

**Statement of  
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Department of the Interior  
House Committee on Natural Resources  
Subcommittee on Public Lands & Environmental Regulation  
H.R. 5167, Olgoonik Land Conveyance Act  
September 9, 2014**

The Department of the Interior appreciates the opportunity to present testimony on H.R. 5167, the Olgoonik Land Conveyance Act. This bill directs the Administrator of the General Services Administration (GSA), on behalf of the Secretary of the Interior, to sell, at fair market value, approximately 1,518 acres of Federal property located in the National Petroleum Reserve in Alaska (NPR-A) to the Olgoonik Corporation (Corporation), an Alaska Native Corporation established under the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA). The lands are part of a former withdrawal for the U.S. Air Force (USAF) to operate a Distant Early Warning (DEW) Line site near Wainwright, Alaska. Sale of these lands to the Corporation will consolidate their land ownership and support economic development in the area. The Department supports the goal of H.R. 5167, and would like to work further with the sponsor and the Committee to convey these lands to the Olgoonik Corporation.

**Background**

In 1923, President Harding signed an executive order establishing the nearly 23 million acre Naval Petroleum Reserve Number 4, on the North Slope of Alaska. The Naval Petroleum Reserves Production Act of 1976 (1976 Act) renamed the area the National Petroleum Reserve in Alaska, transferred authority and administrative responsibility to the Department of the Interior, and withdrew the lands from disposition. Under subsequent amendments to the 1976 Act, and implementing regulations, the BLM is required to balance the exploration and development of oil and gas resources with, among other values, the protection of wildlife, habitat, and the subsistence values of rural residents and Alaska Natives.

In addition to withdrawing NPR-A lands from disposition, the 1976 Act revoked an existing withdrawal known as the Wainwright DEW Line site. The site was originally withdrawn for defense purposes. After the withdrawal was revoked, BLM issued a right-of-way (ROW) for approximately 1,518 acres that allowed the USAF to continue to operate the station. The USAF no longer needs the parcel. The USAF is now in the final stage of cleaning up the lands of hazardous materials as part of its obligation under the terms of the ROW.

The Wainwright DEW Line site lands are surrounded by Corporation lands and as such are difficult to manage by the BLM. The DEW Line site lands were unavailable for selection in the ANCSA conveyance process because the site required decommissioning and environmental cleanup. Olgoonik's ANCSA land entitlement has now been fulfilled and the BLM cannot utilize ANCSA authorities to transfer the 1,518 acres to the Corporation.

### **H.R. 5167**

H.R. 5167 authorizes the Administrator of the GSA, on behalf of the Secretary of the Interior, to sell, at fair market value, to the Corporation all right, title, and interest of the United States in approximately 1,518 acres of public land in the NPR-A in Alaska. Under the bill, the Secretary of the Interior would be required within 180 days of enactment to complete a survey to establish the exact acreage and legal description of the land. The bill also requires an appraisal of the land prior to conveyance, and requires the Corporation to pay the appraised value to the Treasury. The Corporation is required to pay all survey and appraisal costs associated with the conveyance and is required to accept reasonable terms and conditions that the Secretary determines necessary. Finally, the bill exempts the conveyance from environmental review under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA).

The BLM supports the conveyance, but would like to work with the sponsor on a few amendments to H.R. 5167. The BLM is committed to providing environmental review and public involvement opportunities as provided under NEPA. This engagement provides for meaningful consideration of impacts and leads to more sound decision making. Additionally, the Administration is committed to continuing its adherence to the Uniform Appraisal Standards for Federal Land Acquisition and Uniform Standards of Professional Appraisal Practice and recommends the appraisal process be managed within the Department and sale of the BLM lands be completed under the current BLM sale regulations.

Further, there are a number of issues that we would welcome the opportunity to discuss should this legislation move forward. The BLM notes that surveys have been conducted on these lands and we believe these prior surveys should reduce conveyance costs for the Corporation. Additionally, to ensure the accuracy of any conveyance, we recommend that the bill be amended to include a map of the lands. The BLM would be happy to work with the sponsor to provide such a map. We believe, in general, that adhering to existing FLPMA processes as much as possible is important. The BLM recommends that the sale of public lands be completed by the Department of the Interior rather than the GSA and that Olgoonik pay all administrative costs that are incurred. In addition, the bill's 180-day time period for conveyance does not allow sufficient time to conduct appraisals to establish the fair market value of the surface and mineral estates. A mineral report would need to be completed for the area before an appraisal of the mineral estate could be conducted.

### **Conclusion**

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify on H.R. 5167. This legislation is important to the Olgoonick Corporation and the BLM looks forward to working with the sponsor and the committee on this legislation. I would be glad to answer your questions.