

# AlaskaDispatch

News and voices from the Last Frontier

## Shell wants federal order to move quickly on Arctic oil drilling

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By Patti Epler

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Shell Oil Co. wants a federal judge to speed up the government's process for dealing with oil exploration in the Chukchi Sea.

The oil company on Thursday filed a motion in the ongoing court battle over Lease Sale 193. The company is protesting a schedule set out in an earlier filing by the federal Interior Department that stretches out the government's plans to make a decision on Chukchi Sea oil drilling until late October.

Shell has already said that long of a delay would jeopardize its plans to explore for oil in the area in 2012. Now, according to the new court filing, the company wants the court to order the government to be done with a new environmental impact statement by July.

"Steps must be taken to reign (sic) in this process lest this ... devolve into a multi-year process," the oil company said.

Shell purchased leases in the Chukchi sale in 2008, paying more than \$2 billion. Lawsuits filed by Native and environmental organizations have derailed drilling plans because the federal court ordered the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management, Regulation and Enforcement to conduct a more thorough environmental analysis of potential impacts on local communities and the environment.

BOEMRE sought new public comment on the new environmental study last year and earlier this month filed a document in the case saying that it had received more than 150,000 comments. Many people asked the agency to examine the industry's ability to clean up a very large oil spill in light of BP's Deepwater Horizon blowout in the Gulf of Mexico last spring. BOEMRE decided it would do the new oil spill response review, but that it would take the agency until late October to finish the new analysis.

Shell argues that the agency has already done an adequate review of the industry's response capabilities and that it has had plenty of opportunity before now to decide to undertake a bigger review.

The company wants the court to "place BOEMRE on a firm schedule by which to complete the supplemental analysis," the filing said.

Brendan Cummings, senior counsel for the Center for Biological Diversity, one of the groups that is challenging oil activities in the Arctic, said Thursday that Shell is demanding a "rushed and cursory oil spill analysis that only makes sense in its fantasy world where the Deepwater Horizon spill did not occur."