

# Biden administration moves to add protections against drilling in Alaska petroleum reserve

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Federal officials are proposing a new set of protections in the National Petroleum Reserve-Alaska.

If approved, they could come atop the rules that Bureau of Land Management finalized this spring to limit oil and [gas drilling](#) on more than half of the giant petroleum reserve.

Conservation groups cheered the new rules in the reserve, home to ConocoPhillips' controversial Willow oil field project. But they've drawn a string of opposing lawsuits, including from the state of Alaska and ConocoPhillips.

Last week, the federal agency took another step to potentially add more protections against oil and gas drilling to the Indiana-sized tract.

The Bureau of Land Management said it will soon begin seeking public comment on whether new Special Areas with protections against oil and gas drilling should be designated in the reserve, or whether existing Special Areas should be expanded or modified.

"We have a responsibility to manage the western Arctic in way that honors the more than 40 Indigenous communities that continue to rely on the resources from the Reserve for subsistence," said Tracy Stone-Manning, director of the agency, in a prepared statement.

"With the rapidly changing climate, the Special Areas are increasingly critical to caribou movement and herd health, as well as other wildlife, [migratory birds](#), and native plants. We want to hear from the public to ensure we are managing the western Arctic's significant resource values in the right ways and right places."

The reserve contains more than 13 million acres of Special Areas, which are home to sensitive resources such as subsistence activity or fish and wildlife like [polar bears](#), caribou and migrating waterfowl.

This year's new rules finalized limits on oil and gas leasing in the Special

Areas, including banning new leasing on 10.6 million acres. The rules also contained provisions for possible future additions to the Special Areas, leading to the public input period.

Oil giant ConocoPhillips, the state of Alaska, the North Slope Borough and the Voice of the Arctic Inupiat have filed lawsuits to reverse the new rules.

ConocoPhillips and North Slope Borough cited a recent landmark U.S. Supreme Court ruling that is expected to limit the authority of federal agencies after the decision struck down the so-called Chevron deference, according to their filings. Under the doctrine, federal courts for more than four decades had deferred to an agency's interpretation of ambiguous laws.

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