

# Would drilling more Alaskan oil cut prices?

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**COMMENTARY**

The week's vote in the House to approve drilling for oil in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge has several readers — including Kelly in Georgia — wondering if there's enough extra oil up there to make a difference.

**How much oil is in Alaska and is it worth it?**-- *Kelly J., Statesboro, Ga.*

Whenever you're talking about estimates of how much oil is in the ground, the only honest answer is: God only knows.

Oil geologists have gotten pretty good at making estimates. Even then, these analyses are hedged by including the probability that the expected amount of oil will ultimately be found. (This is done through seismic data analysis (4-D, if you track underground changes over time), estimating reserves still in the ground, and other methods.)

The total volume of recoverable crude oil in the so-called coastal plain of ANWR, the last major oil reserve in the U.S., comes to about 10.4 billion barrels, according to the Energy Department's [analysis](#), which is based on

That estimate predicts a 95-percent certainty that only 5.7 billion barrels are recoverable and a 10-percent certainty that only 1.1 billion barrels are recoverable. (These estimates cover both the oil believed to be reachable by land, as well as an estimate of what one is proposing offshore drilling.)

So let's go with the 10.4-billion-barrel estimate. The Energy Dept. figures that, from the day first oil is produced, it will take 10 years to begin producing oil. That means ANWR oil would come on stream in 2013 and peak at



The total volume of recce

How much impact will that have on oil prices? Here's where people on both sides of the ANWR numbers.

The U.S. currently uses about 21 million barrels of oil a day, about 6 million of which is produce declining as older fields dry up. So adding ANWR oil won't bring an increase in U.S. oil product **production from declining fields**. Nor will it make up for the increased demand of another figure out a way to conserve a lot more oil.

On the other hand, 10 billion barrels is a lot of crude. Drilling proponents say it amounts to some Arabia. (While that sounds pretty good, it overlooks the fact that only about 10 percent of U.S. oil billion barrels were recovered, at 1 million barrels a day, production would last for 27 years. But

In any case, drilling in ANWR isn't likely to make much of a dent on the cost of crude. With global rising — even an extra 1 million barrels a day wouldn't be enough to have a significant long-term continues to grow by 2 percent a year, a million barrels a day will represent about 1 percent of o

So is it worth it? For oil companies, it would almost certainly be profitable to produce some of the have developed ways to reduce environmental impact, production would almost certainly have : That's why ANWR was off limits to drilling in the first place. Still, it's reasonable to think that, i

But there's no way drilling for oil in ANWR is going to head off the oil crunch of the next decade

**If all 50 states governments introduced a law to establish ethanol producing plants, this eventually stabilize the cost of energy and reduce our dependence on overseas R. L., -- Springfield, Mass.**

Probably not. There are already lots of federal incentives to produce ethanol, and new plants are has increased to about 4.5 billion gallons a year, doubling in the past five years. Some 97 ethanol **least 33 are under construction** with a capacity of 1.9 billion gallons a year.

That sounds like a lot. But Americans burn through about 385 million gallons of gasoline every ethanol will make up less than 5 percent of all the motor fuel used in the U.S.

So why not make more ethanol? Clearly, you'd have to expand production dramatically — and not to make ethanol — to begin to put a serious dent in America's thirst for gasoline. (The increased Brazil, demand for ethanol made from sugar cane has periodically forced sugar prices higher.)

And while it's true that ethanol reduces some forms of pollution from burning gasoline, ethanol environmental impacts of their own. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency warned in 200

monoxide, methanol and some carcinogens at levels "many times greater" than expected. (*Note came earlier this year.*)

Then there are the critics who argue that making ethanol is a major waste of energy because it takes more energy to produce than you get out of it when you burn it. Though these studies are controversial, it would clearly take a lot of energy to replace gasoline. Where will that energy come from?

That's why research into alternative ways of making ethanol — and other biofuels — is so important. Research that is clean and efficient would go a long way to easing our dependence on oil — imported or otherwise — and on ethanol to get us there.

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