

Alaska Wilderness League; Audubon Alaska; Earthjustice; Natural Resources Defense Council; Northern Alaska Environmental Center; National Audubon Society; Pacific Environment; REDOIL; Sierra Club; The Wilderness Society; and Trustees for Alaska

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**HUNDREDS OF THOUSANDS CALL FOR PROTECTION OF WORLD-CLASS
WETLANDS COMPLEX FROM OIL AND GAS**

Public Comment Period Closes for Alaska's Teshekpuk Lake

WASHINGTON, DC – Today marks the close of the Department of Interior's (DOI) latest public comment period for its court-mandated Supplemental Environment Impact Statement (SEIS) concerning the sensitive and world-class wetlands surrounding Teshekpuk Lake in northern Alaska. Close to a year after receiving over 200,000 public comments opposing its oil and gas plans for the Teshekpuk Lake area, DOI continues to face challenges from Alaska Natives, sportsmen, environmental groups and the public to defend a plan that leaves many of last year's concerns, as well as new concerns such as climate change, unanswered.

The Teshekpuk Lake area is the only part of the northeast National Petroleum Reserve-Alaska that – for now – remains closed to drilling. Four Presidents and their Secretaries of the Interior have recognized the importance of this area and acted to protect it. The area around Teshekpuk Lake provides critical molting habitat for up to one-third of all Brant (a marine goose) in the Pacific Flyway, and the 45,000-head Teshekpuk Lake Caribou Herd bears its calves and seeks relief from insects nearby.

“The Teshekpuk Lake wetlands are among the most important in the entire Arctic, and there is neither need nor justification to open this one part of the vast Reserve to oil development,” states Stan Senner, Vice President and Executive Director of Audubon Alaska. “There is no new science that would justify this decision, and the administration's complicated leasing plan will only result in the fragmentation and degradation of critical wildlife habitats.”

Just a little over a year ago, the U.S. District Court of Alaska struck down a DOI plan to sell oil and gas leases on more than 400,000 acres around the lake. The judge found that the government's environmental analysis violated federal laws by failing to consider the cumulative environmental impact of widespread oil and gas drilling in the Reserve and across the North Slope.

“With this new draft, the DOI once again failed to complete an adequate quantitative assessment of the cumulative effects of oil and gas development at Teshekpuk Lake,” said Dr. Wendy Loya, an ecologist with The Wilderness Society in Anchorage. “The agency also failed to account for any effects of climate change. As a result, we cannot feel confident that there is credible science and data to reasonably support the important management decisions the DOI is proposing for this unique Arctic environment.”

“Human health effects from oil and gas development continue to rise with higher numbers of asthma-related illnesses occurring in my village of Nuiqsut, where the Alpine oil fields are just four miles away,” said Rosemary Ahtuanguaruak, former Mayor of the City of Nuiqsut, community healthcare practitioner and board member of the Inupiat Community of Arctic Slope (ICAS). “We are worried about these continuing health issues and the lack of

help to address the long-term impacts they pose to our people. As we said last year, we say again, we oppose opening the Teshekpuk Lake area to oil and gas development. ICAS passed a resolution last month which states we oppose development in Teshekpuk Lake.”

“The astounding opposition from scientists, Alaska Natives and conservation groups to oil and gas development in Teshekpuk Lake appears to have fallen on deaf ears at the DOI,” said Kristen Miller, Legislative Director for Alaska Wilderness League. “The fact that the agency continues to pursue leasing of this sensitive and pristine area to oil and gas, when it has already leased approximately 3.8 million acres of the Reserve to the oil and gas industry, clearly shows that attention to local and national public concern for this area is not the priority for this administration.”

“Drilling at Teshekpuk Lake would destroy habitat important for waterfowl that are hunted in every state from the Mississippi Valley west to the Pacific Ocean,” said Sierra Club sportsmen organizer Jon Schwedler. “This place is too important to throw away.”

The DOI did not select a preferred alternative in its August 20 SEIS. As a result, there is no way to know how and when the agency plans to proceed with its plans for Teshekpuk Lake.

“It is the hope of hundreds of thousands of Alaska Natives, scientists, sportsmen, conservationists and members of the American public that the administration will pay attention to public opinion before irreversibly damaging Teshekpuk Lake,” said Miller.

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