

*This blog post was drafted by Jamie T. Martinez.*

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) is preparing an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) in order to implement the Coastal Plain Oil and Gas Leasing Program established in the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act of 2017 (TCJA) (see [Public Law 115-97 Title II § 20001\(b\)\(2\)](#)). This leasing program covers the 1.6-million-acre Coastal Plain area within the 19.3-million-acre Arctic National Wildlife Refuge in northeastern Alaska. The leasing program requires the Secretary of the Interior to “establish and administer a competitive oil and gas program for the leasing, development, production, and transportation of oil and gas in and from the Coastal Plain.” The program requires that at least two lease sales occur by December 22, 2024. It also requires that each lease consist of at least 400,000 acres of Coastal Plain land. The leased land must have the highest potential for gas or oil discovery. Further, lessees are allowed up to 2,000 acres of surface area to be used for production and support facilities.

The Coastal Plain Oil and Gas Leasing Program EIS serves to inform the implementation of the program. It analyzes post-lease activities such as seismic and drilling exploration. The EIS also considers the potential environmental impacts of various leasing alternatives, which address the areas to be leased, and the terms and conditions of the leases. Specifically, the EIS outlines three leasing scenarios that consider various limitations on available acreage and activity timing, which are intended to account for wildlife migrations and local subsistence activities. Moreover, it analyzes the conditions of oil and gas activities to properly balance oil and gas development with existing uses and preservation of resources.

The [U.S. Geological Survey](#) has estimated that the Coastal Plain may contain up to 11.8 billion barrels of recoverable oil, while the mean oil estimate is at 7.7 billion barrels of recoverable oil. However, the Leasing Program has been controversial, as noted in [The New York Times](#) and [The Washington Post](#). Some believe the program will create jobs and revenue for Alaska, while also supporting the nation’s need for oil and gas. Proponents of the program argue that it provides energy security that does not rely on foreign energy sources. Critics of the program argue that the infrastructure implemented for the program, and the drilling activity, will harm porcupine caribou herds native to the Coastal Plain. Further, some fear that the disruption of the caribou herd will negatively affect smaller communities near the Coastal Plain, who depend on the migration and hunting of caribou.

On February 11, 2019, the [Arctic Cultural and Coastal Plain Protection Act](#) (ACCPA) was introduced in the U.S. House of Representatives. If passed, the ACCPPA would amend the TCJA and repeal the Leasing Program. Whether or not the ACCPPA will survive the legislative process is yet to be determined. As of now, the Leasing Program is legally

mandated and will move forward.

A draft of the [Coastal Plain Oil and Gas Leasing Program EIS](#) is available for public comment and review. The official Public Comment period runs from December 28, 2018 to March 13, 2019. All public meetings scheduled to discuss the EIS have already occurred. However, public comments may be submitted either through the [BLM ePlanning website](#), or via mail using the following information:

Attn: Coastal Plain Oil and Gas Leasing Program EIS

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