



Division of O&G approves lease assignment to Cade, Donkel

Derek Nottingham, director of the Alaska Division of Oil and Gas, has approved a lease assignment for oil and gas lease ADL 393574.

In a Dec. 26 decision, Nottingham said applications were received Nov. 10 to transfer working interests in the lease from J. Andrew Bachner and Keith C. Forsgren to Samuel H. Cade and Daniel K. Donkel.

The division's most recent North Slope lease ownership map, dated September, shows the lease as the only non-Cade/Donkel lease in a block at the eastern edge of state acreage offshore the North Slope.

When the division approved unit formation for Cade/Donkel's Greater Point Thomson unit last June, ADL 393574 was excluded from the lease approval. The application had been for 58,790 acres, but the state approved the unit at only 35,122 acres, excluding unleased state lands, leases where "geophysical analysis does not show the presence of a hydrocarbon reservoir or potential hydrocarbon accumulation" and Backner/Forsgren acreage. The Backner/Forsgren acreage was excluded, Nottingham said in that decision, because those parties had not ratified the proposed Greater Point Thomson unit agreement or the unit operating agreement.



DEREK NOTTINGHAM

—KRISTEN NELSON

Conoco, State of Alaska respond to NPR-A legal challenge

There have been several court filings in a case in the Alaska District Court, in which three environmental organizations have challenged the legality of the exploration activities that ConocoPhillips plans in the National Petroleum Reserve-Alaska this year. ConocoPhillips plans to drill four exploration wells and conduct seismic surveying in the reserve.

As previously reported by Petroleum News, the organizations argue that potential environmental impacts from the planned exploration activities are likely to cause long term harm to soils, vegetation and wildlife in the reserve, including population-level impacts to Teshekpuk Caribou Herd that uses the region within which the exploration is planned to take place.

On Dec. 16 ConocoPhillips filed a preliminary response challenging the validity of the court case. The company listed a series of general challenges to the plaintiffs' claims, including an argument that the plaintiffs lack standing to bring their claims, an

see **LEGAL CHALLENGE** page 6

NPR-A integrated resource plan environmental assessment OK'd

On Dec. 22 the Bureau of Land Management announced the approval of the environmental assessment for its revised version of the integrated activity plan for the National Petroleum Reserve-Alaska. The approval enables the new plan to go into effect. As a consequence the agency anticipates holding an oil and gas lease sale this winter, the first of five lease sales directed under the terms of President Trump's One Big Beautiful Act, passed last July. The last lease sale in the reserve was held in 2019.

18.6 million acres available

The new IRP renders 18.6 million acres, or 82% of the NPR-A's subsurface estate available for oil and gas leasing. That compares with the 11.8 million acres, or 52% of the surface land, available for leasing under the previous IRP. The land availability

see **NPR-A PLAN** page 6

FINANCE & ECONOMY

Venezuela roils ANS

Glut worries overpower large surprise draw on U.S. crude inventories

By STEVE SUTHERLIN

for Petroleum News

Alaska North Slope crude plunged \$1.03 Jan. 6 to close at \$61.57 per barrel as traders pondered the U. S. invasion of Venezuela in terms of its potential to add to world supplies under U.S. management – offsetting the geopolitical risk narrative that had previously lent support to prices. West Texas Intermediate plunged \$1.19 on the day to close at \$57.13 and Brent plunged \$1.06 to close at \$60.70.

On Jan. 7, crude futures continued lower. WTI plunged \$1.14 to close at \$55.99, and Brent dropped 74 cents to close at \$59.96. The ANS closing price for Jan. 7 had not been released by the Alaska Dept. of Revenue as Petroleum News went



CHRIS WRIGHT

to press Jan. 8.

On Jan 6, ANS closed at a premium of \$4.44 over WTI and at an 87-cent premium over Brent.

The United States will control sales of sanctioned Venezuelan oil "indefinitely" and ease restrictions on the country's crude in global markets, the White House said Jan. 7, adding that sales would start with 30 million to 50 million barrels with revenue controlled by the U.S. government.

"We need to have that leverage and control of those oil sales to drive the changes that simply must happen in Venezuela," Energy Secretary Chris Wright said.

