

Research and Monitoring Team Research Status and Current Initiatives

The NPR-A Research and Monitoring Team (RMT) was formed as directed by the 1998 Record of Decision for the Northeast NPR-A FEIS/IAP. The RMT is currently providing advice to the AO as a subcommittee of BLM-Alaska's Resource Advisory Council. It is assumed that the North Slope Science Initiative (NSSI) will eventually include the role and responsibilities of the RMT within its structure. Once that is accomplished, the RMT will be discontinued as a separate entity. If the NSSI does not succeed in this capacity, the RMT will continue to exist and function as an advisory committee to the AO on matters specific to the NPR-A.

In April, 2004, the NPR-A Research and Monitoring Team (RMT), an advisory committee to the AO, was tasked with developing a monitoring plan for the NPR-A. The purpose would be to implement studies to assess the impacts of oil and gas exploration and development on various surface resources of the NPR-A, and suggest ways to further mitigate any impacts. Development of that monitoring plan continues, and at present the RMT has decided that the plan will address 10 general issues, as described below:

- Caribou populations and harvest – effects of ice roads and all permanent facilities, and disturbance effects from vehicle and aircraft traffic, seismic exploration, and drilling activities; potential displacement resulting in altered forage quality; potential effects on rates of reproduction and survival
- Molting geese – reduced survival from habitat changes or disturbance factors (aircraft, vehicles, pedestrians, etc.)
- Potential degradation of fisheries – barriers to fish movements from infrastructure and roadways (including ice roads), and changes in water quality due to water withdrawals or run-off
- Change in access to subsistence resources – altered distribution or abundance of subsistence resources and physical or perceptual barriers to subsistence users
- Alteration of predator/prey relationships – increased predator populations resulting from human developments and activities, and any resulting adverse impacts on prey species
- Impacts to local cultural systems – any changes to the sharing network which may result from altered subsistence activities
- Populations of cliff-nesting raptor species – effects of disturbance and habitat loss
- Effects on migrating bowhead whales in autumn – deflection of migrations from barging and seismic exploration on marine waters
- Populations of threatened eider species – effects of collision and oil spill related mortality, increased predator density, habitat loss, and disturbance
- Environmental contaminants – oil or hazardous chemical spills, water effluent and air emissions, resulting in contaminants in water, sediments, invertebrates, plants, fish, birds and mammals