in the untouched Arctic lands could extend beyond the oil companies that are now active in Alaska. "There are an interesting number of companies that had sort of walked away from the North Slope in the past," he noted, "and who are now taking a new fresh look.

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Dee Williams, PhD
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