



# **MEDIA RELEASE**

## **Alaska Department of Natural Resources**

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**DIVISION OF MINING, LAND AND WATER**

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**SUBJECT: Tundra Travel Study Validated**

(Anchorage) – The Department of Natural Resources’ new standards for allowing cross-country exploration activities on frozen North Slope tundra are proving to be reliable in protecting the tundra, according to a recent report.

DNR recently released a validation study report confirming that the tundra travel model developed in 2004 is accurate in predicting the amount of impact caused by cross-country vehicle travel. Monitoring of early travel conducted under the new standards in 2004 and of long-term effects of the original study plots led to the report’s conclusion that the new standards allowed no more impact than had previous management standards.

“Our mission is to develop Alaska’s resources while protecting the environment, and this study has given us a more precise and reliable tool to accomplish both of these goals,” said DNR Commissioner Michael L. Menge. “By providing sound scientific justification for allowing longer winter exploration seasons, the study and new management standards based on them should help the oil and gas industry spend more time in the field seeking and identifying new sources of hydrocarbon energy.”

With support from the U.S. Department of Energy, Yale University’s School of Forestry, the Alaska Oil and Gas Association and some oil and gas companies, DNR in October 2004 completed its study of how Arctic tundra responded to measured impacts. The study involved driving typical exploration vehicles over tundra at different soil temperatures and snow depths from late fall to early winter, and measuring the impacts relative to undisturbed control sites.

Further measurements evaluating early vehicle use during seismic studies last winter showed no significant environmental change where tundra travel was limited to areas where the soil had reached minus-five degrees Centigrade at a 12-inch depth, and the snow cover had reached six inches in coastal areas or nine inches in the foothills areas, the report said.

Monitoring the earlier study plots also showed that the effects of travel on tundra under such conditions did not worsen over time, and that the affected tundra began recovering to within its normal range of variation within two years. DNR will continue to monitor the long-term effects of tundra travel, both on the test plots and traveled areas.

“This report and the validation of the new tundra travel standards are good news for the environment and for the industry, and I commend the staff at Mining, Land and Water for continuing to build on sound science to find better ways to manage activities on the North Slope,” Menge said.

The report was produced for DNR’s Division of Mining, Land and Water by Betula Consulting of Alaska. The report, along with other related information, is available on the Department’s website, at: <http://www.dnr.state.ak.us/mlw/tundra>.

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