The White House said the proceeds of crude sales would go to benefit Venezuela and the

see **OIL PRICES** page 7

EXPLORATION & PRODUCTION

US rig count up 1 at 546

Texas down 1; majority state counts unchanged; November international up

By KRISTEN NELSON

Petroleum News

Baker Hughes' U.S. rotary drilling rig count was 546 on Dec. 30, up one from the previous week. The domestic rig count has ranged from the 530s through the 550s since the beginning of June.

For 2025, the count peaked Feb. 28 (and again March 21) at 593, hitting its low point Aug. 29 at 526. For 2024, the count peaked March 1 (and again March 15) at 629, hitting its low point June 28 at 581. In 2023 the count peaked early in the year at 775 on Jan. 13, bottoming out Nov. 10 at 616.

A drop of 17 to 731 on May 12, 2023, was the

steepest weekly drop since June of 2020, during the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic, when the count also dropped by 17 to 284 on June 5, following drops as steep as 73 rigs in one week in April. The count continued down to 251 at the end of July 2020, reaching an all-time low of 244 in mid-August 2020.

When the count dropped to 244 in mid-August 2020, it was the lowest the domestic rotary rig count had been since the Houston based oilfield services company began issuing weekly U.S. numbers in 1944.

Prior to 2020, the low was 404 rigs in May 2016. The count peaked at 4,530 in 1981.

see **RIG COUNT** page 8

EXPLORATION & PRODUCTION

Pikka 2026 POD approved

By KAY CASHMAN

Petroleum News

On Dec. 24 the Alaska Department of Natural Resources' Division of Oil and Gas approved the 2026 Pikka Unit Plan of Development, or POD.

On Oct. 31, the Division of Oil and Gas had received the proposed 2026 Pikka Unit POD from Oil Search (Alaska) LLC, a subsidiary of Santos Ltd. and operator of the Alaska North Slope Pikka Unit, or PKU.

Oil Search provided a technical review to the Division on Dec. 16, 2025.

Oil Search is ahead of the curve at Pikka. In late August, Managing Director and CEO Kevin Gallagher announced the Pikka Phase 1 development was "progressing well" and that the company has



KEVIN GALLAGHER

brought first oil guidance forward from mid-2026 to first quarter 2026, with the ramp-up to plateau of 80,000 barrels per day expected in the second quarter 2026.

Unit history

The PKU is comprised of both State of Alaska oil and gas leases and Arctic Slope Regional Corporation oil and gas leases. The PKU was formed June 18, 2015 and was expanded for the first time in March 2018 and again on Sept. 10, 2024. The unit consists of a total of 97,385.47 acres.

On Dec. 31, 2024, the term of the PKU was extended until June 1, 2030. While the unit does not have sustained production, the Nanushuk

see **PIKKA POD** page 7

• EXPLORATION & PRODUCTION

November ANS production edges up by 0.4%

Month-over-month increase led by Prudhoe, Milne; Kuparuk down, but up from '24; Colville, Nikaitchuq, Greater Mooses Tooth down

By KRISTEN NELSON
Petroleum News

Alaska North Slope production averaged 471,651 barrels per day in November, the most recent month for which the Alaska Oil and Gas Conservation Commission reports data by well and field. That was a 0.43% increase, 2,026 bpd, from an October average of 469,625 bpd, but a 3.09% decrease from a November 2024 average of 486,700 bpd.

Crude oil was 89.25% of November ANS production, averaging 420,955 bpd, up 0.14%, 601 bpd, from an October average of 420,354 bpd, but down 2.34% from a November 2024 average of 431,059 bpd. Natural gas liquids accounted for 10.75% of November production, averaging 50,696 bpd, up 1,426 bpd, 2.89%, from an October average of 49,271 bpd but down 8.89% from a November 2024 average of 55,641 bpd.

The county time series maintained by NOAA's National Centers for Environmental Information shows North Slope Borough temperatures averaged 9.3 degrees F in November, down 2.2 degrees from a 1925-24 mean of 11.5 degrees.

Month-over-month increases

The largest volume increase in production was at the Hilcorp Alaska-operated Prudhoe Bay unit which averaged 255,999 bpd in November, up 7,785 bpd, 3.14%, from an October average of 248,214 bpd but down 3.75% from a November 2024 average of 265,966 bpd.

Hilcorp's Milne Point averaged 50,906 bpd in November, the first month in which Hilcorp has topped the 50,000-bpd average mark for a month at the field.

