

Oil Pipeline Bill

Signed by Nixon

Washington

With 17 members of Congress looking on, President Nixon signed the Alaska pipeline bill yesterday and hailed it as a first step toward making the U.S. wholly self-sufficient for its energy supplies by 1980.

An Interior Department official expressed confidence that the law to authorize a 789-mile pipeline from Prudhoe Bay on Alaska's North Slope to the warm-water port of Valdez will survive any challenge in court.

Two of the environmental organizations left the door open, however, saying that "the environmental issues that have been awaiting judicial determination should be left to the courts, in the absence of any adequate consideration of those issues in Congress." The statement was issued by the Wilderness Society and Friends of the Earth.

SUCCESS

They and other plaintiffs had successfully challenged the pipeline on the ground that it would have led to violations of right-of-way limitations in the Mineral Leasing Act of 1920. After the U.S. Court of Appeals so held last February, without reaching environmental issues, the administration asked Congress for special legislation.

The bill Mr. Nixon signed revised the right-of-way limitation but more importantly authorized the secretary of

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the interior to grant exceptions.

It also declared it to be the will of Congress that the pipeline be built "promptly without further administrative or judicial delay or impediment." The bill seeks to confine judicial review to the question of constitutionality. It orders that any such challenge be tried on an expedited basis with any appeal to go directly to the Supreme Court.

In a prepared statement which he didn't read during the Oval Office ceremony, Mr. Nixon saluted the \$4.5 billion venture as "the largest single endeavor ever undertaken by private enterprise."

The President said the pipeline would be completed by 1977, but officials of Alyeska Pipeline Service Co., the consortium of seven oil companies that will build the line, said that was only a hope, not a certainty.

The company estimated that it must receive 1100 permits from federal agencies in the course of construction. For example, said Interior Secretary Rogers C. B. Morton, the Environmental Protection Agency must license the emissions from the 12 pump stations that fill make the crude oil flow through the line at a rate of seven miles an hour.

Morton, however, said at a post-ceremony news briefing that he would sign no permit

until Alyeska came to terms about payment of \$12 million which Morton said was owed to the government for extraordinary expenses incurred in the preparation of the project's environmental impact statement. He estimated those negotiations could take up to six weeks.

The pipe's interior diameter is 48 inches, giving it a transmission capacity of two million barrels a day. Originally, Alyeska had contemplated that capacity flow wouldn't be reached for years after the completion of construction.

More recently, there had been talk of compressing that schedule, but Alyeska isn't prepared to say when it will deliver two million barrels of oil a day to the tankers that will load at Valdez and unload at West Coast refineries.

The Prudhoe Bay discovery, announced in February 1968, has been conservatively rated at 9.6 billion barrels. A White House "fact sheet" said additional development is expected to increase this figure to 15 billion.

To the west of Prudhoe Bay lies the Naval Petroleum Reserve Number Four, largely unexplored but believed to hold tens of billions of barrels of oil. Morton, when asked, said extensive exploration of the reserve would be "in the national interest."

New York Times