

Oil & Gas Activity in National Wildlife Refuges

(Excerpted from NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGES: **Opportunities to Improve the Management and Oversight of Oil and Gas Activities on Federal Lands [GAO 03-517]**)

- Approximately one in four (155 of 575) national wildlife refuges have past or present oil or gas activity on them ranging from oil and gas wells to pipelines.
- There are 4,406 oil and gas wells on 105 refuges and 1,806 wells on 36 refuges are active.
- Another 4,795 wells are located within one-half mile outside refuge boundaries, in some cases on lands that the U.s. Fish & Wildlife Service (FWS) may acquire in the future.
- In 2003 wells on wildlife refuges accounted for 1.1% of national oil production and .04% of natural gas production.
- There are 1,120 wells at Upper Ouachita NWR in Louisiana. More than one-half of all refuge wells (2,512) are located on refuges in FWS Southeastern Region and a majority of these are in Louisiana.
- The impact of oil and gas activity on refuges is unknown because FWS has conducted no comprehensive reviews. Anecdotal evidence, available studies, and the findings of a GAO investigation show that damage to refuge resources has occurred from spills; construction, operation and maintenance of infrastructure; and FWS' reduced ability to manage resources: .
 - A study of Atchafalaya and Delta NWRs in Louisiana found that levels of oil contamination near oil and gas facilities are lethal to most species of wildlife, even though refuge staff were not aware of any large spills.
 - FWS reported 348 spills in 2002, but this figure is limited as not all spills are reported.
 - FWS spent \$387,100 to clean up 14 oil- or gas-related sites between fiscal years 1991 and 2002 and is planning to spend an additional \$108,000 at 3 sites in fiscal year 2003.
- Of 16 wildlife refuges visited by GAO in a 2003 study, meant to be representative of the refuge system, 15 had suffered contamination from spills of oil or brine.

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