

Environmental, Native groups file suit over Chukchi drilling



The Minerals Management Service approved Shell Oil's permit to drill in the Chukchi Sea next summer. (Courtesy Shell)

by Christine Kim
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ANCHORAGE, Alaska -- Several environmental and Alaska Native groups have filed a lawsuit against the Minerals Management Service.

The lawsuit is over the MMS approving Shell Oil's permit to drill in the Chukchi Sea next summer.

The Center for Biological Diversity says the plan doesn't comply with environmental laws and was approved without analyzing the potential impacts to the sea.

But Shell says it believes the MMS was thorough in its assessment of the plans, which the company says incorporated the concerns of the North Slope.

"Many Alaskans are aware that Shell has successfully completed seismic and shallow hazard surveys in the Chukchi Sea over the last four years. It's an area that we believe could be home to some of the most prolific undeveloped hydrocarbon basins in all of the U.S. but we won't know until we drill," Shell's Curtis Smith said.

"Right now we don't have enough information to know the impacts of their activities on the ecosystem and on the marine mammals there so we know not now. As for the future it depends on what we find but we still need to do a

lot more research about what's out there," said Rebecca Noblin with the Center for Biological Diversity.

A challenge to the approval of Shell's plans to drill in the Beaufort Sea was also filed in December.

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