

INVESTIGATION 32



Project

Political Activism Letter

PURPOSE

- Investigate the environmental issue of whether to drill for oil and gas in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (ANWR) in northeastern Alaska
- Write a letter to a nationally elected government official, urging him or her to take a specific action on this issue

INTRODUCTION

It is important to tell elected officials where you stand on issues and that you are an active, interested voter. Your input on clean water, urban sprawl, energy, trade, and other issues can help shape the way your representatives create and implement environmental and social policy. E-mails, postcards, and faxes are good communication tools, but letters and phone calls are the most effective and persuasive way of communicating your views to elected officials. They show that you are willing to do extra work to convey your ideas and that you are more committed than someone who simply sends blind bulk mailings or other mass-market types of communiqué.

Fig. 32-1

The United States Capitol



To write an effective letter arguing for or against opening ANWR to drilling, you must provide the official with background information. You need to explain why he or she should go along with your view. This requires objective thought and research. As an example, the May 2001 issue of *Scientific American* has an excellent balanced article describing many of the issues involved in this complex problem. There are many other sources in the literature and on the Web. Much of what is written is very biased, so be careful of your sources.

Procedure

- Step 1** Research the topic. In preparation, develop responses to all the “Points to Ponder” raised in the last section of this project.
- Step 2** Draft your letter. These tips will help you write a more persuasive letter:
- Keep it short. Limit your letter to one page and one issue.
 - Identify yourself as a concerned, motivated, and involved new voter. Do not refer to the letter as a school project.
 - Be polite, but take a firm position. Be confident in your understanding of the issue, and remember that the legislator may know less than you and may be voting along party lines or with the polls.
 - If you are writing to a senator or representative, cite the specific bill and identify it by number. You can access the Congressional Web site to find the bill numbers for and against opening ANWR.
 - Clearly describe the issue and your view of it. Select just three or four of the strongest scientific reasons that support your argument and develop them clearly. Too much information can distract from your position.
 - After stating arguments, make the letter personal. Say why the issue matters to you and how it affects you, your family, and your community. Make a connection to the legislator. Outline where you agree with him or her on other issues and how this one is very important personally.
 - Always thank politicians for their time and efforts on your behalf and urge them to see your point of view. (If they vote the way you want, send them a thank-you note. This may help if you write again, on another issue.)
- Step 3** Check over your letter. Remember to:
- Request a *specific* action, whether to open ANWR to drilling or not.
 - Ask for a reply. Include your name and address on your letter and envelope.
 - Include an envelope with your typed return address (don’t seal this!)
 - Provide the background information that you used to formulate your argument. If a document is from the Internet, underline the most important points. Do not include multiple-page print-outs—just key excerpts.

- Make a bibliography documenting all reliable or authoritative sources you used, such as an informative map or the Scientific American article.

Step 4 Address your letter to one elected official with correct title and address. Contact

The president at: The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20500

Your senator at: U.S. Senate
Washington, D.C. 02510

Your representative at: House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 02515

Or look them up online at:

<http://www.congress.com/>

Before you write your letter, consider the following topics and ideas. By having answers to them, you will be better able to summon good arguments. To carry out your research, try the Web sites listed after the questions.

Points to Ponder for your Letter

1. Estimates are that at a price of \$24/barrel, there are 7 billion barrels that could be economically extracted in ANWR. If the price fell to \$18/barrel, there would be only 5 billion barrels that could be extracted at a profit, and if the price plummeted to \$12/barrel, there would be only a few hundred million barrels.

If we start to drill in ANWR, could OPEC undermine our efforts by increasing their production and lowering the price of a barrel of oil enough to make it unprofitable for us to continue drilling? What would be the implications of a start without follow-up?

2. Refer to **Fig. 32-2**. Those in favor of drilling say that 1002 Area is a very small percentage of the land area of Alaska and even a small percentage of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (1.5×10^6 out of 19.5×10^6 acres, or 7.7%). By this fact they imply that such a very small area does not compare to all of the natural beauty and wildlife that abounds in Alaska. Consider:

- a. Why might it be a bad idea to drill in this tiny spot?

- b. What else happens on this disputed coastal plain? Is it enough to warrant the banning of drilling there?

- c. What does the University of Alaska, Fairbanks Institute of Arctic Biology report say concerning caribou distribution patterns and oil fields?

