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MARK BEGICH
ALASKA

United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

COMMITTEE ON COMMERCE, SCIENCE, AND TRANSPORTATION
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March 7, 2013

Mr. Bud Cribley
BLM—Alaska State Director
222 West 7th Avenue #13
Anchorage, AK 99513-7599

Dear Mr. Cribley:

During my annual address to the Alaska State Legislature, a legislator publically raised concerns that the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) is seeking to designate "legacy wells" in the National Petroleum Reserve-Alaska (NPR-A) as historic sites to avoid clean up responsibilities. I want to thank you and your office for quickly clarifying to my staff and to the Alaska press that BLM is not pursuing this approach and has every intention of cleaning up all the wells.

However, because of the serious and longstanding nature of the NPR-A legacy well issue, I ask you to formally and personally reassure Alaskans BLM has a workable plan to properly plug and abandon these wells. Further, I ask you to explain in clear terms how your agency has and will work with the Alaska State Historic Preservation Office to satisfy the terms of the Federal Historic Preservation Act (FHPA) for these wells while protecting the public and natural resources of the NPR-A.

In addition to the limits of agency budgets, compounded by the remote locations of these legacy wells and seasonal and logistical constraints, Alaskans are understandably concerned this requirement will slow down the cleanup process and consume already constrained BLM resources. I trust you are well aware of the widespread desire in Alaska to see these legacy wells addressed as soon as possible. Given that pressure, what options are available to your agency to expedite the FHPA review for all the wells at one time? What resources are available to your office to move the review quickly and at the least cost to taxpayers?

Additionally, at a recent Alaska Oil and Gas Conservation Commission (AOGCC) hearing, I understand representatives from your agency rather unhelpfully stated the BLM is not bound by state law and state well standards. My general understanding of federal law is that federal law trumps state law, so this may, in

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fact, be the case. However, as you know, the AOGCC has done an admirable job ensuring maximum utilization of Alaska's resources and protecting the public and the public's groundwater resources. I ask you to formally commit your agency to plugging and abandoning these wells to a standard that meets or exceeds the State of Alaska's standards.

Former North Slope Borough Mayor Edward Itta first brought this issue to my attention early in 2009. Since that time, I am aware of little progress toward properly plugging and abandoning these decades-old wells. While I stand ready to assist from my position on the Interior, Environment and Related Agencies Appropriations Subcommittee, Alaskans expect better results on the legacy well issue than they have seen to date.

Thank you for taking the time to address this critical issue. Please contact Michael Johnson in my office at (202) 224-3004 or Michael_johnson@begich.senate.gov with any questions about this request.

Sincerely,

Mark Begich
United States Senator

cc: Neil Kornze, Acting Director, BLM
Cathy Foerster, Chair, Alaska Oil and Gas Conservation Commission