

## Press release

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### **Itta has not budged on NPR-A lease sale**

North Slope Borough Mayor Edward S. Itta today assured local residents and others concerned about the future of the Teshekpuk Lake area's wildlife habitat that he still opposes an upcoming oil and gas lease sale in the area. The Associated Press reported on Wednesday that Itta had softened his stance after touring the Teshekpuk Lake area with Interior Secretary Dirk Kempthorne.

"My position has not changed one iota, because I have not heard anything that would make me feel any more comfortable with BLM's plan for the area," Itta said.

The Bureau of Land Management has scheduled a September 27 lease sale in the northeast planning area of NPR-A, including sensitive areas around Teshekpuk Lake, the largest and most biologically productive lake on the North Slope. Some of these areas were granted special protections by four previous presidents.

"In light of the string of disasters in the Prudhoe Bay field this year, I'd expect to hear more concern about protecting this world-class wildlife area," Itta observed. "Instead, there seems to be less concern on the part of the Bush administration."

The mayor pointed out that industry already has access to 2.8 million acres in the northern part of NPR-A, acreage that was leased without objection from the North Slope Borough. Itta said Inupiat subsistence users are especially upset because for generations the Teshekpuk area has been prime subsistence hunting territory for people across the Slope.

“We don’t complain about most of these onshore lease sales. We’re not opposed to development. But the waterfowl and caribou habitat north of the lake is one-of-a-kind,” he said, adding, “We have made room for the industry time after time, but when we ask for one area on the northern edge of NPR-A to be excluded from leasing – just as it always has been in the past – we get nothing from BLM but empty gestures and watered-down stipulations.

“The least they could do is stay south of the lake while biologists gather baseline data. That’s the only way to get a true picture of this wildlife breadbasket. Otherwise we’ll never know if drilling there is as risk-free to wildlife as they say it is.”

Mayor Itta said he enjoyed meeting with Secretary Kempthorne. He was glad to show the Secretary around NPR-A, including a visit to Itta’s subsistence hunting cabin, and he hopes the two can continue to share opinions on North Slope development. There should be plenty of opportunities, because while he was in Barrow, Kempthorne appointed Itta to the Federal Outer Continental Shelf Policy Committee, which advises the Secretary on offshore development.

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