Crude oil accounted for 81.22% of Prudhoe production, averaging 207,923 bpd, up 6,155 bpd, 3.05%, from an October average of 201,768 bpd but down 2.59% from a November 2024 average of 213,460 bpd. NGLs averaged 48,076 bpd, 18.78% of Prudhoe November production, up 1,630 bpd, 3.51%, from an October average of 46,446 bpd, but down 8.44% from a November 2024 average of 52,507 bpd.

In addition to the primary reservoir, production volumes from Prudhoe include Aurora, Borealis, Lisburne, Midnight Sun, Niakuk, Polaris, Point McIntyre, Put River, Raven and Schrader Bluff.

ConocoPhillips Alaska holds 36.5% of the working interest ownership at Prudhoe; ExxonMobil Alaska Production holds 36.4%; Hilcorp North Slope holds 27.1%.

Hilcorp's Milne Point averaged 50,906 bpd in November, the first month in which Hilcorp has topped the 50,000-bpd average mark for a month at the field. The volume is up 2,086 bpd, 4.27%, from an October average of 48,819 bpd and up 7.25% from an October

see ANS OUTPUT page 4

Cook Inlet gas production down 1%

Natural gas production in Cook Inlet averaged 210,730 thousand cubic feet per day in November, down 1.06%, 2,263 mcf per day, from an October average of 212,993 mcf per day but up 10.73% from a November 2024 average of 190,311 mcf per day.

Volumes are calculated from Alaska Oil and Gas Conservation Commission data, reported on a month-delay basis. For natural gas AOGCC reports measurements in thousands of cubic feet, mcf.

In November 83.5% of inlet gas production was from six fields: Beluga River, Kenai, Kitchen Lights, McArthur River, Ninilchik and North Cook Inlet.

The Hilcorp Alaska-operated Beluga River field tops the list at 57,140 mcf per day in November, 27.12% of inlet production, up 2,935 mcf per day, 5.42%, from an October average of 54,204 mcf per day and up 24.18% from a November 2024 average of 46,014 mcf per day. Field operator Hilcorp holds a minority working interest ownership in the field; Chugach Electric Association is the majority WIO.

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SIDEBAR, PAGE 2: Cook Inlet gas production down 1%


LAND & LEASING

6 Hilcorp Alaska now Prudhoe Bay operator

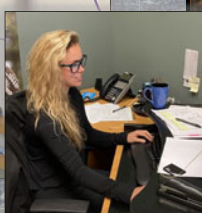





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Alaska-Mackenzie Rig Report

Rig Owner/Rig Type	Rig No.	Rig Location/Activity	Operator or Status
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Alaska Rig Status

North Slope - Onshore

All American Oilfield LLC			
IDECO H-37	AAO 111	Magtec Yard, Stacked	Available
Doyon Drilling			
Dreco 1250 UE	14 (SCR/TD)	Oliktok Point, O-233	Hilcorp Alaska LLC
Dreco 1000 UE	16 (SCR/TD)	Deadhorse, Standby	Available
Dreco D2000 Uebd	19 (SCR/TD)	Deadhorse, Standby	Available
AC Mobile	25	Kuparuk, Standby, 3S-Pad	ConocoPhillips
OIME 2000	141 (SCR/TD)	Deadhorse, Standby	Available
	142 (SCR/TD)	Kuparuk, 3T-609	ConocoPhillips
TSM 700	Arctic Fox #1	Deadhorse, Standby	Available
ERD	26	Alpine, Standby, MT6-Pad	ConocoPhillips
Hilcorp Alaska LLC			
Rotary Drilling	Innovation	Prudhoe Bay, Z Pad	Hilcorp Alaska LLC
TSM-850	169	Prudhoe Bay	Hilcorp Alaska LLC
Nabors Alaska Drilling			
AC Coil Hybrid	CDR-2 (CTD)	Prudhoe Bay	Hilcorp Alaska LLC
AC Coil	CDR-3 (CTD)	Prudhoe Bay	Hilcorp Alaska LLC
Dreco 1000 UE	7-ES (SCR-TD)	Kuparuk, Workover	ConocoPhillips
Dreco 1000 UE	9-ES (SCR/TD)	Stacked	Available
Oilwell 2000 Hercules	16-E (SCR/TD)	Stacked	Brooks Range Petroleum
Emsco Electro-hoist			
Oilwell 2000 Canrig 1050E	27-E (SCR-TD)	Stacked	Available
Academy AC Electric CANRIG	99AC (AC-TD)		Available
OIME 2000	245-E (SCR-ACTD)	12 Acre Pad, stacked	Available
Academy AC electric CANRIG	105-E (AC-TD)	Megrez-1	Pantheon Resources
Academy AC electric Heli-Rig	106AC (AC-TD)	Stacked	Available
NOV ADS-10SD	272	Pikka	Santos
NOV ADS-10SD	273	Milne Point	Hilcorp Alaska LLC
Nordic-Calista LLC			
Superior 700 UE	1 (SCR/CTD)	Deadhorse	Available
Superior 700 UE	2 (SCR/CTD/TD)	Deadhorse, stacked	Santos
Ideco 900	3 (SCR/TD)	Kuparuk	Available
Rig Master 1500AC	4 (AC/TD)	Oliktok Point	Hilcorp Alaska LLC

