

Bennett, John F (DOT)

From: Bennett, John F (DOT)
Sent: Thursday, July 31, 2008 8:29 AM
To: Larabee, Ann M (ACS)
Subject: FW: Arctic Ocean Access

Terri, coincidentally, this just came in from DNR this morning. John Reeves had asked me about Arctic Ocean access a couple of weeks ago and I sent him my old memo that I had also sent you. JohnB

-----Original Message-----

From: Milles, Chris C (DNR)
Sent: Thursday, July 31, 2008 8:20 AM
To: Reeves, John M (DOT)
Cc: Irwin, Tom E (DNR); Lefebvre, Richard A (DNR); Schultz, Gary (DNR); Menefee, Wyn (DNR); Mylius, Richard H (DNR); Bennett, John F (DOT)
Subject: Arctic Ocean Access

Thank you for contacting me regarding the issue of gaining public access though the Prudhoe Bay oil field to the Arctic Ocean. The 1993 synopsis of access beyond Deadhorse to the Arctic Ocean by John Bennett is very accurate. At this point, I don't see any scenario that would open the last 10 miles to the Arctic Ocean to unrestricted public access. As you know, many things changed on September 11, 2001. The North Slope oil fields are very important to the security of the nation. As a result, the oil companies have increased the level of security for access to the oil field (including the Arctic Ocean). DNR agrees that it is critical that the security of the oil field be maintained. (It should be noted that Homeland Security and the Alaska State Troopers support industry's position that access should be restricted.) However, it is also important that the public still have some way to gain access to the Arctic Ocean. DNR has worked very hard to maintain this access by working with tour operators and BP to ensure that some kind of tours continue to exist. It has been a real challenge to meet BP's needs for security and to develop a system that works for the tour operators and their clients. It is only through working with these groups that some kind of tour to the Arctic Ocean continues to exist.

Since the memo outlined the issues of North Slope access and how BP gained the rights to control access, I will not go into that now. However, there have been recent developments that have changed the way the oil field is operated and how tours are conducted. Following is a summary of the current status of tours to the Arctic Ocean.

Public access on the North Slope road system is blocked at the East and West Checkpoints. However, based on provisions in the East Dock and West Dock tideland leases, access to the Arctic Ocean via commercial tours continue to exist. Currently, NANA is operating tours, under contract from BP, that coordinate with the tour operators' schedules (i.e. flight arrival times and coach or van southbound departure times). Individuals taking tours are subject to passenger screening (similar to screening conducted by TSA at the airports). Names and identification of individuals must also be listed at least 24 hours in advance so that Homeland Security can check them against names of known threats. Independent travelers can take the tours provided by NANA, and must go through the same security screening as individuals who are on tours.

I support your desire that the public have access to the Arctic Ocean. It would be great if there were a way to get the public to the ocean without traveling through the oil field. However, with the roads the way they are, there is no way to accomplish this without spending hundreds of millions of dollars for a new road and a bridge. Due to the unfortunate threats that we now live with, I must continue to support the oil industry's needs to restrict access to the oil field.