ISER RESEARCH SUMMARY

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OCS Revenue Sharing in Alaska

Congress in 1984 proposed to share a maximum of 4 percent of federal petroleum revenues from the Outer Continental Shelf (OCS) with Alaska and the other coastal states—a share that would fall far short of the 25 percent or more of resource revenues that states receive from all other federal lands.

This is one of the findings of a recent report by the University of Alaska's Institute of Social and Economic Research. The report, prepared for the Office of the Governor, compares federal revenue-sharing programs for onshore lands with proposed levels of OCS revenue sharing. OCS lands are currently the only public lands from which the federal government keeps all resource revenues—but Congress came close to enacting an OCS revenue-sharing plan last year and will likely consider such plans again.

Existing Revenue-Sharing Programs for Federal Lands

State and local governments have long argued that they should be compensated for federal ownership of land within or adjacent to their boundaries. They feel they deserve compensation because federal ownership of land costs them control of the land and resources and because federal land is immune from state and local taxation. The federal government has accepted some of these arguments, and over the past 80 years has established a number of programs under which state and local governments collect substantial revenues from federal lands.

In its two largest revenue-sharing plans, the federal government distributes to affected states 25 percent of logging and other revenues from national forests and 50 percent of federal mineral-leasing revenues.[1] In addition to these and other programs that share resource revenues, federal "payment in lieu of taxes" programs attempt to replace actual or potential revenues lost by local governments because they are unable to tax federal lands. These programs provide a steady stream of revenue to local governments affected by activities on adjacent federal lands, even if the lands produce no current revenues.

In 1982, the 12 western states containing most federal lands (including Alaska but not Hawaii) received over 800 million dollars in shared resource revenues and an additional 76 million dollars in payments in lieu of taxes.

OCS Revenue-Sharing Proposals

Over the past decade when the federal government has stepped up its OCS leasing program, coastal states have argued for a share of OCS revenues to help them pay for the increased costs that can accompany this national energy program. These costs include increased costs of services resulting from a sharp increase in population and potential environmental costs of oil spills or other industrial accidents. States have maintained that the federal government should compensate them with a significant share of the development revenues from oil production on the OCS, just as it has historically compensated state and local governments for developments on other federal lands.

In 1984, a conference committee of both houses of Congress agreed on an OCS revenue-sharing bill, although Congress ultimately failed to enact it. Under that bill, 4 percent of OCS revenues would be set aside each year, up to a ceiling of $300 million (the ceiling would increase slightly after 1985). Some of this money would be allocated to various coastal programs, and the remainder would be divided among coastal states under a complicated formula. No state could receive more than 15 percent of available revenues each year and would pass on one-third of what they received directly to local governments.

Potential Alaska Production and Revenues

Alaska may have a lot at stake in the federal government's ultimate decision on OCS revenue sharing. Although there have as yet been no commercial

[1]Under the National Forest Revenue Act of 1908, states receive 25 percent of receipts from national forests located within their borders, and then must pass these revenues on to county governments. The Mineral Leasing Act of 1920 provides states with 50 percent of federal receipts from onshore mineral leases (although Alaska, through a special provision, receives 90 percent of most onshore mineral revenues).

discoveries on the Alaska OCS, most analysts believe the region will yield a number of huge fields, most likely in both the Beaufort and Bering Seas.

Figure 1 shows how hypothetical federal OCS royalties might compare with the state's petroleum revenues derived from state leases on the North Slope (most of projected state petroleum revenues). Both North Slope state and OCS revenues in Figure 1 are based on development scenarios that assume moderate oil prices, with production occurring from both the Beaufort and Bering Seas before the turn of the century. We emphasize that these projected OCS revenues are conditional on discovery and development of reserves of a particular size, and are intended just to show the scale these revenues could reach.[2]

The graph in Figure 1 shows that government OCS royalties could reach $1 billion annually (in 1984 dollars) by the mid-1990s, and that by the late 1990s they could exceed the state's North Slope petroleum revenues—which are expected to decline, after adjusting for inflation. Recent Congressional proposals for dividing up those OCS revenues would put almost all of them into the federal treasury and yield the State of Alaska a small amount—perhaps on the order of $20 to $30 million annually.

On the other hand, if Congress would agree to share OCS revenues in the same proportions as it shares other federal resource revenues, Alaska could stand to collect OCS revenues on a scale 10 times larger—perhaps in the neighborhood of $200 to $500 million annually by the end of the century. Assuming that huge oil reserves are in fact discovered on the Alaska OCS in the coming years, the State of Alaska has an important stake in persuading the federal government to share OCS revenues as generously as it has shared resource revenues from other federal lands.

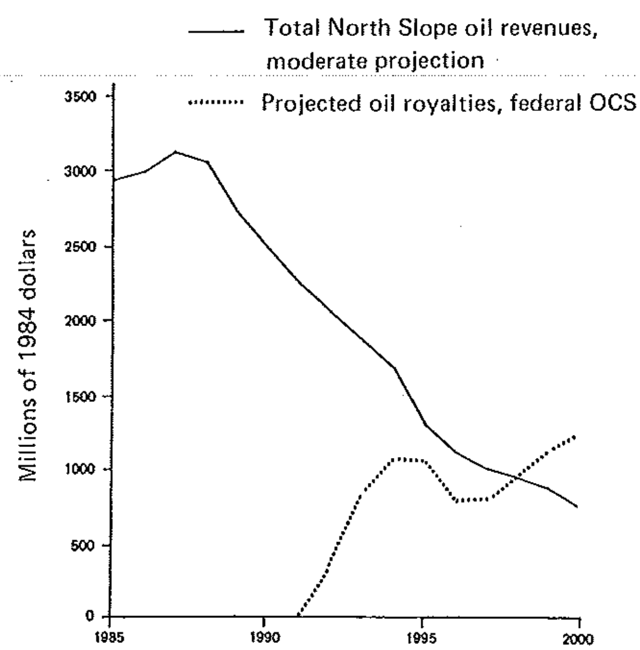

Figure 1. Projected Alaska North Slope Oil Revenues and OCS Royalties

[2]The OCS royalty projections are based on oil development scenarios published by the Minerals Management Service, U.S. Department of the Interior. They assume a constant real wellhead price of $25 per barrel for Bering Sea oil and $15 per barrel for Beaufort Sea oil, with an average royalty share of one-sixth. Figure 1 does not include any potential state or federal revenues from natural gas.

This **Research Summary** *is based on* **Sharing Revenues from the Outer Continental Shelf and Other Federal Lands,** *44 pp., prepared for the Office of the Governor, State of Alaska, by Matthew Berman and Karen White of the Institute of Social and Economic Research. Copies of this report are available for reproduction costs of 10 cents per page from ISER, 707 A St., Suite 206, Anchorage, Alaska 99501, telephone 278-4621.*

RESEARCH SUMMARY (No. 26)
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