North Slope - Offshore

Doyon Drilling			
Sky top Brewster NE-12	15 (SCR/TD)	Point Thompson Unit, PTU-19	Hilcorp Alaska LLC
Nabors Alaska Drilling			
OIME 1000	19AC (AC-TD)	Oooguruk, Cold Stacked	Hilcorp Alaska LLC

Interior Alaska

Hilcorp Alaska LLC			
Mobile Drill Rig	Integrity Rig	Yukon Flats Basin, exploratory	Hilcorp Alaska LLC

Cook Inlet Basin – Onshore

BlueCrest Alaska Operating LLC			
Land Rig	BlueCrest Rig #1	Stacked	BlueCrest Alaska Operating LLC
Nordic-Calista LLC	Rig 37	Kenai	Available
Hilcorp Alaska LLC			
TSM-850	147	Beluga, Stacked	Hilcorp Alaska LLC

Cook Inlet Basin – Offshore

Hilcorp Alaska LLC			
National 110	C (TD)	Platform C, Stacked	Hilcorp Alaska LLC
	Rig 51	Steelhead Platform, Stacked	Hilcorp Alaska LLC
	Rig 56	Monopod A-13, stacked	Hilcorp Alaska LLC
ILC-Skidoff, jack-up	Spartan 151	Tyonek Platform	Hilcorp Alaska LLC
Glacier Oil & Gas			
National 1320	35	Osprey Platform, activated	Glacier Oil & Gas

Mackenzie Rig Status

Canadian Beaufort Sea

SDC Drilling Inc.			
SDC Mobile Offshore Drilling Unit Rig #2		Set down at Roland Bay	Available

The Alaska-Mackenzie Rig Report as of January 7, 2026.
Active drilling companies only listed.

TD = rigs equipped with top drive units WO = workover operations
CT = coiled tubing operation SCR = electric rig

This rig report was prepared by Susan Crane



JUDY PATRICK

Baker Hughes North America rotary rig counts*

	Dec. 30	Dec. 23	Year Ago
United States	546	545	589
Canada	101	118	94
Gulf of Mexico	9	9	12

Highest/Lowest

US/Highest	4530	December 1981
US/Lowest	244	August 2020

*Issued by Baker Hughes since 1944

The Alaska-Mackenzie Rig Report
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• EXPLORATION & PRODUCTION

DOG approves North Fork POD for 2026

Field operator Hilcorp commits to drilling sidetrack well and grassroots well in 2026; anticipates enhanced gas production

By **ALAN BAILEY**
for Petroleum News

On Dec. 23 Alaska's Division of Oil and Gas approved Hilcorp Alaska's 2026 plan of development for the North Fork gas field in the southern Kenai Peninsula. In the plan Hilcorp commits to drill one sidetrack well and one grassroots well within the North Fork unit during the period of the plan, which runs from Jan. 1, 2026, to Dec. 31, 2026.

Hilcorp told DOG that the company also commits to maintaining and enhancing gas production from the unit and that facility work will be completed as needed.

Hilcorp had requested that the new POD should termi-

nate on Aug. 1, 2026, to align the POD timeframe with Hilcorp's PODs for its other Cook Inlet units. However, the division declined this request, saying that aligning all PODs to the same timeframe would not provide the division with sufficient time to adequately conduct due diligence on each POD.

Formed in 1965

The unit was originally formed as a federal unit in 1965, with two federal leases and two state leases. In 2006 the Bureau of Land Management waived its administration rights, transferring its leases to the state. Currently the unit includes five state leases, covering a total area of

2,601 acres.

