



United States Department of the Interior
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

Padre Island National Seashore
P.O. Box 181300
20301 Park Road 22
Corpus Christi, Texas 78418



IN REPLY REFER TO:

L3025 (PAIS)

August 1, 2002

Senator Carlos F. Truan
District 20
P. O. Box 12068
Austin, TX 78711-2068

Dear Sir,

This letter is to acknowledge your correspondence of June 5, 2002, concerning the government purchase of mineral rights and the proposed Lemon/Lemon Seed wells within Padre Island National Seashore.

The National Park Service realizes that issues related to the development of oil and gas underlying Padre Island National Seashore may be of considerable concern to many of your constituents. However, when Congress established Padre Island National Seashore on September 28, 1962, to "save and preserve, for purposes of public recreation, benefit, and inspiration, a portion of the diminishing seashore of the United States that remains undeveloped" (16 U.S.C. §459d, *et seq.*), the enabling legislation stipulated that the original grantors of the property retain all mineral rights within the National Seashore. Therefore, a primary management objective of the National Park Service (NPS), as outlined in our General Management Plan (U.S.D.I. National Park Service, 1983), is to "fulfill the commitment to previous property owners by ensuring their ability to recover the oil and gas mineral resources with a minimum of environmental consequences."

Buyout potential was addressed during a 1995 lawsuit, *Dunn McCampbell Royalty Interests v. National Park Service and Butch Farabee*; the mineral owners offered \$750 million as a buyout price. The government considered this offer as excessive at the time and refused the option. Today's higher natural gas prices would increase the value substantially. One outcome of the 1995 lawsuit was the development of an Oil and Gas Management Plan and operators Oil and Gas Handbook. These documents put into writing a comprehensive framework for how the NPS will manage the exploration, development, and transportation of nonfederal oil and gas resources within the park.

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A revised environmental assessment (EA) for the Lemon/Lemon Seed wells was released July 25, 2002, for a 30-day public review. The purchasing of mineral rights and leases was not considered as an alternative for this EA, since the process was begun before the current administration's buyout of private oil and gas rights below Florida's Big Cypress National Preserve, earlier this summer. Buyout of the minerals will be addressed as an alternative in subsequent oil and gas environmental assessments.

To date, there has not been a specific social survey addressing visitor attitudes toward drilling operations within the park. Comment cards are available at the park's Visitor Center allowing visitors to submit their comments at anytime. Many visitors have made comments that have been addressed as conditions of approval in the above-mentioned EA. These conditions will reduce the negative impacts to visitor use and experience. The park will be rewriting its General Management Plan (GMP) this upcoming fiscal year. Part of the GMP process will include an extensive visitor survey addressing issues such as: oil and gas exploration and development, overflights, development within the park, visitor use conflicts, and other topics.

Thank you for your interest in these matters. If you have further questions, please contact me at 361-949-8173.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Jock Whitworth", with a long, sweeping horizontal line extending to the right.

Jock Whitworth
Superintendent