

Alaska Wilderness League and Sierra Club

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Fixated Politicians Threaten Arctic Wildlife Refuge, Again

JUNE 20, 2007 – Backed by powerful Alaskan oil interests, Senators Ted Stevens (R-AK) and Lisa Murkowski (R-AK) are once again pushing legislation to drill the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. The proposed amendment to the Senate Energy Bill would open the entire 1.5 million acre Coastal Plain – considered by scientists to be the biological heart of the Refuge – to oil drilling.

“It’s the same old drill,” said Cindy Shogan, Executive Director of Alaska Wilderness League. “Even with Americans calling out loud and clear for sensible, forward-thinking energy solutions, some politicians still don’t get it. Instead of new thinking, they’re offering the same old tricks.”

This year’s amendment is the latest maneuver in Senator Steven’s decades-long quest to drill the Refuge. In 2005, after failing to squeeze Arctic Refuge drilling into the massive federal budget bill, Stevens attached the controversial proposal to his own committee’s defense spending bill. A bipartisan effort forced Stevens to remove the drilling language and pass a clean bill to fund American troops.

“The drilling lobby should have realized by now that Americans aren’t buying it,” said Shogan. “More political rhetoric and misleading numbers don’t change the fact that drilling America’s Arctic Refuge is a bad idea.”

Scientists agree that drilling the world-class refuge will have significant impacts on wildlife, including polar bears already pushed to the brink by global warming. Among the most heavily impacted would be the 130,000-strong Porcupine Caribou herd, whose annual birthing grounds are directly targeted for sprawling oil development. The herd supports one of America’s last remaining subsistence cultures: the Gwich’in.

Even if oil companies were allowed to drill the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, oil prices would not be affected by more than a few pennies per gallon, 20 years from now, according to data from the U.S. Department of Energy.

“It’s time for drilling-obsessed politicians to stop stalling with bad ideas,” said Athan Manuel, Sierra Club’s Director of Public Lands. “America needs new policies that invest in our energy future, not more favors for the very industry that is keeping us oil addicted.”

For more details on the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge and proposed drilling go to:
<http://media.alaskacoalition.org>

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