Several companies have operated the unit at various times. Hilcorp took over the unit from the previous operator Vision Operating LLC in 2024. While gas production from the field had been declining at a rate of about 3% per year, production has steadily increased since Hilcorp became operator — between October 2024 and October 2025 production increased by more than 24%, the division wrote.

Mandatory contraction

Under state regulations, after a unit has been in

see **NORTH FORK** page 6

continued from page 2

INLET GAS

Hilcorp's North Cook Inlet averaged 40,819 mcf per day in November, 19.37% of inlet production, up 2,907 mcf per day, 7.67%, from an October average of 37,912 mcf per day but down 12.75% from a November 2024 average of 46,783 mcf per day.

Hilcorp's Ninilchik averaged 27,823 mcf per day in November, 13.2% of inlet production, down 1,272 mcf per day, 4.37%, from an October average of 29,095 mcf per day but up 4.87% from a November 2024 average of 26,532 mcf per day.

Furie's Kitchen Lights averaged 19,896 mcf per day in November, 9.44% of inlet production, down 4,403 mcf per day, 18.12%, from an October average of 24,299 mcf per day but up 126.3% from a November 2024 average of 8,792 mcf per day.

Hilcorp's Kenai gas field averaged 17,737 mcf per day in November, 8.42% of inlet production, down 18 mcf per day, 0.1%, from an October average of 17,755 mcf per day and down 1.1% from a November 2024 average of 17,934 mcf per day.

Hilcorp's McArthur River averaged 12,548 mcf per day in November, 5.95% of inlet production, down 214 mcf per day, 1.68%, from an October average of 12,762 mcf per day but up 16.11% from a November 2024 average of 10,807 mcf per day.

Sixteen fields accounted for the remaining 16.5% of November natural gas production.

Hilcorp's Swanson River averaged 7,508 mcf per day in November, down 2,577 mcf per day, 25.55%, from an October average of 10,085 mcf per day but up 1.36% from a November 2024 average of 7,407 mcf per day.

Hilcorp's Cannery Loop averaged 3,724 mcf per day in November, down 85 mcf per day, 2.24%, from an October average of 3,809 mcf per day and down

2.24% from a November 2024 average of 4,798 mcf per day.

Hilcorp's Deep Creek averaged 3,631 mcf per day in November, down 107 mcf per day, 2.86%, from an October average of 3,738 mcf per day but up 29.31% from a November 2024 average of 2,808 mcf per day.

Hilcorp's Beaver Creek averaged 3,460 mcf per day in November, down 119 mcf per day, 3.32%, from an October average of 3,579 mcf per day and down 22.17% from a November 2024 average of 4,446 mcf per day.

Hilcorp's Whiskey Gulch averaged 3,338 mcf per day in November, up 1,026 mcf per day from an October average of 2,312 mcf per day. Hilcorp brought the field, north of Seaview, online in October. Production is from a single well.

Hilcorp's Pretty Creek averaged 2,854 mcf per day in November, up 931 mcf per day, 48.43%, from an October average of 1,923 mcf per day and up 491.16% from a November average of 483 mcf per day.

Hilcorp's Ivan River averaged 2,422 mcf per day in November, down 973 mcf per day, 28.66%, from an October average of 3,395 mcf per day but up 114.03% from a November 2024 average of 1,131 mcf per day.

Hilcorp's North Fork averaged 2,314 mcf per day in November, up 109 mcf per day, 4.94%, from an October average of 2,205 mcf per day and up 32.39% from a November 2024 average of 1,748 mcf per day.

Hilcorp's Granite Point averaged 2,285 mcf per day in November, up 45 mcf per day, 2%, from an October average of 2,240 mcf per day but down 22.48% from a November 2024 average of 2,947 mcf per day.

Hilcorp's Lewis River averaged 1,811 mcf per day in November, up 39 mcf per day, 2.2%, from an October average of 1,772 mcf per day but down 38.01% from a November 2024 average of 2,922 mcf per day.

BlueCrest's Hansen averaged 560 mcf per day in November, down 23 mcf per day, 3.88%, from an October average of

582 mcf per day and down 43.22% from a November 2024 average of 986 mcf per day.

