

National Aeronautics and Space Administration
Goddard Space Flight Center
Wallops Flight Facility
Wallops Island, VA 23337-5099



April 27, 2018

Reply to Attn of: 800

Patricia Framboise
Chief, Leasing Section
Bureau of Ocean Energy Management
Alaska OCS Region
3801 Centerpoint Drive, Suite 500
Anchorage, AK 99503

Dear Ms. Framboise:

On behalf of NASA's Wallops Flight Facility (WFF), I submit this correspondence in response to the March 30, 2018, Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM) notice in the Federal Register regarding the proposed Beaufort Sea oil and gas lease sale in 2019 (83 FR 13778). The information contained herein is intended to assist BOEM in 1) assessing multiple uses of the proposed leasing area; and 2) identifying areas that should receive special concern and analysis (30 CFR 556.301 (d) and (e), respectively).

As most recently expressed in our input to BOEM's 2017-2022 national oil and gas leasing program and accompanying Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement (PEIS), WFF has concerns regarding the potential effects of oil and gas leasing on its sounding rockets program at the University of Alaska Fairbanks's Poker Flat Research Range (PFRR) in interior Alaska. Since the late 1960s, NASA, other government agencies, and educational institutions have carried out scientific research using suborbital rockets launched from PFRR. In fact, PFRR is the only high-latitude rocket launching facility in the United States where a northerly-launched sounding rocket can study the interaction between the sun and earth's upper atmosphere. Several configurations of PFRR-launched sounding rockets have the potential to land within the boundaries of the Beaufort Sea Planning Area (see Figure 1); we estimate that at least 70 PFRR-launched rocket motors and/or payloads have landed within the Beaufort Sea since the range's inception. In the future, it is likely that a greater percentage of NASA missions will need to land within the Beaufort Sea due to the trajectories of the higher performing rockets that are more frequently specified by researchers. WFF's primary concern is that future oil and gas development in the Beaufort Sea could result in the need to protect additional persons and property when conducting launch operations.

Consistent with the approach taken for the 2017-2022 oil and gas leasing program, NASA is currently preparing an updated 2019-2024 oil and gas leasing program mission impact assessment for its launch operations at PFRR, that will be provided to BOEM at the earliest time possible. We understand, based on earlier conversations with BOEM Headquarters staff, our assessment should be delivered by May 2018. Concurrent with providing BOEM Headquarters WFF's 2019-2024 mission impact assessment for consideration in the nationwide program, we will also provide Beaufort Sea-specific information directly to the Alaska Region. As has been past practice, I will avail my staff to meet with the BOEM team to discuss WFF's assessment, including the analytical methodology and underlying assumptions.

Furthermore, I would like to take this opportunity to express WFF's interest in participating as a cooperating agency in the preparation of the companion Beaufort Sea Lease EIS. Thank you for considering our request; we look forward to hearing from you in the near future. Please contact Ms. Shari Miller by phone at (757) 824-2327 or by e-mail at shari.a.miller@nasa.gov for further coordination of the EIS effort.

WFF appreciates your continued collaboration regarding offshore oil and gas leasing in the OCS. If you have questions or require additional information regarding the mission impact assessments, please contact Mr. Joshua Bundick by phone at (757) 824-2319 or by e-mail at joshua.a.bundick@nasa.gov.

William A. Wrobel
Director, Wallops Flight Facility

Concurrence:

Robert P. McCoy, Director
Geophysical Institute
University of Alaska Fairbanks

4/27/2018
Date

Larry D. Hinzman, Vice Chancellor for Research
University of Alaska Fairbanks

30 Apr 2018
Date

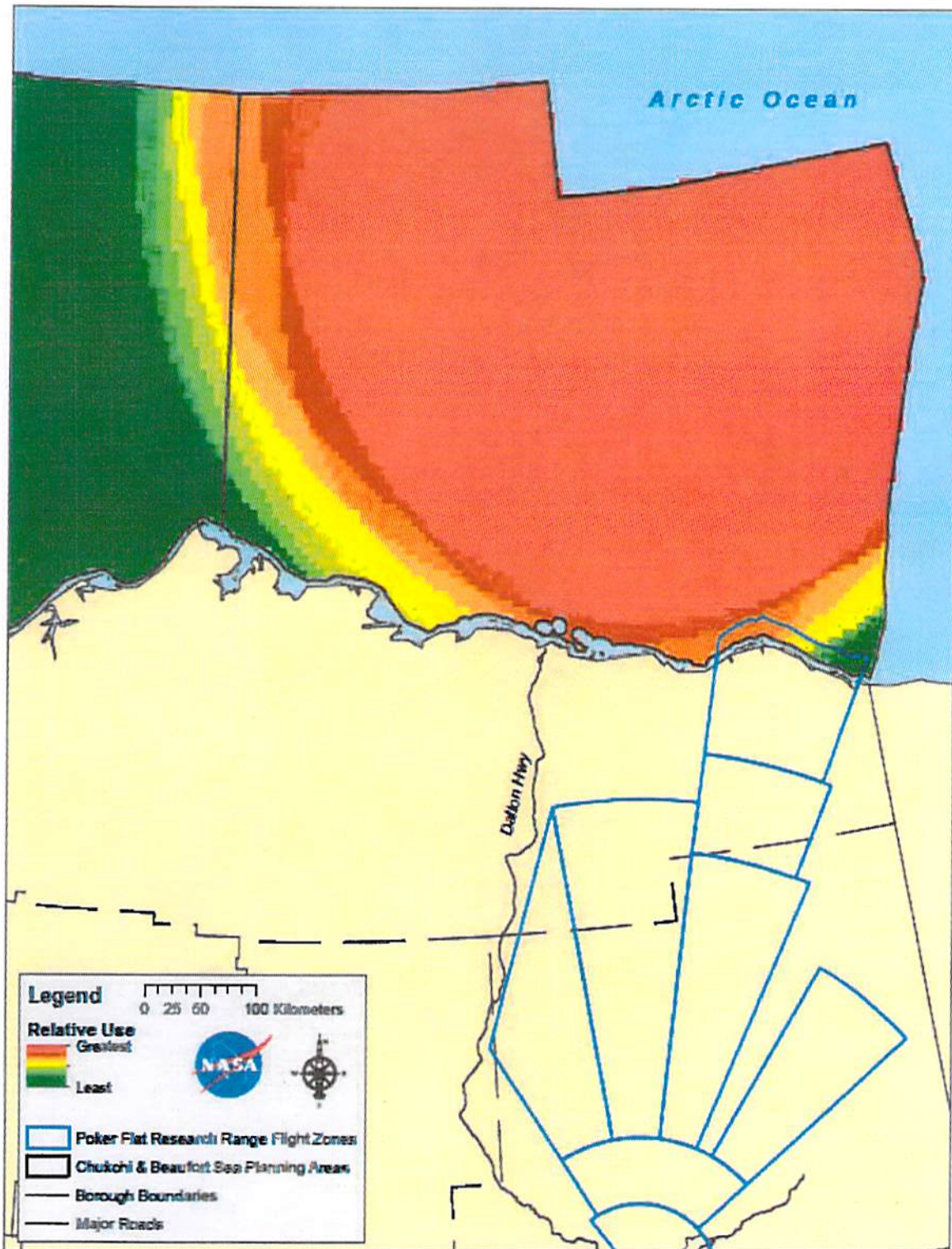


Figure 1: Poker Flat Research Range Relative Use of Offshore Areas