

PERSPECTIVES III

DAMAGE: PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE

IT'S BEEN OVER A QUARTER OF A CENTURY NOW SINCE MASSIVE OIL RESERVES WERE FIRST DISCOVERED ON ALASKA'S ARCTIC COASTAL PLAIN. THE "NORTH SLOPE" SUPPLIES ROUGHLY ONE-FIFTH TO ONE-QUARTER OF THE OIL CURRENTLY USED IN THE UNITED STATES, BUT THE OILFIELDS CURRENTLY UNDER PRODUCTION ARE BECOMING DEPLETED AND THE FUTURE OF ALASKA'S OIL INDUSTRY DEPENDS GREATLY ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF NEW FIELDS, EITHER IN ANWR OR ELSEWHERE IN THE STATE.

BOTH SIDES IN THE DEBATE ABOUT WHETHER OR NOT TO OPEN ANWR TO EXPLORATION AND PRODUCTION POINT TO THE ENVIRONMENTAL RECORD REGARDING CURRENT AND PAST OIL AND GAS ACTIVITIES ON THE NORTH SLOPE. AS THESE READINGS SHOW, OPINIONS DIFFER REGARDING THE IMPACTS ON COASTAL PLAIN ECOSYSTEMS TO DATE.

F. SCOTT FITZGERALD ONCE WROTE: "THE TEST OF A FIRST-RATE INTELLIGENCE IS THE ABILITY TO HOLD TWO OPPOSED IDEAS IN MIND AT THE SAME TIME AND STILL RETAIN THE ABILITY TO FUNCTION." FOR THIS DISCUSSION, COME PREPARED TO ARGUE IN FAVOR OF EITHER SIDE ON THE ISSUE OF WHETHER OR NOT OIL PRODUCTION ON THE NORTH SLOPE HAS HAD A SUBSTANTIVE NEGATIVE EFFECT ON THE ECOSYSTEMS OF THE ARCTIC COASTAL PLAIN.