Hilcorp's Trading Bay averaged 359 mcf per day in November, down 255 mcf per day, 41.51%, from an October average of 613 mcf per day and down 57.31% from a November 2024 average of 840 mcf per day.

Cook Inlet Energy's West McArthur River averaged 185 mcf per day in November, down 15 mcf per day, 7.54%, from an October average of 200 mcf per day and down 24% from a November 2024 average of 244 mcf per day. CIE is a Glacier Oil and Gas company.

Amaroq's Nicolai Creek averaged 184 mcf per day in November, down 153 mcf per day, 45.42%, from an October average of 338 mcf per day and down 58.46% from a November 2024 average of 444 mcf per day.

CIE's Redoubt Shoal averaged 108

mcf per day in November, down 10 mcf per day, 8.46%, from an October average of 118 mcf per day and down 23.72% from a November 2024 average of 141 mcf per day. CIE is a Glacier Oil and Gas company.

AIX's Kenai Loop averaged 26 mcf per day in November, up 10 mcf, 62.5%, from an October average of 16 mcf per day but down 98.64% from a November 2024 average of 1,907 mcf per day.

There was no November production from Hilcorp's Nikolaevsk, which had been producing from a single well, Red 1, since 2012.

Cook Inlet natural gas production peaked in 1990 at more than 850,000 mcf per day.

—KRISTEN NELSON

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LAND & LEASING

Hilcorp Alaska now Prudhoe Bay operator

The Alaska Department of Natural Resources' Division of Oil and Gas has approved an operator change for the Prudhoe Bay unit.

In a Dec. 22 approval, division Director Derek Nottingham said the division received notification on Dec. 18 that Hilcorp North Slope LLC was resigning as operator of the Prudhoe Bay unit and designating Hilcorp Alaska LLC as successor unit operator.

Hilcorp North Slope LLC will continue to be the working interest owner within the PBU.

"Hilcorp reported business optimization and operating and reporting efficiency by aligning ownership geographically as justification for transfer of ownership," Nottingham said.

—PETROLEUM NEWS

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NPR-A PLAN

in the new IRP is consistent with the IRP issued by the then Trump administration in 2020.

BLM says that the completion of the environmental assessment involved consultation with tribes and Alaska Native corporations, as well as a 14-day public comment period on the draft assessment.

"This updated plan is a major step forward in restoring the National Petroleum Reserve in Alaska to the purpose Congress intended," said acting BLM Director Bill Groffy. "By opening more of the reserve to responsible development, we are helping meet national energy needs while continuing the legacy begun in the 2020 plan for thorough environmental review and strong engagement with Alaska communities."

However, BLM commented that not all of the available land may necessarily be offered for leasing the upcoming lease sales. And new infrastructure would be prohibited in approximately 4.3 million acres of surface land.

Of particular concern in the protection of the environment in the NPR-A are "special areas," areas designated as containing

particularly critical environmental resources. The special areas recognized in this latest IAP consist of the Teshekpuk Lake Special Area, Utukok River Uplands Special Area, Kasegaluk Lagoon Special Area and Peard Bay Special Area. The Teshekpuk Lake Special Area, including and surrounding the Teshekpuk Lake, is considered to have especial environmental sensitivity related to caribou and the bird population.

"All of the Teshekpuk Lake Special Area would be available for leasing, with potential impacts on caribou calving habitat and important bird habitat primarily mitigated through NSO (no surface occupancy) stipulations and TLs (timing limitations), among other operational measures," BLM wrote in its approved environmental assessment. "The extent of NSO coverage here means that some areas, while technically available for leasing, would not be within reach of current directional drilling technology; however, keeping those areas available for leasing allows for advances in future technology."

—ALAN BAILEY

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LEGAL CHALLENGE

argument that the court lacks jurisdiction over some or all of the claims, and an argument that for various reasons some of the claims are barred from being considered.

The State of Alaska has intervened in the case in support of ConocoPhillips and has filed a "general denial," raising similar issues to ConocoPhillips.

On Dec. 11 the environmental organizations asked the court to issue an injunction, preventing ConocoPhillips proceeding with its exploration program until the court case has been resolved. And on Dec. 24 the State of Alaska filed a court document opposing the requested injunction, arguing that the environmental organizations' claims did not meet the threshold requirements for issuing an injunction. Also, an injunction, if issued, would cause significant harm to the Alaska economy, the state wrote.