Questions

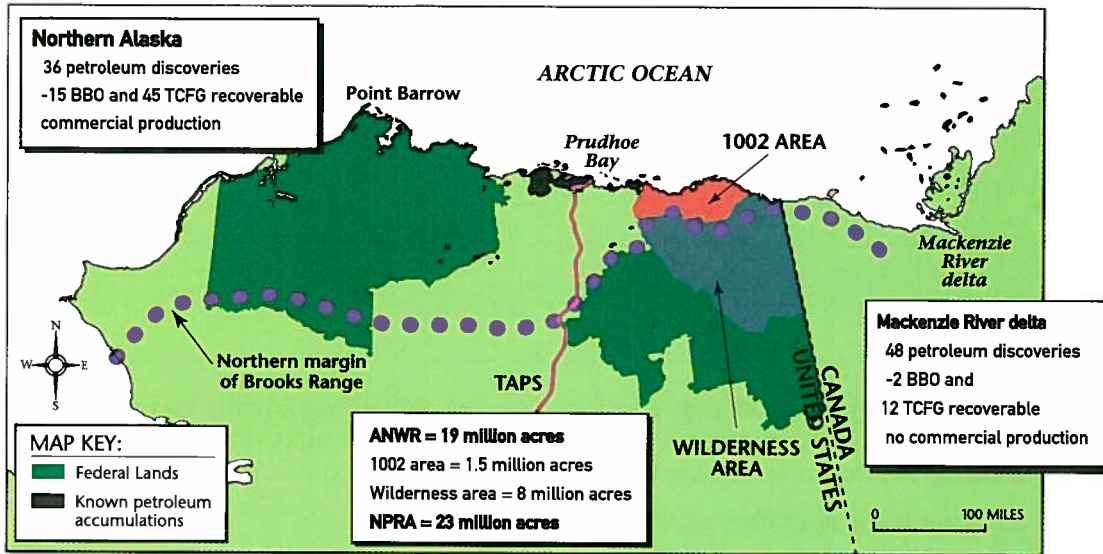


Fig. 32-2

3. According to estimates by geologists at the USGS, if there are 7 billion barrels of oil to be economically recovered from 1002 Area, then about 200,000 barrels/day can be expected for the first five years of operation.

a. Americans consumed 19.5 million barrels of oil in 2000, and estimates are for 23 million barrels to be consumed by 2010. How would ANWR production compare? (1 barrel = 42 gallons)

b. Suppose the fleet of 200 millions cars on American roads now gets 24.5 mi/gal. By how much would that fuel economy need to be changed to save the 200,000 barrels/day from ANWR?

4. If permission for drilling were given today, it would still take nearly ten years until the first oil flowed.

a. What new improvements in auto fuel economy can be projected 10 years into the future, especially in light of a possible increase of gasoline prices to \$2-\$4/gal?

Questions

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- b.** What are the implications about the future development of vehicles that use alternate fuels to gasoline: hybrids, fuel cells, hydrogen, etc?

- 5.** To protect the permafrost and surrounding tundra, drilling would only occur in the winter, when the average temperature is -19°F and the ground can support the drilling equipment. Building, moving, and working large oil rigs in the Arctic requires large volumes of water.

- a.** What is the hydrology of the region?

- b.** Is there enough water to satisfy industry and wildlife so that both can prosper?

- c.** How does the transport of water in Arctic regions, in the dead of winter, contribute to the price of a barrel of oil and, therefore, to the amount that can be profitably recovered?

Investigate the following Web sites to help get your research started. They all have search boxes. Type “drilling in ANWR” in the box for information.

CNN www.cnn.com

CNBC <http://www.cnbc.com>

United States Department of Energy <http://www.energy.gov/>

United States Fish and Wildlife Department on ANWR
<http://arctic.fws.gov/issues1.htm>

Union of Concerned Scientists <http://www.ucsusa.org/>

USGS - ANWR, 1002 Area, Petroleum Assessment, Including Economic Analysis
<http://pubs.usgs.gov/fs/fs-0028-01/fs-0028-01.htm>

American Petroleum Institute <http://www.api.org/>

The Sierra Club <http://www.sierraclub.org/>

The National Audubon Society <http://www.audubon.org/>

The Wilderness Society <http://www.wilderness.org/>