—ALAN BAILEY

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NORTH FORK

production for 10 years it has to be contracted to areas that are producing oil or gas. Given the various changes of field operator, there have been several changes to the stipulated mandatory contraction date. On Jan. 5 Hilcorp announced that, following a request to DOG, the agency has deferred the current contraction date from Dec. 31, 2025, to Oct. 1, 2027. The company said that it had told DOG that, pending the results of the planned drilling of a grassroots well and a sidetrack well, the company may drill an additional well outside the field's current producing gas pool.

Hilcorp has completed several well work activities, in particular opening up four new well perforations to access gas resources in the upper Tyonek gas reservoir. Two of the well modifications resulted in additional gas production. Also a technical study of the unit identified four new drilling opportunities, the division wrote in its plan of development approval. ●

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PIKKA POD

Participating Area, or PA, was approved by the Division director on Oct. 23, 2025.

In the 2025 POD period, Oil Search committed to continuing the Phase 1 scope of PKU development.

This included the following facilities and infrastructure work: installation of the NPF module, installation of remaining pipelines along all pipeline routes, continued work on the grind and inject and seawater treatment plant (STP) facilities, import and export pipeline work to enable oil sales, seawater import for pressure maintenance, and fuel gas import, and completion of work on the Nanushuk Operation Pad.

Additionally, Oil Search committed to drilling between six to eight development wells within the PKU.

During the 2025 POD period, Oil Search completed most of its facility projects. Work is still on-going on the STP and tie ins for production to commence in the 2026 POD period. Additionally, by the end of the POD period,

Oil Search will have drilled and completed nine wells.

2026 POD

During the 2026 POD period, which will run from Feb. 1 through Jan. 31, 2027, Oil Search committed to complete all remaining facility and infrastructure work to commence production from the PKU. Production will be tapered for a facility warmup period. Production will ramp up gradually after this warmup period.

In addition to commencing production from the PKU during the POD period, Oil Search will drill an additional eight wells.

This approval is only for a general plan of development. Specific field operations require separate approval under 11 AAC 83.346, Unit Plan of Operations.

Under 11 AAC 83.343, the 2027 POD is due Nov. 3, 2026, 90 days before the 2026 POD expires.

At an Aug. 27, presentation to AOGA in Anchorage, Pete Laliberte, Santos vice president business development, said "This is our core development area, so when we sanctioned Pikka Phase I, we sanctioned it in this core development area with our partner Repsol."

Laliberte said his colleague Mark Ireland likes to say, "in this core area we have three Pikkas."

"I think that we've got the one Pikka development that we're doing right now, but we also have a unit called Horseshoe and a unit called Quokka," Laliberte said.

"In Quokka we're drilling another appraisal well this winter and in the Quokka and Horseshoe units we see 'the potential for two more Pikkas.'"

In other words, Santos has much more to come on the Slope.

Pikka Phase 1 is going to be developed on some 17,000 acres of land, 1% of the total Santos leasehold on the North Slope, Laliberte said, adding, "So we have a huge amount of running room and this is exactly what our subsurface team is looking at.

"We've also got a major discovery in Lagniappe in the eastern North Slope and that's with our partners, APA Corporation and Armstrong," he said. "And then finally we've got a big NPR (National Petroleum Reserve-Alaska) position -- probably a little bit longer term." ●

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OIL PRICES

United States.

On Jan. 5. ANS jumped 80 cents to close at \$62.60, WTI leapt a dollar to close at \$58.32, and Brent leapt \$1.01 to close at \$61.76.

In the raid on Venezuela Jan. 3, the country's former president Nicolás Maduro was arrested in Caracas and extradited to face drug, weapon, and narco-terrorism charges in the United States.

On Jan. 2 – the first trading day of 2026, trading was muted as the market searched for direction in the wake of a U.S. campaign to strike alleged Venezuelan seaborne drug smuggling vessels and seize tankers carrying sanctioned crude, as peace efforts in Ukraine wavered.

ANS inched 5 cents lower on the day to close at \$61.80, as WTI and Brent each edged 10 cents lower to close at \$57.32 and \$60.75 respectively.

Crude prices fell Jan. 7 despite a large surprise draw-down of U.S reserves.

U.S. commercial crude oil inventories for the week ended Jan. 2 – excluding Strategic Petroleum Reserve levels – decreased by 3.8 million barrels from the previous week to 419.1 million barrels – 3% below the five-year average for the time of year, according to data released by the U.S. Energy Information Administration in its weekly petroleum report Jan. 7.

Crude stocks had been expected to have fallen by 900,000 barrels, per the average estimate in a Wall Street Journal analyst survey. Gasoline and distillate reserves, however, surprised to the upside.

Total motor gasoline inventories increased by 7.7 million barrels over the week to 242.0 million barrels – 3%

above the five-year average for the season, the EIA said. Distillate fuel inventories increased by 5.6 million barrels over the period to 129.3 million barrels – 3% below the five-year average for this time of year.

Gasoline levels were anticipated to have risen by 2.8 million barrels according to the WSJ poll, while distillate fuel stocks were predicted to see a 700,000-barrel rise.

ANS fell 66 cents Dec. 31 to close at \$61.85, while WTI fell 53 cents to close at \$57.42, and Brent plunged \$1.03 to close at \$60.85.

On Dec. 30, ANS gained 9 cents to close at \$62.51, WTI fell 13 cents to close at \$57.95, and Brent slid 6 cents to close at \$61.88.

ANS shed 94 cents from its Dec. 30 close of \$62.51 to its close of \$61.57 on Jan. 6. ●

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Oil Patch Bits



Hajdukovich new RDC executive director

The Resource Development Council of Alaska, or RDC, has a new executive director, Connor Hajdukovich.

He assumed the position of Jan. 1, 2006.

Hajdukovich has served as RDC's interim executive director since October and was selected following a comprehensive search process. He brings extensive experience in public policy, federal and state advocacy, and Alaska's resource industries, including prior roles advising the U.S. Department of Defense and serving on Capitol Hill.

AS RDC closes its 50th year, Alaska enters a critical period of opportunity

driven by renewed investment, infrastructure development and growing demand for responsibly produced natural resources.

RDC is confident Hajdukovich's leadership will help advance responsible development and long-term economic growth for Alaska.

This information was gathered from LinkedIn.

Editor's note: Some of these news items will appear in the next Arctic Oil & Gas Directory, a full color magazine that serves as a marketing tool for Petroleum News' contracted advertisers. The next edition will be released in September.



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RIG COUNT

The count was in the low 790s at the beginning of 2020 prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, where it remained through mid-March of that year when it began to fall, dropping below what had been the historic low in early May with a count of 374 and continuing to drop through the third week of August 2020 when it gained back 10 rigs.

The Dec. 30 count includes 412 rigs targeting oil, up by three from the previous week and down 70 from 482 a year ago, with 125 rigs targeting natural gas, down by two from the previous week and up 22 from 103 a year ago, and nine miscellaneous rigs, unchanged from the previous week and up by five from a year ago.

Fifty-six of the rigs reported Dec. 30 were drilling directional wells, 476 were drilling horizontal wells and 14 were drilling vertical wells.

Alaska rig count unchanged

Utah (13) and Wyoming (16) were each up two rigs from the previous week.

Texas (231) was down by a single rig.

Rig counts in other states were unchanged from the previous week: Alaska (9), California (8), Colorado (11), Louisiana (43), New Mexico (101), Ohio (14), Oklahoma (43), Pennsylvania (18) and West Virginia (7).

Baker Hughes shows Alaska with nine rotary rigs active Dec. 30, unchanged from the previous week and down by one from a year ago when the state's count was 10.

The rig count in the Permian, the most active basin in the country, was unchanged from the previous week at 247 and down by 57 from 304 a year ago.

International rig count down 8 in December

Baker Hughes' monthly international rig count for December, issued Jan. 2, was 1,065, down by eight from November and down 49 from a count of 1,114 in

December 2024, with land rigs down two to 845, month over month, and offshore rigs down six to 220.

Baker Hughes began providing a monthly international rig count in 1975. The international count excludes North America, which is included in the company's worldwide figures.

The Middle East accounted for the most rigs in the international totals for December, 509, followed by Asia Pacific with 123, Latin America with 104, Europe with 96 and Africa with 92.

The U.S. rig count averaged 546 in December, down by three from 549 in November and down 43 from December 2024, while the Canadian count for December averaged 172, down 19 from 189 in December and up 10 from December 2024.

Worldwide the rig count averaged 1,783 in December, down 30 from 1,812 in November and down 82 from 1,812 in December 2024. ●

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